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THE TRAVELS OF DERVISHES IN ANATOLIA AND RUMELIA AND THE IMPACT ON RURAL SOCIETY FROM THIRTEENTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

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Itinerancy which has long been a significant aspect of Sufi life was particularly accepted as an important principle by the Sufi orders that belonged to the type of orders known as the new ascetic movement or the Qalandariyah that emerged and spread across the Islamic world after the beginning of the thirteenth century. For those dervishes that belonged to these orders itinerancy was almost transformed to a life style. Thus, during the Islamic late middle period (thirteenth to sixteenth centuries) it was possible to frequently encounter wandering dervishes following a caravan on the intercity roads, they could also be seen on roads in rural areas travelling from one village to another alone or in groups and see them sitting in a corner of the streets of a town. Most of society was accustomed to this dervish behavior and the people welcomed and ascribed spiritual meanings to this practice. They were accepted as the travelers of a holy path and as the lovers or friends of God who searched for the truth, and the people sought to meet their demands for alms. However, other parts of society characterized them as “work-shy and lazy” (*iş kaçgını tembeller*)¹ or as “surplus to requirements” (*âlemin fazlalığı*).² Undoubtedly such attributions could have resulted from the fact that these dervishes did not undertake any economic activity since they followed the principle of absolute poverty and renunciation of all worldly affairs, relying on alms from the public or the waqfs and that they never contributed to the reproduction of society remaining single throughout their life.

Whatever meanings were attributed to this itinerant life style it led to the development of a multi-dimensional and multi-functional relationship between the dervishes and society. This relationship became more intensive and meaningful for the inhabitants of rural areas who had very limited communication with the outside

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1 Osman Turan, ‘Selçuk Türkiyesi Din Tarihine Dair Bir Kaynak: Füstât ul-‘adâle fî Kavâ'id is-saltana', in *Fuad Köprülü Armağanı*. İstanbul: DTCF Yay., 1953, 538.

2 This definition was given by Nasiruddin Tusi, the advisor of the famous Ilkhanid Khan Hulagu during his military campaign in Syria when he came across a group of Qalandars in Harran near Urfa. With this definition, Tusi wanted to clarify that they did not belong to any professional group or social class. See Osman Turan, *Doğu Anadolu Türk Devletleri Tarihi*. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yay., 1993, 226–227.

world. The dervishes had many direct and indirect functions for the communities they passed through. First, their travels functioned to offer educational and social welfare services to the local population, which were similar to those available in the dervish lodges (*tekkes*), to the local people. However, more important was the role that the itinerant dervishes played in being a channel through which the rural population made contact with the outside world. Thus, the itinerant dervishes could shape intellectual and belief perspectives of those living in rural areas. This article will first describe the travels of the dervishes in rural areas in Anatolia and the Balkans and their contacts with the rural communities during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Furthermore, these travels will be examined in terms of the impact on rural society and the kind of functions the dervishes performed for the communities they visited.

To travel is seen as a means of spiritual maturation in Islamic mysticism, and applied by many of the Sufis as a stage in their journey along the path of spirituality (*seyr-i sülûk*). Early in their initiation many Sufis would travel to find a spiritual guide (*mürşid-i kâmil*) or to train and discipline their soul or self to endure the difficulties of travel. Later, the dervishes would spread their teachings or seek someone to converse with. Travel was also seen as a way of searching for God by observing and considering the works and traces of ancient people and the natural beauty to achieve an understanding and perception of their creator (to reach the creator through the creatures). However, to avoid being subject to people's tendency to endow them with great respect or kind regard some Sufis preferred to move unknown amongst the people and would not stay in one place for a long time.³

In addition to the mystical aspects, the travels of dervishes were transformed into a life style and also a livelihood. For the Qalandari type of Sufis or the new ascetics this itinerant lifestyle was almost mandatory as was the absolute poverty and mendicancy according to the principles of their Sufi ideology. As the Sufis refused to own property, earn money or engage in any work, and if there was insufficient support from the waqf the dervishes were dependent on the charity of the people. Since there could potentially be a problem if the Sufis continually received alms from the same source they had to diversify their sources of charity, and expand the area in which they travelled.⁴

In addition to the reason given above some Sufis, in maturity of their calling, would rather travel to the famous towns and make contact with the privileged people to spread their knowledge or to exchange ideas.⁵ Other Sufis continued wandering from place to place rejecting all worldly affairs and focusing on seeking God. These

3 For more information and bibliography about the place and importance of travel in Sufi life, see Resul Ay, *Anadolu'da Derviş ve Toplum (13–15. yüzyıllar)*. İstanbul 2008, 96–102.

