

## Chapter 11

### Environmental Understanding in Turkish-Islamic History

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#### Environmental Understanding in Turkish-Islamic History

Living and non-living beings that create the environment are in harmony naturally. Like every living creature, humans need nature and balance of nature in order to continue with their lives. The Industrial Revolution, which started in England in the second half of the 18th century, affected not only humanity but also the environment. While this great revolution accelerated scientific and technological developments that facilitated human life, it caused an increase in environmental issues. In addition to industrialization, people's unconscious use of natural resources in their daily lives also causes a global environmental destruction.

The “Environmental Movement”, which was created to prevent environmental issues, showed its first effects in Western Europe and America in the 1800s, and has left an impact in the second half of the 20th century (Duru, 1995). However, centuries before the environmental movement was formed, the understanding of protecting the environment and living in harmony with nature was adopted in the old Turkish communities and states. Moreover, the balance of nature and the importance given to the environment were frequently mentioned in the holy books. The importance given to the environment in the verses of the Qur'an, which is the holy book of Islam religion, and in the life of the prophet Muhammad specially attract the attention.

In this section, subjects such as the environment according to the Islamic belief, the importance given to the environment, the interaction of human and environment, the balance of nature, animal rights will be examined in the light of verses of the Qur'an and hadiths. Then, the understanding of environment in Turkish-Islamic history will be explained by giving examples from Turkish states. It is suggested that mentioned environmental understanding can guide people towards preventing environmental problems and for a sustainable environment.

#### Environment in Islam

As social being, humans are affected by the conditions and culture of the period they live in. Moreover, they create a consciousness mechanism belongs the period they live. Therefore, humans evaluate the lives of humans and other living being in the world, and the events and issues that occur in the world, with this consciousness mechanism.

When we look at environmental issues, it is seen that environmental issues such as air, water, soil, noise pollution, global warming and climate change, which have reached a very important level today, did not exist in past centuries. Until this era, which is called Modern Age, humans have lived in constant exchange with the environment since their first days on earth (Özdemir & Yükselmiş, 1997).

Increasing human population, their growing and diversifying needs and accordingly the production of advanced technologies, consumption and destruction of limited natural resources, and construction of settlements in agricultural lands can be cited as the reasons why environmental problems have increased so much in the 21st century compared to the past (Türküm, 1998). To prevent environmental issues, global agreements, government policies and scientific studies are carried out. However, in order for these large-scale measures to be effective and permanent, “human behaviour” must be taken to centre.

The human beings were created with a willpower. They decide on the basis of the guide they have adopted and act according to it. There is a significant effect of religious belief on human actions (Cebeci, 2008). According to the Islamic belief, holy book Qur’an, was sent down as a guide to people, and the prophet Muhammad was assigned to warn, guide and herald with good news under the guidance of the Qur’an. This situation is described in the following verses in the Qur’an:

“...Say: “It is a guide / And a healing to those / Who believe; and for those / Who believe not, there is / A deafness in their ears,/ And it is blindness in their (eyes): / They are (as it were) / Being called from a place / Far distant!” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Fussilat/41: 44).

“A similar (favour / Have ye already received) / In that We have sent / Among you a Messenger / Of your own, rehearsing to you / Our Signs, and purifying / You, and instruction you / In Scripture and Wisdom, / And in new Knowledge.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah/2: 151).

In order to prevent environmental issues and for a sustainable environment, it is very important to determine the environmental understanding of the Islamic belief, which has a tremendous impact on human behaviour, in the light of the Qur’an and hadiths.

In this chapter, the phenomenon of environment in Islam, the verses of the Qur’an sent down as a guide to people and the importance of the environment within the framework of the life of the prophet Muhammad, are examined under the subjects of human and environment, balance in nature, animal rights.

### *Importance of Environment*

In order to prevent environmental pollution, which is one of the biggest problems of our

age, it would be correct to examine the conceptual content of it. Environmental pollution can occur as air, water, soil, noise and visual pollution. (Atabek Yiğit, 2009). This situation causes the extinction of vegetation and animal species (Çelikkıran, 1997). In other words, caring and protecting air, water, soil and living things is the basic principle in preventing environmental pollution. In order for the plants and especially the trees that make up the forests to grow in a healthy way, the soil must not be polluted and it must be well taken care of. Also, water is as important as soil for living beings. Moreover, forests that grow with clean soil and clean water ensure that the air is clean (Durkaya & Durkaya, 2016). As can be seen from here, there is a strong bond between soil, water and air. Pollution in one affects all others. In short, the environment is the habitat in which living and non-living being coexist in balance. Therefore, both biotic and abiotic factors are negatively affected by the pollution. The natural balance is disrupted, and environmental issues begin to occur.

