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Among the many Dervish fraternities which have exercised their influence over the lives of a large proportion of the Turkish people of the Ottoman Empire the Bektashis have held a unique place.

(This is quoted from - BIRGE, John Kingsley : **THE BEKTASHI ORDER OF DERVISHES**, Luzac & Co., 1937, p. 13-21 Quotations will be continued from Birge's pioneer book)

INTRODUCTORY FACTS

1. THE GENERAL PLACE OF DERVISH ORDERS IN TURKEY AND OTHER MOSLEM COUNTRIES

The study of mystic orders in Islam is one of particular importance if the Moslem world is to be adequately understood. The religion left by Muhammad very early developed in two directions. On the one hand it produced a rigid, scholastic theology with an inflexible religious law. At the same time, even from within the first two centuries, a tendency away from this fixed, external system showed its beginning and quickly developed into individuals and groups who emphasized the ascetic life and the mystical approach to direct knowledge of God. As orthodox canonists and professional theologians objected to this tendency to “search the conscience” on the ground that the the ultimate result would be in the direction of heresy, organized bands or brotherhoods began to develop, based on the fundamental idea that “the fervent practice of worship engenders in the soul graces (fawaid), immaterial and intelligible realities, and that the ‘science of hearts’ (ilm al kulub) will procure the soul an experimental wisdom (ma’rifa) **(1)**.”

Although the article *Tarika* in the Encyclopaedia of Islam makes the statement that “As a rule the number of persons affiliated to the brotherhoods in any particular Muslim country is not over three per cent. of the population,” it appears certain that in Turkey and Albania, at least, the proportion of actual members and of those loosely affiliated is far greater. When the writer first visited Turkey in 1913 he went about under the impression he had received from books that Turkey was a Sunni (i.e. from the Muhammadan point of view orthodox) country. He quickly found to his surprise that an enormous proportion of the people not only were affiliated with dervish brotherhoods, but even the leaders who appeared on Friday as Imams in the formal worship (namaz) in the mosque, were on other days to be found acting as Şeyh’s (Shaikhs) in dervish tekkes. **(2)** During Muharrem, the month when Shi’ites especially remember the death of Huseyin and the early injustice done Ali and his family in taking the Caliphate from them, the writer visited tekke after tekke, and found in them all dervishes passionately mourning the death of Hasan and Hüseyin. In discussing this matter later with one of Turkey’s greatest scholars the writer expressed the impression that the Turkish people while outwardly Sunni were, under cover of their dervish brotherhoods, partially Shi’ite, at least in their tendencies, and certainly mystical rather than orthodox. The scholar replied that there in there in Constantinople where the proportion was presumably less than the rest of the country, probably sixty per cent. of the people belonged directly or indirectly to dervish fraternities. He pointed out that in Christian countries we had in church history experienced our persecutions, Catholics killing Protestants and vice versa, but that there was a certain moral advantage in this. Deep sincerity, he said, lay behind these persecutions. Whereas, in Moslem lands, he continued, the practice of takiye, dissimulation, had grown up to make possible a

man's continuing his standing as an orthodox member of a mystic fraternity which emphasized an experimental rather than a traditional and formal approach to reality.

In Turkey, therefore, this tendency to group life in a brotherhood of those seeking a direct knowledge of God must be recognised as a widespread tendency lying sometimes beneath the surface, but influencing probably the lives of a large majority of the people.

In general, the ideology of such groups has come from Arabic and Persian sources, the more learned among the dervish leaders being well able to read and to write in these languages. The most important immediate sources of ideas for all the Turkish dervish orders have been the Mesnevi, a great poem written in Persian in the thirteenth century by Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the patron saint of the Mevlevi dervish order, and two Arabic works Futuhatı Mekkiye and Fususul Hikâm by Muhyiddini Arabi (1165-1240). Lying as a foundation underneath the system developed by the influence of these books has been the common belief and practice of the Turkish people with their inherited customs from the Asiatic past. Certain orders, of which the Mevlevi's are the outstanding example, grew up chiefly in urban centres, as aristocratic, intellectual fraternities, especially attracting members from the upper classes o grounds largely of aesthetic appeal. Other groups, of which the Bektashis are the notable exponent, developed directly out of the life of the people. On the surface in these latter groups, lies the Islam which became the accepted religion of the people. Underneath have lain, all down through Ottoman history, customs and practices which came originally from the ethnic life of the various peoples who mingled together on the frontiers in the thirteenth century, and from amongst whom grew up a natural religion of the people.