4 Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994, 14–15.

5 Resul Ay, 'Ortaçağ Anadolu'su'nda Bilginin Seyahati: Talebeler, Âlimler ve Dervişler', *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar* 3 (2006) 36–44.

dervishes, dressed in ragged and strange outfits, were not interested in concepts of time and space, and would go wherever the road led and spending the night anywhere when the sun set. If there was no dervish lodge in the area or the possibility of staying in someone's home they would usually stay outside in nature. Those who travelled in the forests or mountains would spend the night under a tree, in a cave, but if they were lucky, they could pass the night in a mill or hunting lodge.⁶

The dervishes who travelled in Anatolia and the Balkans usually belonged to the orders of Qalandariyya, Yasaviyya, Vefaiyya, Haydariyya and Cavlakiyya. After the Babai movement in 1239/40 they were referred to as *babai taifa*, then during fourteenth century as *Abdals of Rûm*, and after that as *Bektashis*. Different names such as *ışık*, *torlak* or *abdalan* were also used although it is not clear whether they referred to a specific group or all of them.⁷

Although it was possible to encounter the dervish groups referred to above in the cities they were seen much more in the rural areas and preferred rural areas for their activities. Another possible reason why the Sufis travelled in rural areas was that they appeared to have similar social and cultural ideas to those of the people living in rural areas. Furthermore, because of their antinomian and deviant features the Sufis faced opposition in the cities from members of the religious orthodoxy in cities.⁸ In contrast, it seems that the dervishes who chose the rural areas for carrying

6 Sadi-i Şirazî, *Bostan*. Hikmet İlaydın (tr.), İstanbul, 1992, 198; *Güllistan*. Hikmet İlaydın (tr.), İstanbul, 1997, 40, 93, 115, 132. İbn Batuta, Clavijo and the hagiographies reflect a vivid landscape of itinerant dervishes in Anatolia. See İbn Batuta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi* I. A. Sait Aykut (tr.), İstanbul, 2004, 433, 441; R. G. Clavijo, *Anadolu, Orta Asya ve Timur: Timur Nezidine Gönderilen İspanyol Sefiri Clavijo'nun Seyahat ve Sefaret İzlenimleri*. Ö. R. Doğrul (tr.), İstanbul, 1993, 88; A. Gölpinarlı (ed.) *Menâkıb-ı Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli, "Vilâyetnâme"*. İstanbul, 1991, 49, 63. Moreover, the vilâyetnâme of Otman Baba is a full reflection of such an itinerant lifestyle. See Küçük Abdal, *Otman Baba Vilâyetnamesi*, Milli Kütüphane, Mikrofilm Arş. No: A-4985, 1976. [a new edition: Şevki Koca (ed.), *Vilâyetnâme-i Şahi: Göçek Abdal, Bektaş Kültür Derneği*, 2002.]

7 For an academic discussion of these dervish groups and their identification, see A. Y. Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Marjinal Süfîlik: Kalenderiler (XIV-XVII. yüzyıllar)*. Ankara: TTK, 1992; Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*. 51-84; Ahmet T. Karamustafa, 'Kalenders, Abdals, Hayderîs: The Formation of the Bektaşîye in the Sixteenth Century' in H. İnalçık, C. Kafadar (ed.), *Süleyman The Second and His Time*. İstanbul: The Isis Press, 1993, 121-129; Same author, 'Yesevîlik, Melâmetîlik, Kalenderîlik, Vefâîlik ve Anadolu Tasavvufunun Kökenleri Sorunu', in Ahmet Y. Ocak (ed.), *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf ve Süfîler kaynaklar-doktrin-ayın ve erkân-tarikatlar-edebiyat-mimari-ikonografi-modernizm*. Ankara 2005, 61-88; A. Y. Ocak, 'Kalenderiler ve Bektaşîlik', in *Doğumunun 100. yılında Atatürk'e Armağan*. İstanbul: İÜEF. Yay., 1981, 297-300.