In order to find an answer to the question of what is in the essence of living beings according to Islam, it would be correct to look at what object or matter Allah created living things from. According to the Qur'an, jinn were created from fire, humans from earth, and living things in general from water (Yeniçeri, 2009). Knowing that human, whom Allah has declared to be the highest among His creations, is essentially soil, shows how important soil is in Islam. In addition, with the hadith of Prophet Muhammed "When any of you treads with his shoes upon something unclean, they will be purified with the earth." (Sunan Abi Dawud, Kitab Al-Taharad, 1, 386), it is emphasized that the soil is not a dirt, but a cleansing matter. The soil, which is considered very valuable in Islam, is unfortunately exposed to soil erosion by wrong agricultural practices done by humans and heavy rains. One of the most effective solutions to prevent this problem is to plant trees (Morgan, 2009).

Although there is no command to "plant a tree" in the Qur'an, it is seen that there are trees and other plants in many sections. The word "secer", which is the equivalent of the word tree, is mentioned in 26 places in the Qur'an. The word heaven, which is the equivalent of the vineyard and garden formed by the coming together of trees, is seen 70 times in the singular and 76 times in the plural. In addition, the words date, date palm, grape, olive, pomegranate, fig are also mentioned in many verses. In the surah At-Tin, by saying "By figs and olives..." an oath made to these two trees (Canan, 1986). The fact that trees and plants are mentioned many times in the Qur'an, the paradise promised to people is depicted with trees, and Allah's oath to figs and olives shows the importance Islam gives to trees and plants. In addition, the importance Prophet Muhammad gave to plants and trees in hadith sources is seen in the following hadiths:

"If the Final Hour comes while you have a shoot of a plant in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it," (Al-Adab Al-

Mufrad, 27, 479).

“There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 42, 1).

“Eat (olive) oil, and anoint with it, for it is from a blessed tree!” (Ash-Shama’il Al-Muhammadiyah, 25, 7).

When the hadiths above are examined, it is reported that the Prophet Muhammad encouraged people to plant trees and that planting trees is charity defined as material and moral aid given to gain Allah’s approval (Emsal & Şentürk, 2021: 85). Again, the Prophet Muhammad stated that it is wrong to damage trees and that those who intentionally harm trees will be cursed and punished with the following hadith:

“If anyone cuts the lote-tree, Allah brings him headlong into Hell.” (Sunan Abi Dawud, Kitab Al-Adab, 43, 467).

When the verses and hadiths in the Qur’an are examined, it can be said that the Islamic faith gives importance to plants, encourages people to plant plants and trees, and there are deterrent provisions against harming plants. In the Qur’an, it is explained that the environment is important for both humans and animals, and that countless blessings created are put at the service of man. The most remarkable and important of these blessings is water, which is the main source for the continuation of life (Chaplin, 2001). The importance of water, which is essential for the life of living things and the environment, is seen in some verses of the Qur’an:

“Do not the Unbelievers see / That the heavens and the earth / Were joined together (as one / Unit of Creation), before / We clove them asunder? / We made from water / Every living thing. Will they / Not then believe?” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Anbiya/21: 30).

“And We send down water / From the sky according to / (Due) measure, and We cause is / To soak in the soil: / And We certainly are able / To drain it off (with ease). With it We grow for you / Gardens of date palms / And vines; in them have ye / Abundant fruits: and of them / Ye eat (and have enjoyment)-” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Mu’minun/23: 18-19).

“It is He Who sendeth down / Rain from the skies: / With it We produce / Vegetation of all kinds: / From some We produce / Green (crops), out of which / We produce grain, /Heaped up (at harvest); / Out of the date palm / And its sheaths (or spathes) / (Come) clusters of dates / Hanging low and near: / And (then there are) gardens / Of grapes, and olives, / And pomegranates, / Each similar (in kind) / Yet different

(in variety): / When they begin to bear fruit, / And the ripeness thereof. / Behold!  
In these things / There are Gigns for people / Who believe.” (The Holy Qur’an,  
Surah Al-An’am/6: 99).

As stated in the verses, plants, greenery and trees grow from the soil with water. In other words, water is a very important resource for living things. However, water should be used with caution, like any other resource. The Prophet Muhammad’s action to someone who uses a lot of water while performing ablution and saying don’t waste it (Özdemir & Yükselmiş, 1997) shows his attitude towards preventing water waste (Koop & Leeuwen, 2017), which is one of the important problems of our age.

