

OPPOSITION TO THE BEKTĀSHĪ ORDER IN EGYPT

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Abstract

Since its appearance on the stage of history, the Bektāshī Order has been subject to criticisms, whose level and quality changes due to circumstances, from various societies throughout the world because of the Order's beliefs and practices. The representatives of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt, where it has continued its activities for years, have been occasionally exposed to attacks from opponents in the region. The scarcity of texts produced before the 19th century, however, does not allow for objective commentary on those publications that condemn the Bektāshī Order. However, after 1826, the year when the Bektāshī Order was banned throughout the Ottoman lands, it became exceedingly difficult to find anything related to the early publications. In this article, activities against the Bektāshī Order that were carried out in Egypt for approximately five centuries, and some important claims that were included in the relevant publications are chronologically evaluated. In this regard, it is observed that some works referenced in this paper were actually extensions of the publications generated in Anatolia at that time. The Bektāshī Order, from its initial appearance on the stage of history forward, was equalized by certain movements, such as the Anatolian Alevism, which did not present a homogeneous structure in terms of its beliefs and practices. This situation resulted in observations and comments being made about the Order that were based on sweeping and erroneous judgments that ultimately led to negative and opposing attitudes regarding the Bektāshī Order. The fact that the Bektāshī Order "could not express itself directly and the way it should be" because it was comprised of a group of people who were of non-Arabic origin, such as Turks and Albani-

ans, and, as a group, it did not reach out to the masses, has allowed for criticisms and accusations based on unsupported and fallacious claims.

Key Words: Bektāshī Order, Egypt, Egyptian Bektāshī Order, the opposition to Bektāshī Order

Introduction

After the emergence of the Sufi orders and especially from the time of Mamlūks onward, Egypt became one of the most important centers of Sufi thought.¹ With the help of government officials and combined with other supporting conditions since the 15th century, the Bektāshī Order began to manifest itself in the area where mystics easily maintained their activities. There were, however, some unusual problems. The stories narrated about the events between Kaygusuz Abdal (d. 848/1444?), who was the first representative of the Order after he and his disciples came to Egypt, and the governor of Cairo at the time,² bear important clues about the possibilities granted to this pioneer of the Bektāshīs.³ Moreover, both old and new sources which offer information about the historical development of Sufi thought in Egypt and about the Ottoman period in particular often mention the Bektāshī Order among those Sufi orders that were founded in the period of the Ottoman rule in Egypt.⁴ Some of these sources present the *Qaṣr al-ʿaynī*, which is the first active Bektāshī Order in Egypt, as

¹ Donald P. Little, "The Nature of *Khānqāhs*, *Ribāṭs*, and *Zāwiyas* under the Mamlūks," in Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (eds.), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 91-105; Th. Emil Homerin, "Sufis and their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt: A Survey of Protagonists and Institutional Settings," in Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies & Polemics* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 1999), 225-248.

² For example, see Aḥmad Sirrī Dede Baba, *al-Risāla al-Aḥmadiyya fī tāriḫ al-ṭarīqa al-Bektāshīyya* (4th edn., Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿAbduh & Anwar Aḥmad, 1959), 37-38.

³ See Leonor Fernandes, "Some Aspects of the *Zāwīya* in Egypt at the Eve of the Ottoman Conquest," *Annales Islamologiques* 19 (1983), 9-17.

⁴ For example, see Tawfiq al-Ṭawīl, *al-Taṣawwuf fī Miṣr ibbāna l-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1988), I, 77; Muḥammad Ṣabrī Muḥammad Yūsuf, *Dawr al-mutaṣawwifa fī tāriḫ Miṣr fī l-ʿaṣr al-ʿUthmānī (1517-1798 M)* (Bilbīs: Dār al-Ṭaqwā, 1994), 43.

one of the most important *dargābs* (dervish lodges) of Ottoman Cairo.⁵

It is known that the Bektāshīs maintained their life in Egypt without problems after the Ottomans took over, a situation that is similar to the time of the Mamlūks.⁶ In accordance with that, there are a great number of signs that indicate that, more so than at any other time in their history, the Bektāshīs were well received and treated with gracious hospitality during the reign of Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala (d. 1849)⁷ and, particularly, under the rule of Khedive Ismā‘īl Pasha (d. 1895)⁸ and Farouk I (d. 1965).⁹ There was, during this time, however, a short period when the Bektāshī Order was banned by Sultan Maḥmūd II in 1826.¹⁰