8 Many stories and lively scenes about such dervishes picturing them in the cities can be seen in the works of Sadi-i Şirazî and other literature. Moreover, the existence is known of the Cavlakîs (a Qalandar group) in Konya and their good relations with Mevlana Celaleddin and the Mevlevîs. See, Turan, 'Selçuk Türkiye'si Din Tarihine Dair Bir Kaynak', 542. For the cases of Buzağı Baba and Erzurumlu Hoca who were disliked by the Mevlevîs but favored by many people of the city, see Eflakî, *Ariflerin Menkıbeleri I*. İstanbul: MEB. Yay., 1995, 323; vol II,

out their activities and establishing their tekkes had good relations with the rural people and a lively communication network was established. Some of them were homeless and did not belong to any tekke at the beginning of their Sufi life and would continuously travel without tying to any place or any lodges. This is reflected in the hagiographical lives of the famous Otman Baba and Şucaüddin Baba. Lonely and carried by a mystical experience Otman Baba wandered for a long time around the Balkan Mountains and today's Bulgaria and some parts of Romania. The people who saw him took him as a crazy (*divane*) person or a fugitive (*kaçgun kul*) and often he would even be detained by the villagers or hunters, and brought to the *kadi*.⁹ During his journey Otman Baba spent nights in a cave or under a tree, or if he was lucky, in a Sufi lodge or a mill. Şucaüddin Baba also wandered alone around the rural areas of today's Eskişehir in Turkey and stayed in a cave.¹⁰ However, as being seen in the cases of Otman Baba and Şucaüddin Baba when the Sufis found a tekke in the course of time their travels would be based on a daily routine systemically visiting the villages around the tekke. However, they would also engage in a longer journey together with a group of their *mürids* (disciples) at least once a year

As far as can be seen in the Menakıbnâme sources, except for performing the travel duty of their sufi order these local trips were usually undertaken to obtain alms and also to visit their colleagues. It was a common practice for many dervish groups in Anatolia and the Balkans to visit their colleagues who belonged to the same order or Sufi school.¹¹ Some dervish groups would spend their winter months as visitors in a different tekke far from their home.¹² However, the most organized

448. But it is well known that they also met with strong reactions in these environments. The author of a risale titled 'Füstât ul-'adâle fî Kavâ'id is-saltana' warned and provoked the statesmen against the cavlakis and all the other groups calling them batînîs. See, Turan, 'Selçuk Türkiyesi Din Tarihine Dair Bir Kaynak', 531-552. Also see the case of Otman Baba who was subject to complaints from the townsmen to the *kadı* in Edirne because of his strange dress and antinomian discourses. (Küçük Abdal, vrk. 117a-b). This gives the impression that dervishes might experience difficulties in the town centers. However, the same dervishes were received with great enthusiasm in rural areas and the local people attributed to them spiritual meanings.

9 Küçük Abdal, vrk. 25b-27a, 29b-30b, 34a, 44a, 46b.

10 Küçük Abdal, vrk. 25b, 26b, 28b, 32b, 88a; Yağmur Say, *Kalenderî, Alevî ve Bektaşî Kültüründe Önemli Bir Alp-Eren Gazi Şuca'eddîn Velî (Sultan Varlığı) ve Velâyetnâmesi*. Ankara, 2010, 36, 38, 106; Orhan F. Köprülü, 'Velâyet-nâme-i Sultan Şucaüddin', *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 17 (1972) 183.