Clean air as well as soil and water affect the growth of plants. With the change in the ratio of the gases in the air, the air becomes polluted and as a result, acid rains occur. When acid rains reach the soil, the pH level drops and the toxic effect can be seen on the plants grown in the soil with the enrichment of  $Al^{3+}$  and  $Mn^{2+}$  cations (Tolunay, 1992). In general, one of the most important sources for cleaning the air polluted due to human behaviour is forests (Durkaya & Durkaya, 2016). The importance of plants and trees in the Islamic faith was mentioned with the verses of the Qur’an and examples of hadiths. In addition, it is seen in the following verses in the Qur’an that one of the elements that ensure a healthy life is the wind:

“Among His Signs is this, / That He sends the Winds, / As heralds of Glad Tidings,  
/ Giving you a taste / Of His (Grace and) Mercy- / That the ships may sail /  
(Majestically) by His Command / And that ye may seek / Of His Bounty: in order  
/ That ye may be grateful.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Rum/30: 46).

“And He it is Who sends / The Winds as heralds / Of glad tidings, going before / His  
Mercy, and We send down / Pure water from the sky- That with it, We may give /  
Life to a dead land, / And slake the thirst / Of things We have created- / Cattle and  
men in great numbers.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Furqân/25: 48-49).

Winds have negative effects as well as positive effects on our lives. Severe hurricanes and tornadoes can cause great destruction in the region. In addition, it is a well-known fact that toxic gases causing air pollution damage human health. The following verses describe how people are punished with polluted air and storms in the Qur’an:

“For We sent against them / A furious wind, on a Day / Of violent Disaster” (The  
Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Qamar/54: 19).

“And the ‘Ad- / They were destroyed / By a terrible Storm / Of thunder and lightning!”  
(The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Hâqqah/69: 6).

“Then watch thou / For the Day / That the sky will / Bring forth a kind / Of smoke (or

mist) / Plainly visible, Enveloping the people: / This will be a Penalty / Grievous.”  
(The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Dukhân/44: 10-11).

“On you will be sent / (O ye evil ones twain!) / A flame of fire (to burn) / And a smoke  
(to choke): / No defence will ye have” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Rahmân/55:  
35).

In the 21st century, it is predicted that there will be an increase in the number of hurricanes due to climate change which is the result of air pollution and global warming (Alper & Anbar, 2007). The verses that explain that Allah punished people with smoke and hurricanes in the past are warnings about future disasters if air pollution and global warming are not prevented.

### *Human and Environment*

When the Qur’an is looked at as a whole, it can be said that human beings appear in a central position among all living and non-living beings. The fact that Allah has put all the blessings He has created into the service of humans also supports the idea. This situation is revealed in the following verses in the Qur’an:

“It is He Who hath created for you / All things that are on earth: / Then He turned to the heaven / And made them into seven firmaments. / And of all things / He hath perfect knowledge.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Baqarah/2: 29).

“It is Allah Who hath created / The heavens and the earth / And sendeth down rain / From the skies, and with it / Bringeth out fruits wherewith / To feedyou: it is He / Who hath made the ships of service / To you, that they may sail / Through the sea by His Command; / And the rivers (also)hath He / Made of service to you. And He hath made of service/ To you the sun and the moon. / Both diligently pursuing/ Their courses: and the Night / And the Day hath He (also) / Made of service to you.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Ibrâhîm/14: 32-33).

As it is understood from the verses, the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon, the seas, night and day, the crops grown on the earth, olives, dates, grapes and all kinds of plants were created for humans. However, people can only benefit from these blessings by protecting the environment (Akgündüz, 2009). The fact that Allah has put all the blessings He has created into the service of man does not mean that man can exhibit unconscious and arbitrary behaviour towards the environment. People, who must live in harmony with other living things in nature, are responsible for the environment they live and benefit from. The connection between human and nature, and between natural sciences and religion is clearly seen in the Qur’an (Nasr, 1988/2019).



### *Balance of Nature*

There is a balance between living and non-living beings in nature. It is explained in the following verses that Allah created the entire universe and the planet we live on in a balance:

“Verily, all things / Have We created / In proportion and measure.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Qamar/54: 49)

“And the earth We have spread out / (Like a carpet); set thereon / Mountains firm and immovable; / And produced therein all kinds / Of things in due balance.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-Hijr/15: 19)

According to the Islamic belief, Almighty Allah has created everything in itself flawlessly. There is a magnificent order and balance in the universe. Humans should live in harmony and protect the ecological balance in the environment they live in. In addition, attitudes and behaviours that will disrupt this balance should be avoided (Akgündüz, 2009).