2. THE PLACE OF THE BEKTASHI ORDER IN TURKISH LIFE

Among the many Dervish fraternities which have exercised their influence over the lives of a large proportion of the Turkish people of the Ottoman Empire the Bektashis have held a unique

place. From the point of view of mere numbers they have been significant. The Bektashis themselves estimate their numbers at about seven million. Ali Turabi Baba, postnişin of the Bektashi tekke on Mt. Tomori in Albania writing in his Historija E Bektashinjvet **(3)** says that before the destruction of the Janissaries in 1826 and the accompanying abolition of the Bektashi Order, annual statistics were kept, and that these figures showed the number Bektashis to be 7,370,000 seven million being in Anatolia, 100,000 in Albania, 120,000 in Stambul and the remainder scattered through Irak, Crete, Macedonia and other sections especially of the Balkans. In October 1933 Niyazi Dedei the head of the officially recognised Bektashi community of Albania, gave me personally his estimate that in the old Turkish Empire there were 7,500,000 Bektashis not counting the more or less loosely affiliated Kizilbash. There were in the Eastern Provinces of Turkey alone, he said, 1,500,000. In Albania he estimated there were 200,000 or twenty per cent. of the population. The English treveller and historian, Rycaut, writing in the seventeenth century, says that the Bektashis “are now grown into that vast multitude as is almost impossible to extirpate them.” He quotes his teacher as saying that Bektash had many millions of followers.
(4)
A more recent observer, Besim Atalay, delegate from Aksaray in the Grand National Assembly, writing in 1340 (1924) estimates their numbers at 1,500,000.
(5)
including apparently the Kizilbash and Tahtajis in this figure. If we take the lowest figure given by any observer, approximately ten per cent. of the population of Turkey were directly or indirectly under the influence of this Order.
(6)

Not a mystical fraternity alone, the Bektashis have played their important military role all through Ottoman history down to 1826 through their intimate connection, apparently from the beginning, with the Janissary Army corps. Village groups scattered throughout Anatolia, under the names Kizilbash (Red heads), Tahtaci’s, Abdal’s, Çepni’s, in ways that will be later enumerated, are related intimately with the Bektashi organization by belief and tradition and religious ceremony and often in organization well.

Perhaps the most important justification, however, for studying the Bektashi Order is the fact, generally recognized by all students of Turkish culture to-day, that all down through Ottoman history, when the orthodox religious life of the people was under dominant Arabic influence,

when the classic literature in vogue in palace circles was Persian, and when even a great mystic order such as the Mevlevi's, based its belief and practice on a book written entirely in Persian, the Bektashis consistently held to the Turkish language and perpetuated in their belief and practice some at least of the pre-Islamic elements of Turkish culture. A Turkish investigator in 1926, writing in the official magazine of the national culture society called the Turkish Ocak, makes the claim that the Turkish national ideal never was able to find its expression in the Arab internationalism, but did find it in the tekkes or lodge rooms of the Alevi orders of which the Bektashis and village groups related to them are chief examples. In the secret practices of those religious groups alone was "national freedom" to be found. **(7)** The very aim, he says, of the founders of these groups, was to preserve the Turkish tongue and race and blood.
(8)

That this point of view, while extreme, is not that of an isolated individual is shown by the fact that in 1930 the Department of the Republic printed 3,000 copies of a book called Bektashi Poets **(9)** containing biographical sketches and selections from the religious verse of 180 Bektashi poets. In recent years every history of Turkish literature written from school use has emphasized for each century "Bektashi Literature" because in that, more than in anyother type of writing, the original Turkish language and Turkish literary forms were used and Turkish national customs and points of view reflected.

3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF THE BEKTASHI ORDER

Modern interest on the part of scholars in the Bektashi Order may be said to go back to the great history of Turkey written by Von Hammer. In that history publicity is given to the tradition of the first blessing of the Janissary soldiers at their beginning by Haji Bektash Veli. **(10)** The first attempt to write of the order itself and its practices came in 1868 when Brown's book, The Dervishes or Oriental Spiritualism, appeared. An exceedingly valuable, but uncritical, collection of material having to do with the beliefs and practices and symbols of the Bektashi as well as of other dervish orders, this book has recently been printed in a new edition with notes, index and betterarrangement by Pose.
(11)
Unsuspected new light was thrown on the beliefs of the Bektashi Order when, in the spring of 1897, Prof. Edward G. Browne spent an Easter vacation in Paris studying in the Bibliotheque Nationale two manuscripts containing several treaties having to do with an obscure sect called

the Hurufis. The results of this study were publishedin the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society for January 1898, and in a second article in the same journal in the July number of 1907, Prof. Browne reported further discoveries. Stirred with interest in the Hurufi sect by his studies in Paris in 1897, he had ordered his bookseller to procure for him from the Orient available Hurufi texts. To his surprise, the treaties of an order thought to have been long dead turned up in quantities revealing that they were in use in some present-day quarter. On inquiry, it was discovered that they came from the Bektashis, and that in the present-day Bektashi Order the doctrines of Fazlullah, the founder of the Hurufi sect, were being perpetuated.