11 Actually this tradition is seen in all the dervish groups. For example, Ibn Batuta witnessed the visit of a Rifâî dervish group to a tekke from the same order in Izmir. See, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi I*, 425. It is possible to see more examples: The visit of a Kalenderî dervish group from Khorasan to the Tekke of Hacı Bektaş in Sulucakaraöyük (*Menâkıb-ı Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî*. 63), accommodation of a group of dervishes from Khorasan in the tekke of Pakçe Sultan, a caliph of Hacım Sultan, in the district of Menteşe [Rudolf Tschudi (ed.), *Velâyetnâme-i Hacım Sultan (Das Vilâyet-nâme des Hadschim Sultan)*. Berlin, 1914, 92.]; also the frequent visits of Otman Baba to the tekkes, probably from the same order or school, and he would stay there for a period, (Küçük Abdal, in many parts of the book), etc.

12 For example during his travels Otman Baba visited a town called Prevadi and due to the snow

and extensive dervish circulation was the tradition of a yearly meeting held at a special time in their main lodge. One such meeting was organized during the days of the Feast of Sacrifice, around the lodge of Seyyid Gazi, and the other in Muharrem, the first month of the Islamic year, in the lodge of Hacı Bektaş in Sulucakaraöyük. Many of the dervish groups who belonged to these two lodges came from Anatolia and the Balkans. In these meetings, animals were sacrificed, and ceremonial meals were organized. This was a great opportunity for the participant dervishes to communicate with each other and other people also travelled to these places to benefit from the miraculous power of the Sufis; hoping their wishes would be granted or to get rid of their troubles.¹³

The travels of the dervishes for the purpose of demanding charity from nearby villages, small towns and the more distant regions were the most common and the most functional travels of them for the rural society. In their travels to seek alms the dervishes would obtain almost all the daily and yearly needs required by their lodges including all kinds of food products, carpets, oil lamps, and more importantly small and large domestic animals held an important place. The animals collected for sacrifice were often described as the villager's dedications (*adak*). This votive tradition was very common among the people of this environment and was important in maintain the livelihood of the dervishes. The villagers usually made a dedication to the dervishes so that their prayers would be answered. The tradition was so common that the dervishes would return to their tekkes with a herd of animals.¹⁴

This kind of relationship between the dervishes and rural society that had been essentially established in relation to the collection of alms also presented a base for a close dialogue and interaction between the dervishes and the people. The image of the dervishes held by the rural people was very important in this interaction. They were seen by many members of these communities as nourishing their spiritual selves, and as the realization of some of their worldly expectations. The image of the dervishes, especially the sheikhs among them, as miracle-men and friends of God was sufficient to maintain the people's hopes regarding the realization of their expectations. Even for those who had no specific wish, the sheikh could heal by looking at a person. The sheikh's miracle power was also perceived as a force to be feared and it was believed that to offending him would have a catastrophic result.¹⁵

The most important effect of this close relation can be seen in the communication of the rural societies with the outside world. People living in rural

he had to stay there in a tekke over the winter. (Küçük Abdal, vrk. 101a).

13 *Menakıb-ı Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli*, 82; *Velâyetnâme-i Hacım Sultan*, 77–78, 82; Küçük Abdal, vrk. 51b.

14 *Velâyetnâme-i Hacım Sultan*, 56, 61, 68–70, *Menakıb-ı Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli*, 85; Küçük Abdal, vrk. 75a, 80b–81a, 102a.

15 For more information about the dervish image in society, see Ay, *Anadolu'da Derviş ve Toplum*, 139–149; Resul Ay, 'Sufi Shaykhs and Society in Thirteenth and Fifteenth Century Anatolia: Spiritual Influence and Rivalry', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24:1 (2013), 7–13.