Unlike the creatures that live in harmony with each other in their natural environment, humans can engage in behaviours that disrupt this balance. Waste of water and food, unconscious tree cutting as well as agricultural practices and animal hunting activities are the most striking of these behaviours. A person who wastes the blessings bestowed on her or him and uses it unconsciously is warned in the Qur’an as follow:

“(Saying) ‘Eat of the good’ / Things We have provided / For your sustenance, but / Commit no excess therein, / Lest My Wrath should justly / Descend on you: and those / On whom descends My Wrath / Do perish indeed!” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Tâ hâ/20: 81).

“O Children of Adam! / Wear your beautiful apparel / At every time and place / Of prayer: eat and drink: / But waste not by excess, / For Allah loveth not the wasters.” (The Holy Qur’an, Surah Al-A’râf/7: 31).

### *Animal Rights*

The individual should not destroy the environment in line with their own interests and should think that the actions they take will affect the lives of other living beings around them. Not only humans but also animals need environmental resources such as water, plants, fruits on trees, and clean air in the world. In the Qur’an, Allah reveals that animals also benefit from these resources found in nature:

“And do they not see / That We do drive Rain / To parched soil (bare / Of herbage), and produce therewith / Crops, providing food / For their cattle and themselves? /

Have they not the vision?" (The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Sajdah/32: 27).

"It is HeWho sends down / Rain from the sky. / From it ye drink, / And out of it (grows) / The vegetation on which / Ye feed your cattle. With it He produces / For you corn, olives, / Date palms, grapes, / And every kind of fruit: / Verily in this is a Sign / For those who give thought." (The Holy Qur'an, Surah Al-Nahl/16: 10-11).

When we look at the environmental understanding in Islam in general, it is possible to see that there is a balance in nature, but since humans disrupt this balance with their behaviours, they are warned against it. The fact that there are so many blessings offered to the service of humans does not mean that they can consume natural resources as they wish. On the contrary, it imposes responsibility to them on the topic. Thus, it is seen that the right to life of animals and other living beings is also protected. The understanding that people who harm the environment and natural resources they live in will be punished encourages people with Islamic belief to protect nature. As a result, it can be said that the belief in Islam has a positive effect on people's understanding of the environment.

### *Environmental Awareness in Turkish-Islamic States*

It is very important to examine the relationship of the Turkish states, which rule in different geographies around the world, with the environment they live in. The Turks, who ruled in different regions as many empires, states, khanates and beyliks from the 8th century BC to the present, adopted different lifestyles in different periods of history (Çeçen, 2021). Before the settled life, Turks were nomadic and mostly engaged in animal husbandry (Balaban, 2006). After adopting settled life, they have started doing agricultural practices and building permanent shelters. In addition to the geography they live in, the belief systems of the Turks have also affected their lifestyles and especially their understanding of the environment.

In this section, the Turkish states established before and after accepting Islam are briefly mentioned, and then the environmental understanding in Turkish history is explained under sub-titles.

#### *Turkish States Before Islam*

In the pre-Islamic periods, when the Shamanism belief was practised more intensely, Turks saw nature as the essence of life rather than benefiting humanity. While believing in shamanism, the sky, mountains, hills, rivers, trees and land are considered sacred (Özdemir, 2003), and in this way, Turks were firmly attached to their homeland and the environment they lived in (Yörükhan, 2016). In addition, shamans performed various religious practices to make these saints happy (Radloff, 2009). All these show that the



Turks do not pollute the natural resources that they consider sacred in the belief of Shamanism and that they are very careful about using these resources.



Figure 1. A Shaman and her Drum

Before Islam, Tengri (Sky) and the land called Yer-Sub (Earth-Water) were worshipped majorly in the old Turkish belief. However, the real power in this holy couple was the Sky. Khans were given names such as “Sky-like” or “Born in Sky” and according to their beliefs, these khans were in power at the wish of Heaven (Klyashtorny & Sultanov, 2013).

Today, there are Duhka Turks (Dukhas) living within the borders of Mongolia. Dukha Turks, who have Tengrism belief, believe that lakes and mountains have souls. That’s why they won’t wash their dirty things in lakes. They will do the washing outside the lake with the water taken from lake. However, lately, there are those who believe that these spirits are angry because of some people’s polluting lakes and mountains, unnecessary hunting and plant-gathering behaviour. According to their belief, nature gives people plants and animals as a gift to share with others. However, people believe that nature spirits will be angry if they use them as if they belong only to themselves (Küçüküstel, 2012). As horses and donkeys cannot adapt to cold climatic conditions, Dukha Turks generally use deer as mounts. They also use the meat, milk and offal of deer. At the same time, Dukha Turks, who make clothes from deer skin; and knives, necklaces and bracelets from antlers, can earn money by selling these to tourists. Milk milked from deer is placed in a closed container and fixed in cold flowing rivers. Thus, milk can be stored for a long time without spoiling. Thereby, Duhka Turks avoid waste by making use of every part of the animal that is most suitable for the geography and climate they live in, and by using appropriate techniques (Rotasız Seyyah, 2021).