In 1908 there appeared in Germany the first attempt at a critical study of the Bektashis. Prof. Jacob in his Beitrage zur Kenntnis des Derwisch-Ordens der Bektaschis, not only examined the history and spread of the Bektaschis, criticising, among other things, the tradition that Haji Bektash Veli could have given his blessing in person at the time of the founding of the Janissary army corps, but also added a translation of a Turkish book which appeared in 1873 (1290) called Kâşif ul esrar ve Def ul eşrar, Discoverer of Secrets and Rejector of Evils, a bitter attack on the Bektashis, especially on account of their acceptance of Hurufi doctrines. Jacob followed up this study with his book Die Bektaschijje, published in 1909, containing a careful analysis of all the material, oriental and occidental, then available bearing on the Bektashi Order. In this book he gave a special attentionto a study of the sources, Christian, Shi'ite, Gnostic and Pagan from which the Bektashis had received doctrines or practices.

Basing his studies on personal travel and investigation in Turkeyi the English classicist, F. W. Hasluck, published in the years from 1911 on, especially in the Annals of the British School at Athens, interesting studies of the Bektashis, their geographic distribution, their methods of propaganda, and the relation their sacred places to Christian sacred places. These studies were translated into Turkish **(12)** in 1928. Later, supplementingthese personal investigations on the field by a reading of every European book bearing on the subject Hasluck gathered a mass of material which, after his death, his wife published in 1929 under the title, Christianity and Islam under the Sultans. In these studies Hasluck examined the European sources for an understanding of the founding of the Janissaries and cocluded tahat the Haji Bektash Veli tradition in connection therewith could not be true. He tended to find in Fazlullah Hurufi the real founder of the Bektashi Order, and to doubteven the historicity of Haji Bektash Veli's existence **(13)**
except as a possible tribal ancestor who contributed only his name.

In the meantime Turkish scholars had been at work on the Turkish sources. In 1918 Prof. Dr. Köprülü Zade Fuat Bey **(14)** of the University of Istanbul published his important First Mystics in Turish Literature, **(15)** devoting considerable space to the traditions of Haji Bektash Veli and to a critical study of the historic facts. Writing in 1924, Hilmi Ziya, a proffesor in the Galata Saray school, **(16)** noted in the Mihrap magazine
(17)
that the study of Haji Bektash Veli having begun in tradition, had passed in the critical stage to an excessive denial of his influence, even of his existence, and that the pendulum was now swinging back to give a more truly historical picture of the founder of the Bektashi order. In that article he announced the discovery of a copy of a work dated 812 (1409), throwing possible light not only on Haji Bektash Veli's existence but upon his teachings as well.
(18)
In October 1923 Prof. Fuat Bey delivered at the International Congress of the History of Religions in Paris a most important address on the Origins of Bektashiism. In this he critisized the work heretofore done on the Bektashis, pointing out the necessity of studying the religious history of Anatolia for an understanding of the background of all the dervish orders. He reported new historical evidence discovered since the publishing of his "Early Mystics" not only establishing more definitely the historical character of Haji Bektash Veli, but also revealing apparently authentic teachings of the master.
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Supplementing the direct work of critical scholars an important research has of recent years been made into the life, the doctrines and the practices of the Alevi or so-called village Bektashi groups. In the Magazine of the Theological Department of the University during the years 1928 to 1930 Prof. Yusuf Ziya Bey published a most interesting account of personal visits among the Alevi villages around Eski Şehir in search of an intimate enough knowledge of Alevi life and thought so that visits in the role of an actual Alevi might be made to the Tahtaci villages near Smyrna. **(20)** The result of these studies from actual life furnishes a fund of information that is of special value in establishing the actual relation of these village Alevi groups with the Bektashi Order, its doctrines and its practices.

In contrast to others of the dervish orders of Turkey such as the Mevlevi or Whirling Dervishes and the Rufai or Howling Dervishes, the Bektashis have no public service of worship. In fact, the entire ritual of the Bektashi Order is guarded with such absolute secrecy and the beliefs are so obviously kept in concealment from the public understanding that there has long prevailed in Turkey a great curiosity as to the Bektashi Secret. Books and articles have been written in an attempt to discover the elusive mystery. Besim Atalay's Bektaşilik ve Edebiyatı **(21)** and Ahmet Rıfkı's Bektaşi Sırrı,
(22)
(The Bektashi Secret) are among the more important of these, both being attempts at fair appraisal of the Order. Ziya Bey's "Bektaşilik" in the columns of the daily newspaper, Yeni Gün,
(23)
is an excellent studyby a Bektashi himself, presenting an account of the history, beliefs and practices from the Bektashi point of view. The articles end with a point of view in agreement with that often expressed by Bektashis since the Republic of Turkey abolished all dervish orders. Since the Republic, they say, has by government action accomplished what the Bektashis long stood for - abolition of the Caliphate, freedom of women from the veil and social restraints, putting an end to the fanaticism of religious leaders - there is no longer need for the continuance of the order within the borders of the Republic.

