Turkmen’s religion

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ABSTRACT

One of the main functions of the science is consideration about the culture and mores of different tribes, several tribes have special mores and ceremonies to worship their deity that is known as religion and there are different religions among different tribes. Turkmen tribe is one of the most interesting Iranian tribes, because of having especial ceremonies and mores. From religious point of view they also have special mores and manners, and in this paper it is considered. One of the points that is considered is investigation about Turkmen’s religion before Islam and after it, and the place of their clergies, and their religious ceremonies and beliefs, Gnosticism among this tribe and detailed description of their places of pilgrimage.

KEY WORDS: Turkmen; religion; mores; Gnosticism.

INTRODUCTION

Human being naturally is divinity and every human communicate with his God in an especial way and manner, either the persons who accept a particular religion or they who declare we don’t have any religion and apparently feel there isn’t any God, but in the life difficulties and by passing the time, conclude that there is a supernatural power. In short, most of people worship God by different religions and pass the way of reaching it, although these ways are different but the aim of these religions are the same, and it is worship the unique God. Turkmen tribe, as one of the Iranian Muslim tribes, has special religions and religious ceremonies, that in this paper they will be described.

Turkmen

Groups that are now named Turkmen previously were named “Ghouz” or “Oghouz”, taken from the name of their ancestor “Oghouz Khan”. Turkmens were a group of yellow-skinned people who probably lived in Mongolia and then gradually came to the west area and Turkmenistan.

Being Turkmen has three basic conditions: each Turkmen must be in the Turkmens’ Pedigree or be the Turkmens’ second generation children and can speak with Turkmen accent and at last be the Hanafite Sunni Muslim.

Marvzi, doctor of Malek Shah Saljoughi court, knew the word Turkmen related to the end of 5th A.H century, in his book, this name was used in the form of Persian plural, Turkmeanan, by some Iranian writers such as, Gerd Yazdi and Beyhaghi. Some ones believe that Oghuz Turks added the “men” suffix to their name because of their noble birth, and said: Turkmen, “I’m the noble birth and genuine Turk”; in 11th A.D century (5th A.H) the idea of Turkmen = similar Turk was developed, and in 14th A.D century it was confirmed more and more.

Some others believe Turkmen means “Turk Iman”, that means: Turks who became Muslim.

Among the Transoxiana Muslims, they use Turkmen word for some Muslim Oghuzes to distinguish among them.

Religion

Turkmen became Muslim at 16th A.D. century. And their religion is considerable in two parts of before Islam and after Islam.

Before Islam

Turkmens were the followers of Shamanism custom, such as other groups who lived in Middle Asia. Shamanism is the custom that there is ambiguous thinking about the God of Sky, “Tengry”, in it.

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Besides this, the “Etogen” Goddess, who is the Goddess of land and the source of abundance, is taken under consideration. These Gods were adored along with Gods of sun and moon, natural powers, mountains, holy rivers, the souls of great ones and other souls. Also a type of fire worshipping was seen among them, as all their religious duties, by Shaman or the Shamanism custom clergy, were perform at night and in front of fire. Ebn E Fazlan, who passed across the Middle Asia as the Caliph’s representative, wrote that “Qouz” (Turkmens) had an immigrant life and spent their life in suffer and pains. They are from aberrant individuals and don’t believe to the unique God. They don’t worship anything. “Gouzes” don’t wash their face and hands and don’t take a bath, especially in winter. Their women don’t cover themselves against others, but nevertheless adultery don’t happen among them, and if it occur, they tie the adulterer to two branches of a tree, that became near to each other, then release these branches to divide that person to two halves. The marriage custom among them is in this way that, the suitor goes to the patriarch and betroths his daughter or sister against some suit of Kharazmian cloth, some camel or some other animals, and after giving these things he takes the bride with himself, without any fear or shame. When a man dies, his boy married with his wife (with the stepmother), if she wasn’t his mother.