It is possible to collect the beliefs of Steppe Turks under three headings. These are belief in the forces of nature, the cult of ancestors and the religion of Sky-God (Kafesoğlu, 2016). The Turks, who believed in the existence of some secret forces in nature, viewed the sky, mountain, stone and tree as the manifestation of the Creator and regarded them

as sacred (Tazebay & Akpınar, 2010). They were also considered spirits.

The cult of ancestors was considered as a belief of respect for deceased elders and ancestors. Asian Huns, Tuobas and Göktürks offered sacrifices to their ancestors in front of the sacred caves and severely punished the attacks made to the Turkish tombs. While some nations with ancestor cults sometimes see powerful people as demigods and sacrifice human beings for them and other gods, this is not the case for Turks. In the Sky-God religion, which is accepted as the original religion of the steppe Turkish community, Tengri (God) was the Creator, who was seen as the highest being, and was considered almighty. It was also believed that Tengri punished immoral behaviour with drought (Schmidt, 1964). Apart from these belief systems, some Turkish communities affected by different cultures in different geographies have been influenced by different religions such as Shamanism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Manichaeism. However, since the religion of Islam is compatible with the ancient beliefs of the Turks in many respects, it is a widespread religion among Turks and at the same time reinforcing Turkishness (Kafesoğlu, 2016).

The term Tengri (God), which can be considered at the centre of the belief system of the ancient Turks, first appeared in the Huns (200 BC), continued its existence in all Turkish dialects and preserved its place in the religions accepted by the Turks (Roux, 2021). The Huns had a nomadic lifestyle. Animal products were plentiful, but they were in dire need of land crops as they were engaged in animal husbandry. They met these needs with trade or what they had obtained from their raids. However, the successes of the Huns in the wars improved the nomadic animal husbandry and led to the reduction of internal conflicts for the unification of the tribes (Gumilev, 2013). The main food item of the steppe Turks was meat. Turks, who produce plenty of meat, learned how to canned meat in order not to spoil it and to preserve it for a long time (Kafesoğlu, 2016).

Nomadic livestock was generally practised in the Oghuz tribes. However, there were also groups engaged in farming and fishing in settled and semi-settled tribes (Agacanov, 2015). Turks were quite competent in animal husbandry and after adopting settled life they started to do to agricultural activities. As in animal husbandry, they improved in agriculture and used the most appropriate methods and techniques of the period. So much so that many irrigation channels were opened for agricultural purposes during the Göktürks period. One of them, Tötö Canal, whose length is close to 10 kilometres, was built with such high technical knowledge that the Russians decided to use this canal exactly in 1935 (Ögel, 1945).

When we look at the Turkish states before they accepted Islam in general, it is possible to say that people's religious beliefs led them to protect nature and not to harm living things and animals. Considering the elements in nature sacred, preventing the waste

of meat by canning technique and preserving deer milk in cold river water, creating irrigation channels with the right techniques, using deer which is resistant to cold climate conditions as mounts and benefiting from their meat, milk, leather, offal and horns show that even before accepting Islam, the Turks led a life in harmony with the environment they lived in and used natural resources efficiently.

### *Turkish States After the Acceptance of Islam*

The acceptance of Islam by the Turks took place in the 7th and 8th centuries. Itil Bulgars (7th-10th century) and Karakhanids (840-1212) are known as the first Turkish states to accept Islam. In addition, the first state founded by Muslim Turks was Tulunids (868-905) (Alican, 2018). Among the Oghuz, Çanak Khan, who became the head of the tribe after Salur Khan, the ancestor of the tribe, accepted Islam. Other Turkish tribes, clans and families nearby also accepted Islam and they were called Türk-i Îmân (Believed Türk). This expression took the form of Türküman and Türkmen over time. Today, Oghuz Turks who accept Islam are called Türkmen (Maksudoğlu, 2018). Since then, different Turkish states have been founded and generally adhered to the Islamic faith. The foundation of the Seljuk Empire, which has an important place in Muslim Turkish history, was laid in 1020 and was officially established after the victory against the Ghaznavids in the Battle of Dandanaqan (Yenigün, 2020). The Ottoman Empire, which was founded in 1289 by tribal leader Osman, is another Muslim Turkish state that ruled until 1922 (Maksudoğlu, 2018). The Republic was proclaimed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923 and the Republic of Turkey has existed since then. Today, there are Turks in other Turkish states outside the Republic of Turkey who practices different religions such as Shamanism, Buddhism, Tengrism, Burkhanism, Christianity in addition to the belief in Islam (“List of Turkic dynasties and countries,” 2021).