The Bektāshī Order lost one of its most important advocates on Egyptian lands when the monarchy was terminated by nationalist army officers in 1952. Furthermore, difficult times ensued for the dervishes as a result of the direct and indirect pressures of the new regime. Compounding these pressures the land on the Muqāṭṭam

⁵ See Awliyā’ Chalabī, *Evliya Çelebi Seyabatnamesi: Mısır, Sudan, Habeş (1672-1680)* [*Sayāḥat-nāma of Awliyā’ Chalabī: Mişr, Sūdān, Ḥabash (1672-1680)*] (vol. X, Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1938), 246-247; Muḥammad Şabrī, *Dawr al-mutaşawwifa*, 61. In the same source, it is stated that Qalandarīs, who have generally similar beliefs and practices to those of the Bektāshīs, are among the important Sufi groups in the Ottoman period, see, 65-66.

⁶ Sources on the Egyptian Bektāshī Order, especially Awliyā’ Chalabī, state that this judgment is at least not inaccurate.

⁷ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt in the reign of Mubammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁸ For his life and time, see ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi‘ī, *‘Aşr Ismā‘īl* (3rd edn., Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1982), II, 56-71; Ḥusayn Kafāfi, *al-Khidīwī Ismā‘īl wa-ma‘sbūqatub^u Mişr* (Cairo: al-Hay‘a al-Mişriyya al-‘Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1994).

⁹ For his life, see William Stadiem, *Too Rich: The High Life and Tragic Death of King Farouk* (New York: Carroll & Graf Pub., 1991).

¹⁰ For the support given to the Bektāshīs at the time of Khedive Ismā‘īl Pasha see Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000), 416-417; Rıza Nur, “Kaygusuz Abdal, Gaybi Bey, Kahire Bektaşî Tekyesinde Bir Manüskırı [Kaygusuz Abdal, Ghaybî Beg, A Manuscript in the Bektāshī Tekke of Cairo],” *Türk Bilig Revüsü (Revue de Turcologie)* II/1 (1935), 77-98.

mountain, which contained their tekkes, was then taken from them.¹¹ A couple of remaining disciples who were living there were sent to the United States by the sheikh who realized that things were not going well.¹² Finally, the story of the Bektāshī Order came to an end in the area when the last Bektāshī of Egypt, Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, died in 1963.

This article aims at chronologically evaluating the activities of the opposition of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt over the course of five centuries and particularly the publications produced in this context, which include some major claims about this Sufi order.

The Overall View

The historical information we have about the Egyptian Bektāshī Order before the 19th century does not allow us to provide clear descriptions about the content and the quality of the publications against this Sufi order. The fact that it was not easy to act against the Bektāshī Order in the Ottoman lands due to its past relations with the army until its prohibition, along with Jannisaries, in 1826, serves as the main reason for the scarcity of sources pre-nineteenth century.

¹¹ The last Bektāshī sheikh in Egypt, Aḥmad Sirrī Baba's struggle for the foundations that were taken from the Order is very interesting. For copies of his letters, which were written for the return of the foundations and the reimbursement of his salary which was paid to him and then cut after a while, see MS the Library of the Leiden University, Or. 14385. Each copy of the letters that Aḥmad Sirrī Baba wrote to the statesmen for return of the foundations can be found in his own past belongings. Several documents written by Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, including records (*kunyas*) of the followers of the tekke, the records of the famous visitors, and the catalog of the tekke library were donated to the Library of Leiden University by Frederick de Jong, who had coincidentally (?) found them. For a description of these items, see Jan Just Witkam, *Catalogue of Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of Leiden and Other Collections in the Netherlands: Fascicule 5* (Leiden: E. J. Brill & Leiden University Press, 1989), 473-479. In the period mentioned, all foundations under the reign of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt were nationalized. See Hilal Görgün, "Mısır [Egypt]," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* [*Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam*], XXIX, 579.

¹² For his work, which also includes the memoirs of Rajab Baba, one of the disciples of Aḥmad Sirrī Baba was sent to the U.S. and served for many years in the Bektāshī tekke that opened in Detroit; see Rexhebi (Rajab) Ferdi Baba, *Misticizma Islame dbe Bektashizma [Islamic Mysticism and Bektāshism]* (Tirana, Shtypshkronja Sindikalisti, 1995).