If someone becomes ill nobody come to him/her. The family members establish a tent for him/her and put him/her in it, he/she stays there to become well or die. If the ill person was poor, they carry him to the desert and leave him there. When somebody dies, they dig a big hole for him, dressed him fasten his belt and put him in the hole. Put his bow by his side and a wooden cup of wine in his hand; also put all his required things by his side. If he killed anybody during his life, put some statues by the number of persons who killed them in his grave, and believe that they are his slaves in paradise and serve him. They built the top of the hole in a dome-shape. Then attack to his sheep and kill all of them, and eat their meat except their heads, legs, skin and tails. Then hang the remaining of the sheep from an arrow and believe that he gets on these animals and goes to the paradise. Sometimes, they didn’t kill his animals immediately; it means that, some days after his death, one of the patriarchs says that: I saw such person in my dreams, who said all of my friends went to the Paradise but I’m tired and can’t reach them on foot, so I’m alone. After this, they will kill his animals. After one or two days the patriarch says that I saw such person in dream and now he is happy and restful.

**Islamic period**

Turkmens gradually became Muslim in the second half of 16th century A.D. Seljukian Turkmens, were the first groups of Turkmens who accept Islam. May be acceptance of Islam by Turkmens was because of this reason that, they gradually need to change their life from immigrant form to the stable and invariable or new and better form. Islam caused so many changes in Turkmens’ life. They left their beliefs to the sun, fire and other natural powers and believe to the unique God. In any case, Turkmens are the followers of Sunnite Hanafite and are the prejudiced Muslims. Islam influence in different groups was so different. The influence of religion and clergies was more among the groups such as Gooklans, who start stable and non-immigrant life before other Turkmens, and there are more mosques and religious school in these areas rather than other parts of Turkmen Sahara.

**Turkmen clergies**

The effect of clergies in Turkmens life is gradually increased. Nowadays clergies have an extraordinary effect and power in all the Turkmen societies. Turkmen clergies can be described as the following:

**Akhon:** Akhons usually studied in two great religious centers, Bokhara and Khireh. They also learn Persian language in Bokhara. Of course the higher level Akhons scientifically are called “Taghsir”. Nowadays, all the instructions to reach different scientific levels in Iran, is done in the related domains. The Akhon level is offered by the Akhons council regarding the knowledge, wealth and the age of the claimant (usually between 45 to 50 years old).

**Molla:** Molla is said to the person who is studying in the religious schools. Studying in this course is last five to ten years, so these students will receive Akhon grade after graduation.

**Ghari:** Gharies are persons who have the license of reciting Quran from religios schools.

**Ishan:** Isams are religious persons and are respectable for Turkmen society; they are usually the representatives of Naghshbandiyeh sect. They learn theology in Thursdays and Saturdays. Ishans come together after the evening prayer every night to do Sufism works.

**Olad (descendants):** Olad (descendants) are the people of holy tribes.
Turkmens’ religious ceremonies and beliefs

Turkmens pray five times per day such as other Muslims. Besides, they often say their recommended prayers before and after their obligatory prayers. They try to say their prayers during the Ramadan (fasting month) surely in the mosque. One of the customs of Ramadan is that Turkmen well-off families sacrifice a goat or sheep some days before the Ramadan and receive and entertain their relatives and neighbors with this meat. Men come to the host house and eat food there, but the food is sent for their women. This party is called “Allah Youry” means “for God’s sake”. Turkmens also offer sacrifice in the Ramadan’s nights, they respect the 27th night of the Ramadan, and known it as the “Ghadr night” (the night when Qoran was revealed to Mohammad) and give a great party at that night, and go to bed after the Morning Prayer. Turkmens have two important Eve, the Fetr Eve (the festival at the end of fasting month) and the Qurban Eve (the Feast of Sacrifice), and celebrate for them. They named the Fetr Eve “Araz Bayram” and the Qurban eve “Qurban Bayram”. They offer sacrifice in Qurban Eve and have especial ceremonies at that time.

Turkmens give a big party when reach to the age of 63, that is the age of his holiness the Prophet Mohammad, and sacrifice a sheep, and send its meat for other Turkmen families. This party is named “Agh Ghoyeen”.

When a Turkmen dies, wash him and perform ablution for him at his home, shroud him and then carry him to the mosque by a coffin. They pray for him there, then a group consist of one to ten person take him to the cemetery and bury him. Others come back to his home and pray for him. The well-off Turkmens give food to their relatives according to Islam religious in the third, seventh, thirtieth, fortieth, sixtieth, ninth, hundred and twentieth, hundred and fiftieth, hundred and eightieth, two hundred and tenth, two hundred and fiftieth and two hundred and seventieth days after death of a person. Turkmens use the gravestone, like other Muslims, and their gravestone is mainly made of the ram horn. In fact the ram and its horn is a sign of power among Turkmens. Turkmens go on the pilgrimage of Olads, Ishans, and other respectable persons, and make the dome shaped constructions for them. Turkmen women also go on pilgrimage these graves and vow. The barren women usually vow a sheep.