As if to offset the favourable reports of curious students, and as a natural result perhaps of an unorthodox doctrine kept secret, there have appeared in recent years, particularly since November 1925, when all dervish lodges were closed, many articles in depreciation of the Bektashis. Their secret is shown to be something contrary to both religion and morality. **(24)**
The important novel, Nur Baba, by one of Turkey's greatest writers, Yakup Kadri, himself at one time a Bektashi, appeared first in newspaper columns then in two editions in book form,
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and is an amazingly frank treatment of abuses, written before the dervish orders were abolished, in the hope of aiding a needed reform.

4. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

It is this order with its mystery which has challenged the attention of students for centuries, with

its intimate connection with Turkey's military history, and her social and literary culture, an order of which descriptions have been written in high praise and in bitter condemnation, that we are in these pages to attempt to study. Our aim will be neither to praise nor to condemn the order, but to study it objectively, with the particular purpose of trying as best a sympathetatic outsider may, to see life and its problems, the mystery of the universe and its explanation, as a Bektashi himself sees them. It is hoped that this study will serve as a sufficently comprehensive exposition of the beliefs and practices of the order, and of the common references in Bektashi literature, so that it may be an introduction to the intelligent reading of Bektashi poetry and other literary expressions. Only in a secondary way is the study interested in showing relations with Islam in general and with other religious origins. Numerous resemblances to other religious systems will be pointed out, but the writer is frankly skeptical of any attempt to trace dogmatically the origin of a particular belief end practice to its exact and single source. Both beliefs and practices have frequently been the result of influences from different directions combining in a new form where the common elements have been retained or differing elements so changed as to attract a very mixed population, making each group find something familiar to that which has been already known.

Although this study is chiefly an attempt to get at the beliefs and practices of the Bektashis as such are explained in their own literature and in manuscript manuals actually used by their leaders, it has seemed advisable also to set forth at the beginning such facts as are known about the history and origin of the order. This is all the more necessary since the writer believes that previous studies by European scholars have been misleading. New material discovered by Turkish scholars has thrown new light on this very obscure but significant page of history. Much investigation needs yet to be made, however, before the full story of the origin of the Bektashis and of the part they have played in Ottoman history can be adequately understood.

Notes:

(In his book Birge, notes given in every pages starting from number 1, but we give numbers continiously for all pages. Editors)

(1) Encyclopaedia of Islam, article Tasawwuf.

(2) A Tekke is a dervish place of gathering for worship and instruction.

(3) Historija E Pergjitheshme E Bektashinjvet prej Ate Ali Turabiut. Tirane, 1929. Page 64.

(4) The Present State of the Ottoman Empire by Paul Rycaut, London, 1668. Page 149.

(5) Bektaşilik ve Edebiyatı, Besim Atalay. İstanbul, 1340. Page 5.

(6) Hasluck in Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans, page 161, gives 80,000 as the number of Bektashis in Albania, and says that Bektashis themselves claim 3,000,000 as their total number.

(7) Türk Yurdu, no. 21, Eylül 1926, article by Baha Sait on Türkiyede Alevi Zümreleri. Page 204.

(8) Ibid. page 207.

(9)Bektaşi Şairleri, Sadettin Nüzhet, Istanbul, 1930.

(10) Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches; Pesth, 1834, Vol. I, page 97.

(11) The Darvishes, Oxford Press, 1927.

(12) Bektaşilik Tetkikleri, Istanbul, 1928.

(13) Hasluck, Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans, pages 341 and 488.

(14) In accordance with the law requiring choice and registration of family names, this name was changed to M. Fuad Köprülü in 1936.

(15) Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar.

(16) Now on the Faculty of the University of Istanbul.

(17) Temmuz 1340, no. 15, 16, page 515.

(18) Temmuz 1340, no. 15, 16, page 517.

(19) Les Origines du Bektachisme, Extrait des Acts du Congres International d'Histoire des Religions. Paris, 1926. Article Bektaşiliğin Menşeleri in Türk Yurdu, no: 8, 1341.

(20) İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası, nos. 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, years 1928-1930. An earlier study into a similar subject had been made in 1891 by V. Luschan: "Die Tahtadji und andere Reste der der Alten Bevolkerungt Lykiens" in Archiv. für Anthropologie, 19.Pd., Braunschiveig 1891.

(21) Published in Istanbul in 1340 (1924).

(22) Published in Istanbul in 1325-1327 (1909-1911)

(23) Forty instalments, from Jan. 26th, 1931 to March 8th, 1931.

(24) See, for example, the articles in Büyük Gazette, Nos. 1-26, November 1926-March 1927.

(25) Second Edition, İstanbul, 1923.