### *Respect and Love for Animals*

Wolf and Eagle had an important place in Old Turkish Mythology. According to the old belief, it was believed that the “Sky Wolf” lived with the Turkish ancestors and led them. (Candan, 2013). The wolf was considered a sacred animal, a symbol of freedom and independence (Aydoğan, 2019). The eagle had an important role in the shamanistic rites performed in Yakut, Altai, Kazakh-Kyrgyz and Bashkirs. According to the Yakuts, the greatest oath was the oath taken with the name of the eagle. If a person saw an eagle near their house, they would owe it to themselves to offer it a meat feast (Radloff, 2009). While wolves and eagles are seen as sacred animals, horses also have a special place in Turkish states. The Turks living in the steppe culture are the first nation in the world to domesticate horse. (Kafesoğlu, 2016).

While it is seen that some animals were considered sacred and the horse was domesticated in the pre-Islamic period, the feeling of compassion towards animals came to the fore

after the adoption of Islam. It is seen that stray animals and horses are shown mercy during the Ottoman Empire period. Du Loir, who came to Turkey in the 17th century, describes in his travel book *Les voyages du sieur Du Loir* (sieur Du Loir'in Seyahatleri) that there are buildings dedicated to cats in Turkey, foundations are allocated for their food, stewards and butlers are attained to their care. He also states that the Turks do not put too much weight on their horses and that they punish the people who does by making them carry those loads on their backs (Danishmend, 1982). In addition, it was forbidden to put too much weight on the horses, as well as to carry them without shoes and to leave them neglected (Altınay, 1987).

### *Importance of Forest and Trees*

While Turks believed in shamanism, trees and forests were considered sacred by them. It was believed that trees had spirits and these creatures, which they considered sacred, were not harmed unnecessarily (Özdemir, 2003). Steppe Turks, on the other hand, accepted the tree as the manifestation of the Creator and would not harm it (Tazebay & Akpınar, 2010). Likewise, they believed that every tree had a spirit. Nature spirits were called “Yer-Su (Earth-Water)” in the time of the Göktürks. The same term was used as “Yer-Suv” in Uyghurs. Like trees, forests had a very important place in Turkish culture. Otuken forests were considered sacred in the time of the Göktürks and Uyghurs. In the Qara Qoyunlu Alevi Turkmens, there was a sacred forest around one of the villages. They called this forest “Karaoğlan” and it was forbidden to touch these trees. Qara Qoyunlu women used to tie flowers to these trees when spring came and bury the bones of sacrificed animals in this forest (Radloff, 2009).

In the old Turkish belief, a great tree was a symbol of eternity and power due to its roots going deep into the ground and branches reaching to the sky. In that period, when they pass by an old and great tree, they would pay respect by tying their hands together and kneeling down (Aydoğan, 2019).

After the adoption of Islam, the importance given to trees and forests continued. Special measures were taken to protect trees and forests in the Ottoman Empire. Those who cut trees, graze animals and hunt without permission were fined. In 1559, a decision was taken to prohibit cutting trees from the Eşme, Dikme and Sapanca mountains (Çolak, 2019).

The founder of the Republic of Turkey, the Great Leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, did not allow the willow trees in the construction site to be cut down, and had these trees moved to a different place. Atatürk, in the Opening Speeches of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on March 1, 1922, “It is one of our important rules to improve, expand and provide the highest benefit to our forests with modern measures, since they are of certain importance in terms of both agriculture and the existence and general

health of the country,” used the expression (TBMM, 1922). This thought of Atatürk can be accepted as an indication of his far sightedness on sustainable agricultural practices and afforestation, which have an important place today.

Atatürk went to Yalova in 1929 and asked for a mansion to be built near the plane tree in which he rested in its shadow. After the mansion was built, those who worked there told Atatürk, who went back to Yalova in 1930, that the elongated branches of the plane tree damaged the roof and walls of the mansion. When they said that these branches should be cut, Atatürk did not allow. He wanted the mansion to be moved a little further with tram tracks. Thereupon, the tram rails brought from Istanbul were placed on the floor of the mansion as a result of long efforts, and the building was moved about five meters further. After this event, which was one of the greatest examples of Atatürk’s love of trees, the name of the mansion began to be known as “Walking Mansion”. The mansion is currently exhibited as a history museum (“Yürüyen Köşk,” 2021).