Turkmens custom religion

It is mentioned that all the Turkmens’ common ancestor is Oghouz khan. Oghouzes were Shamanist or followers the Shamanism custom before Arabs entrance to the Middle Asia, and worshiping their ancestors’ souls (especially Khans, dogs and nobles) among them is counted the memory of that time. The inscriptions of Oghouz khan is obviously indicated that. Then different groups and tribes followed other religions and customs such as Buddhism and Manichaecom, during the historical development of their life, appropriate to the time and conditions.

According to Abu Reyhan’s idea, who lived in Kharazm and Transoxiana (Turkestan) for a long time at 4th A.H. century, it is mentioned that: “people were Idolater before appearance of religions, and lived in the southeast of the land, and their remaining now exist in India, China, Toguz and Oghuz, inhabitants of Khorasan named them “Shamnan” and their pagodas (idol-temples) and their other remnants are apparent in Khorasan’s Saghur (borderlines)”. In Shamanism thoughts, believe to the sky and worship the nature and its manifestations, such as, moon (Ay), sun (Gun), sunrise (Dang), star (yilduz), land (yer), water (su), all had an especial orientation and holy place, because they are known as the sign and manifestation of divine power. Selecting the name of (the Turk and Turkmens’s ancestor) Oghouz khan’s three sons with the names of Ay, Gun and Olduz rooted in this case.

There are so many ceremonious beliefs among the Turkmens in their history. Such as making small hillocks on the dead graves, and they are seen in Turkmen cemeteries, in Turkmen Sahara just now. There are so many sources and indications that Turkmens believed God in the old time too. As Ebn e Fazlan said in 309 A.H.: “if one Oghouz person is oppressed, he raises his head and says: “unique God”, and whenever one of them becomes ill and dies they dig a big hole like a room for him, dressed him his Cloak and Cassock, fasten his belt and bow and put a wooden cup of wine in his hand and put a wooden bowl of wine in front of him (it means that, buried him in sitting form), then cover the roof of the room and make the top of the room in dome-shaped”.

Farigh Somer mentioned that: “Turkmens on the side of Caspian sea have some domes that are named Yoska”.
“When one of the great chieftains who is obtained the bravery honor, dies, they make a dome or hillock (Yoska) on his grave, after burying him. Each Turkmen must participate in it by throwing at least 7 shovels soil on it, and at last this memorial construction’s width is about 60 feet and its height is about 25 to 30”. This custom existed among Turkmens and its indication is the hills which there are in Iran’s Turkmen Sahara, and Farigh Somer pointed to them too. One of other customs among the Middle Asia Turkmens is that: after the father death, the uncle, the old brother, or the nephew married with his widows.

Nowadays there are some other customs among the Turkmen tribes in commemoration of their deceased, such as putting the ram head on their graves, writing their name or drawing their picture on the carpet and rug and needle works, that among these, they know the ram horn as the symbol of blessing and use it on the graves and the walls of Mosques, wall of houses, the design of prayer carpet and jewelries and …. Just now we can find some woods in different shapes such as the birds’ plumage in the cemeteries of Golidagh and Maraveh Tapeh area, especially on the graves of Turkmens who live in Khorasan Jargalan. Also in Khaled Nabi cemetery there are some columns from sculptured stones with 30 cm to 3 meters height. That is an obvious sample of Turkmens customs in burial ceremonies and memory of dead.

According to the writings of Ebn e Fazlan, groups of Middle Asian people such as Turkmens, believed in 12 Gods in the old time: “winter, summer, rain, wind, tree, people, beasts, water, night, day, death, and God of earth, but there was a God at the head of them that was placed in the sky and was the greatest of them, but was united with all of them”.