areas did not travel far. If they did leave their home this would be due to seasonal movement to a mountain pasture, visiting nearest the marketplace or a nearby shrine. Thus, the inhabitants of these isolated areas had very little contact with the outside world. For these people the wandering dervishes performed an important function providing a connection even to the extent of almost serving as postmen between the villages. This function of the itinerant dervishes, like that of the other travelers, was well known and appreciated by society. In particular, those in power paid great attention to the information by the dervishes and other travelers about what was happening in the Empire and neighboring countries. For example, when Ibn Batuta was travelling and stayed in tekkes or in the private home of an aristocrat he would be questioned by his hosts about the countries he had visited and also about the people of these countries. Especially the ruling elite tried to satisfy their curiosity about the rulers of surrounding regions or other Islamic countries.¹⁶ There was also interest in how the traveler perceived the place he was visiting. This is illustrated in a story told by Sadi-i Şirazî, about a dervish who had travelled widely visiting a city and upon meeting its governor was asked many questions such as “where are you coming from”, “why did you visit us” “were the things you saw in this region good or bad”.¹⁷ At this point in the story Sadi warned the rulers and suggested they should treat travelers well if they wanted to be remembered in a positive way.¹⁸ In some literary sources of the period, there were reports of rumors that began with “I heard from the dervishes”. For example, while Devletşah is giving information about the death of Şems-i Tebrizî in his *tezkiye*, he stated that he heard this from the travelers.¹⁹ This passing of information also led to the dervishes sometimes being considered to be spies.

Although there were other travelers the dervishes should be placed in a special position due to the interaction of the dervishes among themselves which allowed for the spread of collected information and news over a wide area. The process of this dissemination began through the dervishes staying in tekkes during their travels and sharing information which would then be passed on to the communities and people they visited. At each place they stayed, the dervishes would probably listen to stories about the sheikh who founded that tekke or the other famous sheiks in that tradition, and also hear about popular legends, myths and stories. Then the dervishes would pass these stories and other tales to others. Sadi-i Şirazi, the author of *Bostan* and *Gulistan*, frequently mentioned such stories he heard during his journeys. During his accommodation in a tekke around Iran or Khorasan, Şems-i Tebrizi was also told the

16 Ibn Batuta was asked such questions by Eretna Bey and the rulers of Gerede and Kastamonu, and answered them. See İbn Batuta, *İbn Battûta Seyahatnâmesi I*, 416, 438, 440.

17 Şirazî, *Bostan*. 28.

18 Şirazî, *Bostan* 24. See also, V. Gordlevski, *Anadolu Selçuklu Devleti*. Azer Yaran (tr.), Ankara: Onur Yay., 1988, 210.

19 Devletşah, *Devletşah Tezkiresi I*. Necati Lugal (tr.), İstanbul: MEB. Yay., 1994, 309.

life story of a famous Sufi sheikh called Ebül Hasan Harrakanî who lived during the time of the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud.²⁰

In addition to conveying general information the dervishes also played a part in shaping the intellectual worlds of those living in rural areas. The formation of an image about the other communities living nearby, the administration or governments, to which they were subject, the Islamic world to which they belonged, and the native cultures of this world, was achieved mostly through the auspices of the wandering dervishes. The integration of native people with a greater community or the development of a sense of belonging to a greater cultural area was also part of the role played by the dervishes. Through their knowledge of the common and shared high culture of Islam, the dervishes were able to present both the popular and vulgar versions of this culture to the rural communities. Since formal education was not available to most people living in rural areas and the majority of these people would not be literate the spoken word predominated. The dervishes were an essential part of the oral transfer of information and knowledge.

The wandering dervishes also influenced the formation of religious beliefs of the rural communities. In fact, it is most likely that until the establishment of a local Muslim clerical group everything in the name of faith of the rural people generally originated from these dervishes. The dervishes who were active in rural Anatolia and Rumelia during the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries were mainly associated with the new asceticism or with the Qalandariyah lodges that had sprung up in the Islamic world in the same century. Therefore, we can imagine that the dervishes presented a new type of piety to the rural areas they visited. They would have emphasized esoteric meaning instead of practices, and more moderated rules and application, and also mingled this with the cult of saints. The rural people would probably have adopted these ideas since they were in keeping with their lifestyle and ancient faith traditions.²¹

With their potential for communication, the dervishes would also have been effective in the formation of relationships between the central administration and rural society. As efficient propagandists, the dervishes were able to play an important role in the creation of an image of the central administration in these areas, and sometimes in the development of some oppositional political attitudes. The dervishes who considered public service as an important principle of their

20 Şems-i Tebrizî, *Makâlat – Konuşmalar*. O. N. Gencosman (tr.), İstanbul, 1974, 214.