### *Environmental Cleaning and Environmental Regulations*

The importance given to the environment in the Seljuk State is striking. In this period, more environmentalist practices were carried out with the foundations established. Some of the environmentally friendly practices made during the Seljuk State are as follows (Yenigün, 2020):

- Limited resources have been used correctly, thanks to the large number of foundations created.
- In addition to being treated in hospitals, the students who grew up in the district were trained on environmental cleaning and precautions against epidemics that may occur after drought.
- Birdfeed was left where the birds could reach so that they would not starve in case of heavy rainfall.
- Drinking and utility water is provided in accordance with the needs of people. For this purpose, aqueducts, water reservoirs, cisterns, wells, pools, waterways and fountains were built. In addition, snow chutes have been made, which allowed the falling snow of winter to be compressed and used as ice in the summer heat.
- With the sewage system formed from soil pipes, permanent solutions that prevent environmental pollution are presented.

7th sultan of the Ottoman Empire, II. Mehmet (Mehmed the Conqueror) Han (Figure 2), also known as Fâtih, ruled first between 1444-1446 and then between 1451-1481. At the age of 21, he conquered Istanbul and ended the Eastern Roman Empire. Fâtih, one of the



most important sultans of the Ottoman Empire, was cultured, educated and had a broad vision. He wanted the environment to be neat and clean in the lands he ruled. So much so that after the conquest of Istanbul, he wrote an edict to prevent the Golden Horn from being polluted and filled with soil and ensured that necessary measures were taken in this regard (Akgündüz, 2009). In a will that is said to belong to him, He wants the street-side officials to punish these offenders and the street to be disinfected with lime in order to prevent the environmental damage caused by those who spit on the streets (Şeker, 1992).



Figure 2. Sultan Mehmed II, 1480; Oil on Canvas; National Gallery, London.

Another important sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Süleyman I (Suleiman the Magnificent) Han (Figure 3) prepared the Nizamnâme (Regulations), which can be considered the world's first environmental law. The Nizamnâme, which was given to Edirne garbage Soubashi in 1539, continue to be relevant in today's world.



Figure 3. Portrait of Suleiman I by Titian c. 1530.



In the Nizamnâme, there are environmental regulations such as cleaning houses and shops, cleaning dirty places, cleaning the baths, not spilling bleach containing detergents on the road, removing animal carcasses from the places where people live, closing open graves, putting cars in private parking spaces. Based on this Nizamnâme, it is possible to show the principles of the Ottoman Empire on environmental cleaning and regulation in items (Akgündüz, 2009):

- Every individual or institution is primarily responsible for the environmental cleanliness of the area they are in. The control of these is provided by the Soubashi.
- Who threw out the garbage in the neighborhoods, streets and bazaars will be determined by the Soubashi and this garbage will be cleaned by those who caused it.
- Wastewater of businesses that discharge wastewater into the environment is controlled, and these roads are arranged in a way that does not prevent people from passing through.
- Who throws the garbage on the ground is investigated, first of all, those closest to this garbage is held responsible. Even if it is understood that these people did not do it, they are asked to help find the person who is responsible,
- It is ordered that waste liquids such as bleach, blood, paint and other garbage should never be thrown into places where people walk and should be taken to desolate and secluded places away from people in a way that will not disturb anyone.
- Particular attention is paid to the cleanliness of places that produce and sell food products.
- It is requested that the animals should not be fed in public places unless it is necessary, and that the feed residues and animal excrement should be cleaned by the owners when they need to be fed.
- It is ordered that the coachmen tie up their oxen in places that will not disturb people, and that the garbage and excrement formed in the places where these animals are tied are cleaned by the animal owners.
- It is ordered to keep the cemeteries clean and not to throw garbage and animal carcasses in this area.
- Those who pollute the environment with the rubbish and dead animals they leave and resist to cleaning them are informed that they will be disgraced in the city with those animal heads.

The punishment of displaying the dead animal can be seen as a severe punishment in today's conditions, which damages human dignity. However, the aim here is not to damage human dignity, but to prevent crime and ensure that honourable people stay away from these behaviours. Because fines do not have the same deterrence for all people (Akgündüz, 2009).