Anyway with entering the Muslims to Khorasan and Middle Asia, after the wars, gradually the Turk tribes and families became Muslim, and their greatest cities such as Samarkand, Tashkent, Khiveh, Marv, Bokhara and different parts of Kharazm turned into the gathering centre of Muslim learned ones and became the cradle of Islam civilization. But at this time, two big tribes of Turks remained the followers of Shamanism belief until some centuries later, it means until 19th A.D. century, which they were under the yoke of Russians, and then Tatars expand Islam among them.

But after accepting Islam by Oghouzes, such as Turkmens and Turks, parts of beliefs and symbols of old Shamanism custom remained among them that some of them are mentioned, in this case Vombry (1863 A.D.) has interesting writings, and he mentioned that:

“In the combat that start from 800 years ago between Daab (the irregular and invisible orders of Turkmens beliefs) and Mohammad religious, Daab is damaged so little and several customs and mores that Islam forbids them and Mollas have risen against them still remained intact. Changes that new religion caused them influenced not only among the Turkmens but also among all the Middle Asian nomads, but it influenced only in the appearance of their old method, and effects and beliefs that they believe for sun, fire and other natural things now are attributed to the influence of God and mosque, but in fact they are the same as 2000 years ago. They have these characteristics so long as they are immigrant and don’t have a stable life and fixed home.

At the time of Omayyad and especially Abbasids so many Oghuzes, different tribes of Turk and Turkmens accept Islam Custom and Sunnite religion. Then this religion is divided to four groups: Hanafite, Shafite, Hanbalite, Malekite, and among them groups of Hanafite and Shafite had the majority. The majority in Khorasan are the followers of Abu Hanifa (Neman Ebn e Sabet) unless in Khore Chach, Ilagh, Toos, Nesa, Abiverd, Taraz, Sanghaj, Bokhara Suburbs, Sanj, Dandanghan, Esferayen, and Jovein that all are Shafite. In Harat, Saxtan, Saraks, and both parts of Marv this is attractive and judges are not except these two groups. In (Khorasan and part of Transoxiana) land the sermon is by the name of Samanides and all is their tributary. Nowadays all the Turkmens in Iran Turkmen Sahara are theist and worship the unique God, and their main religion is Islam and most of them are the followers of Hanafite religion, and emphasize in the religious matters so much. Of course, recently because of publicizing the Vahabite sects in Kalaleh area some Turkmens become Vahabism blindly, because of insufficient knowledge and without recognition, that by the religious clergies’ awareness it is tried to hold meetings to advice and guide people to keep their religion and custom.

Mysticism among Turkmens

Mystical, Sufism schools and different religious ways series were current in Transoxiana, Middle Asia, and the great Khorasan (at that time) and whole of Turkestan from several years ago, and because of the environmental conditions, the life situation and the existed condition of these areas, is took in to consideration. The writer of the book “Hodod ol Alam men al Mashrigh ela Almaghrib” (boundaries of the world from east to west), in 375 A.H., is named a city by the name of Botman, after mentioning the cities of
Transoxiana, and mentioned that: “two things are observable, one is Dervishes and other is so many Ammonium chlorides”.

Zakariya Mohammad the son of Mahmud Ghazvini, who was born in 600 A.D., also wrote at time of mentioning the Khorasan cities and introducing Nesa (an area that become one of the most important Turkmens centers, and now is located in Turkmenistan): “there are some great and drawer buildings outside of Nesa, which they aren’t seen in any other place. These buildings consist of different parts such as: the Jurists, learned persons part, and an area special for the Sufis that are Robat and Monastery”.

Generally the important tribes of Sufis and mysticism had great influence among Turkmens such as other tribes and peoples who were resident in Turkestan to Khorasan, as some of the main and old centers of Sofia were placed in the living areas. Among them we can point to Sarakhs, Marv and Nesa. In these areas, some other Sufi and mystic persons were favored in addition to the different mystical series that were mentioned above, and we can name Abul-Abbas Sayary (4th century A.H. near Marv), Khajeh Yusuf Hamedani (6th century A.H.) from the followers of Joneid and …. It must be mentioned that the grave of Abu Yaghub Yusuf ebne Hamedani (Khajeh Yusuf Hamedani) still is remained in an area about 20 km far from the north of Marv, and is well known as “Bayram Ali”, but Turkmens name him “Khaje Yusuf” and grant particular respect for him.