21 The Islamic understanding which developed among the rural people, especially the nomads, and the activity of the dervishes can be seen in Fuad Köprülü, *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu*. Ankara: TTK Yay., 1991, 97. Concerning discussions on the nature of religious understanding of this social environment called popular Islam, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, 'Hacı Bektaş Veli ve Anadolu'da Müslümanlık', in P. Ecevitoglu – A. M. İrat – A. Yalçınkaya (eds.), *Hacı Bektaş Veli: Güneşte Zerresinden, Deryada Katresinden (Uluslar Arası Hacı Bektaş Veli Sempozyumu Bildirileri)*. Ankara, 2010, 44–45, 47, Dipnot pub. For further detail on the relationship between this popular religion and ancient Turkish beliefs to which Karamustafa has serious objections, see Fuad Köprülü, *Anadolu'da İslâmiyet*. Mehmet Kanar (ed.), İstanbul, 1996, 48–49.

mystical life could not, presumably, be expected to remain indifferent to the problems of the people with whom they lived and stayed. Problems experienced and issues raised by people in remote regions addressed to the central authority of the state would generally be conveyed to the administration by the dervishes. The role of mediator would be taken on by the main tekke in the capital city of the region.²² In terms of unresolved and chronic problems, it is most likely that the dervishes positioned themselves on the side of the aggrieved people. Although it is possible to see the great revolts initiated by dervishes in the Seljuk and Ottoman period as personal issues with the *mehdihood* or other religious and political claims manipulating the existing questions of the people, it is also possible to consider these revolts as part of resolving the problems that the people suffered. Whatever the reasons are, the dervishes realized these uprising movements through their opportunity of efficient propaganda and creating public support. As Neşri, an Ottoman historian, stated concerning the case of Torlak Kemal that the dervishes (here *torlaqs* and *ışıks*) travelled around the provinces playing musical instruments such as *çengs* and *çeganes*, and told the people about the Sufi cause.²³

The Babais who revolted against the Seljuk Sultan Gıyaseddin Keyhüsrev II should have had a long process of propaganda through the itinerant dervishes of their order and the other close orders. Probably taking into consideration the social and economic questions of the rural societies, the dervishes prepared the people for the uprising by creating propaganda against the non-approved administration of the Sultan and his indifferent attitude towards the issues of the people and the common rules of the religion.²⁴ The same method was adopted in the uprising of Sheikh Bedreddin and his caliphs. The arguments used by Börklüce Mustafa to prepare the people for a revolt were of mostly social and economic nature. He preached a religious and political discourse in respect to both religious and economic equality of the Muslims and Christians, and a system based on a fair share of wealth.²⁵

The sultans who were aware of these features provided the dervishes with many economic opportunities in order to win their support and take advantage of the dervishes' potential for legitimizing their authority over the public, as well as to

22 It is much more possible to see this role of dervishes in Ottoman society. According to the works of Suraiya Faroqhi, it seems that they provided an information flow, independent from the formal channels, to the capital from the periphery. Especially when somebody from the local aristocracy harmed the people a dervish was prepared to convey information to the main tekke. According to the proximity of the sheikh to the Palace, this complaint could even reach the Divan, Ottoman administrative court, and could take result. See, Suraiya Faroqhi, *Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam: Ortaçağdan Yirminci Yüzyıla*. Elif Kılıç (tr.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 1998, 77.

23 Neşri, *Kitâb-ı Cihan-Nümâ Neşri Tarihi I*. F. R. Unat – M.A. Köymen (ed.), Ankara: TTK Yay., 1995, 545–547.

24 A. Yaşar Ocak, *Babaîler İsyanı: Alevîliğin Tarihsel Altyapısı Yahut Anadolu'da İslam-Türk Heterodoksisinin Teşekkülü*. İstanbul: Dergah, 1996, 113–116.