Considering the decisions taken in this Regulation, it is seen that an excellent auto control system was established in the Ottoman Empire for environmental cleaning. Considering the damage caused by liquid wastes such as bleach, dye and detergent water to nature, the restrictions made in this direction still carry great importance today. The rules applicable to passenger animals of that time shed light on the rules established for today's motor vehicles. It is emphasized that auto repairs and maintenance are carried out in a way that does not disturb people (auto industries), and the necessity of parking the vehicles in the places reserved for them without hindering the movement of people. Keeping the cemeteries clean shows the value given to human beings and reveals that the environment of the dead as well as the living should be kept clean.

In the 16th century, garbage was collected in certain places in Istanbul in order to prevent environmental pollution. The rubbish of the chambers of the Janissaries and the Sekban chambers, which constituted an important part of the military power of the Ottoman Empire, was dumped into the sea on the Langa side designated for this purpose. When it was discovered that these wastes were poured into the sea from Yenikapı in 1585, it was decided to dump them again from the Langa side (Altınay, 1987).

The environmentalist personality of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Figure 4), the founder of the Republic of Turkey, has an important place in reflecting the environmental consciousness of Turkish history. After the proclamation of the republic in 1923, some of Atatürk's decisions within the borders of Turkey reveal his environmentalist personality and his aim to bring this environmental understanding to the Turkish nation. Some of the decisions Atatürk took for this purpose are as follows (Köroğlu, 2009):

- Declaring Ankara capital and building Atatürk Forest Farm, Youth Park, Hippodrome, Güvenpark and Victory Park, and working on the dimensions of Ankara streets and forestation,
- Producing fruits, vegetables, milk and dairy products on farms and generating income from these products and producing seeds for farmers,
- Not giving permission to the cutting of willow trees that need to be cut due to the construction in the Söğütözü, and making responsible people move these trees to another place,
- Opening canals in swamps and barren lands, making these lands suitable for

agriculture,

- Reminding the importance Islam gives to planting trees and expressing that some people forget or abuse this rule,
- Greening around Yalova Thermal Springs and planting pine trees in this area,
- Not allowing the plane tree, which is said to have damaged the roof and walls of the mansion he had built in Yalova, to be cut down, and to have the mansion changed using a rail system.



Figure 4. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

There has been an increase in environmental problems globally since the 1970s, and Turkey, like other countries, has followed policies aimed at reducing these problems and preventing them. These problems have been addressed in the development plans and studies have been made and continue to be done to create a sustainable environmental understanding (Sezik, 2018).

### Conclusion

In the belief of Islam, factors such as advising people to use environmental resources

without wasting and sharing these resources with animals, depicting the paradise promised to people with water resources such as trees and rivers, explaining that there is a balance between living and non-living beings in nature reveal the importance given to the environment. When we look at Turkish history, it is seen that natural structures such as the sky, mountains, forests, trees and some animals were considered sacred in the pre-Islamic period, while in the post-Islamic period, animals were treated with mercy and afforestation was given importance. In addition, it is understood that environmental regulations have been made because of increasing population and environmental pollution, and measures have been taken for environmental cleaning.

As a result, it is possible to say that there was an advanced and positive environmental understanding in Turkish states before and after the acceptance of Islam. It is seen that the Turkish states lived in harmony with their environment and had a positive environmental understanding even before they accepted Islam. After the acceptance of Islam, it is understood that this positive environmental understanding was dominated by the understanding of showing mercy to animals and meeting their needs instead of seeing animals as sacred. In addition, in Islam, “rightful due”, which is abusing the rights of others is prohibited. In this respect, it can be thought that the person may be taking special care not to abuse the rightful due, in other words, not to disturb others, especially in environmental cleaning. In other words, this provision of Islam may have had an effect on the measures taken by the Turks for environmental cleaning and regulations after they accepted Islam. It can be said that Islam has an impact on the environmental understanding of the Turks, in terms of compassion for animals and animal rights.

### Environmental Understanding Activity

#### *Let's Picture the Understanding of Environment in Turkish-Islamic History*

##### Aims of the activity:

- To help students comprehend the environmental understanding in Turkish states.

##### Activity time: 2 hours

##### Materials needed for the activity: Colored crayons, drawing paper, symbols.

Activity content: Blank drawing papers and crayons are distributed to the students. Students are asked to draw the environmental understanding of Turkish states. During the activity, it may be requested to show these features in the picture by giving guiding tips such as “environmental arrangements, environmental cleanliness, importance of animals, balance in nature, trees and forests, efficient use of natural resources.” While drawing the picture, elements such as the lifestyles, sanjaks and religions of the Turkish states can be expressed. \_

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