The role of Toreh and Daab in formation the Turkmens’ social relationships

In relationships between the people of one Turkmen village, there was a kind of “Self-created observance and a public behavioral self-controlling” that was related to their old and ancient customs, which was named “Toreh”, and gave them the right of absolute equality and independence. All the Turkmens followed Toreh orders and everyone who ignored them was rejected from Turkmen society. The Toreh must be considered from Oghouzes period because Turks also believed to Toreh principles and defined it in this way: “Toreh was formed the required principles in the social life of Oghouzes, justice, knowledge and wisdom”, Torah experiences politics and government, and never enters the personal tendencies in judgments. Radiation of Toreh light equally and everywhere was well-knowned and observed everyone equally.

Shrines of Turkmens and their tombs

There are so many shrines in Turkmen Sahara that attracted Turkmens’ attentions to themselves. Turkmens in addition to have interest to shrines, grand so respect for dead who have particular fame, and after their death put some special signs on their graves to be distinct from other graves.

“The burial ceremonies are so special among Turkmens; they carry the dead person with his cloths on the top of a hill that is seen near all the cemeteries. This hill is called “Yunvosha”, which can be translated to the washing hill. They take off his cloth and wash him, shroud him and then bring him to the cemetery to bury. They bury the dead person’s cloth in that hill and put the objects and things that belong to the dead person on the grave. For example, on the grave of women they usually put the old boxes and the home furniture and means, and put toys such as a small boat and etc which belongs him on the graves of children. In this case it is mentioned that, they want to recognize the grave of their relatives by they things, but after a short time wind and sand will take and lose them. Turkmens keep some of their old and ancient beliefs and customs yet, and it is possible that they keep this custom of putting things on the graves too. People who die for defending their land are so respectable. For example, they are buried with their own cloth and in a place that they are died, and the large stones are placed around their graves and a big wood is placed in the centre of their grave as a symbol”.

Of course, this custom is the old and ancient custom and nowadays they don’t put things on the graves.


Ghare Imam (black Imam)

The tomb of Ghare Imam or Yahiya Ebne Zeyd Ebne Ali Ebne Hussein Ebne Ali Ebne Abutaleb is placed in Gonbad e Kavoos, he rose at the time of Omayyid concurrent with Mokhtar rising and some of Shiites and expelled group supported him, and also some of Khorasan, Gorgan and Rey people followed him. He fought Yusuf Saghafi, governor of Iraq, before starting their work. Zeyd Ebne Ali was killed in 120 A.H.,
it is said that, Yusuf Ebne Omar ordered to bring his body after killing and burying him, and separate his head and hang his body. Yahiya the son of Zeyd went to Karbala and then Balkh. Yusuf Saghafi appointed Nasr Ebne Sayar, the governor of Khorasan, to arrest him. Yahiya ran away to Beihagh and then to Neishabour. He made a big revolution at the time of Valid Ebne Zeid in Khorasan, and defeated the Caliph’s army. But at last Selim Ebne Aour, the official of Caliph, killed him in OurGhaneh village, sent his head for Valid Ebne Abdolmalik, and hung his body, until the time that Abu Moslem came to Khorasan and bring down his body and buried it.

Generally Ghareh Imam or Yahiya Ebne Zeyd is so respectable for Turkmens of Turken Sahara, and they go to pilgrimage him, vow him and pray him for their needs. Except Ghareh Imam, two other Imams’ children are respectable for Turkmens. One is Ghezel Imam (red Imam), near the Ghary castle in Turkmenistand, and other one is Agh Imam (white Imam) that is located on top of the hills near the Nili village in Fenderesk area.

Agh Imam or Mohammad Ebne Zeyd
He is also from the Imam Zeinol Abedin’s Grandchild, and his Mausoleum is located in Golestan province at one km distance of Azad Shahr- Minudasht road, on top of a big hill, and he has special honor among Turkmens of this area and also other people with other religions, people go to his Mausoleum to pilgrimage and pray him, people believe and trust this Imam’s Child so much.