25 Michel Balivet, *Şeyh Bedreddin Tasavvuf ve İsyan*. Ela Güntekin (tr.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay., 2000, 75.

retaining their public service work. Furthermore, some *duaguyans* (i.e. dervishes charged with praying) were appointed and paid regular salaries just for praying for the sultan's success.²⁶

The dervishes would have also practical functions in the daily life of rural people. Since the dervishes were considered to have miraculous power they were seen as healers of all kinds of illness and as problem solvers. The tradition to visit the lodge of a sheikh or, if he died, his tomb was very common to seek healing.²⁷ If a group of dervishes with their sheik came to the village, the villagers would accept this as a great opportunity for anybody, old or young, to meet the sheik and present their gifts or donations, and try to benefit spiritually from the sheikh. It would be believed that to just stand in front of the sheikh was enough to find healing. The hagiographies mention different kinds of methods or procedures for miraculous healings such as prayer or touching, or a fruit offering.²⁸ However, passed from generation to generation, the dervishes also had information about different methods of treatment and information about diseases acquired from their time in the tekke, or during their travels.

The dervishes were also well versed in many areas thanks to their tekke life and their extensive travels which provided them with a wealth of valuable experiences. It is known that they shared this knowledge and experience with the rural population since Menakıbnames mentioned the dervishes' aid to villagers such as²⁹ road and bridge constructions³⁰ and digging wells for water.³¹ In addition to the works that required technical knowledge and skill, rural society also benefited from their labor in agricultural and livestock activities. Again in the Menakıbnames it was noted that when a dervish group visited a village they helped villagers with the harvest and plowing the fields. Some single itinerant dervishes, for example Hacım Sultan, Otman Baba and Koyun Baba, would work as herdsmen taking care of sheep, cattle and geese in the villages. These activities were, of course, described in terms of being a miracle.³²

In conclusion, the dervish journeys were, in fact, realized as the fulfillment of a mystical principle or for obtaining alms. However, it is also clear that by following

26 Halil İnalıcık 'Dervish and Sultan: An Analysis of the Otman Baba Vilâyetnâmesi', in *The Middle East and the Balkans Under the Ottoman Empire, Essays on Economy and Society*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1993, 26–27.

27 The poetry of Kaygusuz Abdal such as '*Hastalar da gelir dermân isteyü/Sağlar gelir pîrim (Sultan) Abdal Musa'ya*' is a good example. Abdurrahman Güzel (ed.), *Kaygusuz Abdal (Âlâeddin Gaybî) Menâkıbnâmesi*. Ankara: TTK Yay., 1999, 130.

28 See for examples, Ay, *Derviş ve Toplum*, 150–151. In addition see Küçük Abdal, et al. 59a, 76a, 81a,

29 E.g. Abdal Musa is helping an old man who tried to build a house. Abdurrahman Güzel (ed.), *Sultan Abdal Musa Velâyetnâmesi*. Ankara: TTK Yay., 1999, 146.

30 Otman Baba pioneered in building a bridge in a forest. Küçük Abdal, vrk. 31b.

31 Küçük Abdal, vrk. 101a.

32 *Velâyetnâme-i Hacım Sultan*, 26–28; Küçük Abdal, vrk. 44a, 46b; *Menakıb-ı Koyun Baba*, vrk. 2b.

this lifestyle the dervishes were important in the lives of the population. In particular those dervishes who travelled in rural areas were important channels of communication with the outside world. The itinerant dervishes had a decisive impact on the rural population in terms of their world perception, shaping their intellectual development, and the formation of their religious beliefs. Furthermore, the dervishes were effective in connecting the inhabitants of the rural areas with others who shared a similar culture. As efficient propagandists and makers of public opinion they could impact on the behavior of the rural people as obedient/loyal subjects of the sultans or in contrast rebellious ones. In fact, even this last function of the dervishes shows the kind of relations they had with the rural people. The dervishes were sometimes seen as supporting the problems of those living in rural areas but also as using these problems to fire a rebellion.

Dervishes also had more direct functions during their journeys offering many public services based on the dominant principle of serving the people in Sufi idealism. Their tekkes were the center of these services. However, itinerant dervishes conveyed these services directly to the rural people. Despite the dervishes being labelled as “work-shy and lazy” (*iş kaçırganı tembeller*)³³ or as “surplus to requirements” (*âlemin fazlalığı*) by some sectors of the population, they appeared as one of the most useful and functional actors of the society.

33 Turan, ‘Selçuk Türkiyesi Din Tarihine Dair’, 538.