The footstep of Khajeh Baha-ol-Din Mohammad Ebne Mohammad Ebne Mohammad Shah Naghshband Oveis:
This footstep is located in Golestan province, near Bandar Turkmen town.
He was born at 717 A.H. near Bokhara in “Koshk Hendovan” village, which was named “Koshk mystics” later. Then became familiar with Sufism in the presence of his teacher, Mohammad Baba Salmasi, and established Naghshbandiyeh dynasty of Sofia. At last, he died when he was 74 years old. His tomb is placed in “Baveh Din” near Bokara, and after 700 years public people and Sufis go to pilgrimage him yet, even from china, and among the Middle Asian people, Cossacks, Kerkizian, Turkmens respect him more than others, and there is a stone on his tomb that his followers put their foreheads on it. “The Mausoleum of Baha-ol-Din Naghshband the establisher of Naghshbandiyeh is placed in Baveh Aldin village, and all of crazing and excess religious thoughts are originated from here. Baha-ol-Din is the symbol of holiness among the Turkistan people and all of them believe that resorting him keep away the misfortunes from people immediately, and even come to pilgrimage him from china. It is current in Bokhara that travels though this distance once a week and there are 300 donkeys to rent. There are some ram horns on his tomb. There is a sever belief to the number 7 in this place. The tomb of Miry Ghola Self and his clergy father can be seen about half parasang away.

But Turkmens of Turkmen Sahara in Iran go to pilgrimage his footstep place. Public people believe that Baha-ol-Din stayed for a short time in this place when he traveled to Mecca, so this place became holy. Nowadays this place is the place of Turkmen people gathering at Fridays.
Among the Turkmens, women have more belief to this place and resort to this place to meet their needs. They tie a piece of string or yarn to the trees of that place and believe their needs are met with this work.

Ana scientist
There is another Mausoleum in the northwest of Gonbad e Kavoos, near Iran and Turkmenistan boundaries and near “Inche Boroun”, by the name of Scientist (Dalishman), which is honorable and respectable for Turkmens. The natives of that place mentioned that his real name is “Mohammad Dordy”, “Molla Ali”, “Molana Ali” and “Ate scientist”, who had so much knowledge and grace.

Prophet Zakariya
It is a mausoleum in 50 kilometer of Gonbad- Agh ghala road, that Ghourkhanchi visited his made of brick Mausoleum at 1320 and wrote about this “the tomb of prophet Zakariya is placed in the way of Yamot to Gonbad e Kavoos. It is about 8 Parasang far from Gonbad and is located in the north of the road in the Sahara and its construction is from brick. There isn’t any other building except this one in this Sahara”. Turkmens also named this Mausoleum “Olia”.

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Prophet Ayub

The Mausoleum of Ayub prophet is placed on a great hill near Agh Ghala. There is a cemetery near this place that some old stones are observable in it. This place is respectable for Turkmens of Turkmen Sahara in Iran too.

The Mausoleum of prophet Salih

This Mausoleum is constructed at 6 km distance of the west of Agh Ghala on a small hill. It is a square building made of cement and has a partially low height, this Mausoleum is also one of the shrines for Turkmen Sahara Turkmens.

Khaled Nabi

The tomb of Khaled Nabi is placed in adjacent to Gogche village in Maraveh Tapeh and Temer Ghare Ghozi rural distinct, that has particular respect among Turkmens. In adjacent to Khaled Nabi’s Mausoleum there is Khaled Nabi’s cemetery, which is one of the oldest cemeteries. Khaled Nabi: Khaled Ebne Sanan Abas Ebne Baghiz who passed the sea and entered Iran because of the pecuniary conditions in his family situation, means Eden, because of his propagandas. His opponents pursue him till the old Jorgan area (Gorgan- near Gonbad e Kavoos), and at last the war overtook between khaled and his followers in one side and his opponents at the other side. So it is believed that, the cross-stone gravestones in Khaled Nabi’s cemetery, is belong to his killed followers, of course it is emphasized that Zakariya Mohammad Ebne Mahmud Ghazvini at 6th century A.H. , when the Ghuz Turkmen attacked to Neishabour, named them “cross worshipper”. But the time of Khaled Nabi’s life is ambiguous, and it isn’t determined obviously in historical writings. Some people named him “Khaled Ebne Sanan Ene Gheith the son of Jesus” it means the son of Gheith and the grandchild of Jesus, and some other mentioned that his life referred to 40 years before appearance of prophet, as Khaled’s daughter accept Islam by Islam Prophet.

Except these shrines there are some other Mausoleums such as Abulfazl Hasan, Avaz Berdy Ishan, Baba Sheikh, Soltan Habi, which are so honorable among Turkmens of Turkmen Sahara in Iran.

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