However, although the Order was not well known by the local public from its beginning, and it did not spread much in the area,¹³ during some periods in Egypt, there were some activities, though limited, against the Bektāshīs and, thus, against the Bektāshī Order, and some anti-Bektāshī publications produced can be found.

Although Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala and his successors attempted to govern Egypt as an independent state, thus setting themselves free from the Ottomans in the political sense, the publications against the Bektāshī Order in Istanbul, especially after 1826, had their effect in Egypt, which was not different from any province of the Empire in the cultural sense. In this regard, there are some clues, though scarce, showing that several publications against the Bektāshī Order by some groups found echoes in Egypt after the Bektāshī Order was banned in the Ottoman lands. The Bektāshīs began their activities soon after. Given their related fields, some works that are thought to be proper examples of the Bektāshī story are discussed herein.

The Translation of *Kāshif al-asrār*

A work that is in the Old Manuscripts Library of Cairo (Dār al-Wathā’iq al-Qawmiyya) and that is apparently written by two different scribes appears to be one of the oldest examples produced in the region in opposition to the Bektāshī Order. The text is the Arabic translation of *Kāshif al-asrār wa-dāfi‘ al-ashrār* (Istanbul 1290 H [1873-1874?]), a work written by Khoja Ishāq Efendī (1801-1892)¹⁴ and published in Istanbul just before the former’s writing time, criticizes

¹³ Today, the situation in Egypt is not much different from previous times. Along with scarce academic studies (for example, see Hudā Darwish, “al-Manhaj al-ṣūfī li-l-ṭarīqa al-Bektāshīyya wa-ta’tḥīruhū ‘alā l-sulṭa al-ḥākima fī Turkiyā,” *Majallat Kulliyat al-ādāb* [November 2001], 1-71), save some exceptional data that can be found in the memoir literature (see, for example, Esmat Dawestashy [Iṣmat Dāwistāshī], *al-Ramla al-bayḍā’ (Dbikrayāt Sakandarī): al-Juz’ al-awwal (1943-1963)* (al-Iskandariyya: Catalogue 77, 2004), it is not possible to refer to any study that thoroughly addresses this topic.

¹⁴ For more information about Ishāq Efendī, see Meḥmed Surayyā, *Sijill-i ‘Uthmānī* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996), I, 329; Bursalı Meḥmed Ṭāhir, *‘Uthmānī Mu’allıfları [Ottoman Authors]* (Istanbul: Maṭba‘a-i ‘Āmira, 1333 H [1915]), I, 247-248; Mustafa Kara, “Ishak Efendi, Harputlu [Ishāq Efendī of Kharbūt],” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA) [Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam]*, XXII, 531.

the Bektāshī Order. We assume that it is a relatively well-known source for national and international researchers who are professionally interested in the Bektāshī Order and for curious readers who are interested in the field. Accordingly, in this article, we provide only introductory information on the translation, skipping the content of *Kāshif al-asrār* and its Arabic translation.¹⁵

According to the last page of one of the two copies located in the library of Cairo, the original text was prepared in 1293 H [1876] and the second copy was completed in the month Rajab of 1306 H [1889]. While the first copy, which consists of 58 folios, is recorded in the library as *Risāla fī l-radd ‘alā l-Bektāshīyya wa-bayān madhabihim*,¹⁶ the other one is classified under the title *al-Radd ‘alā ṭā’ifat al-Bektāshīyya* and consists of 68 folios.¹⁷ According to the record found therein, the name of the scribe is Muḥammad ibn ‘Azīm al-Maghribī al-Jazā’irī. He indicates that the book he had copied was written in 1293 H [1876]. The translator does not, however, explain that the work is actually a translation of some other original work. Judging from that, it can be concluded that the scribe, Muḥammad ibn ‘Azīm al-Jazā’irī, is not aware of this issue, or he chose to be silent about it. On the other hand, the reasons the translator, whose life and affiliation are not (unfortunately) subject to any data, initiated this translation remains obscure. Another point that should be considered is why the first translation was not, or could not be, published, although its first translation was completed three years after the publication of the original *Kāshif al-asrār* in 1290 H [1873-1874]. Additionally, there is not any information located in the sources about the Bektāshī Order, suggesting that the translation was not known in the time that it was completed. On the other hand, the question whether

¹⁵ When criticizing some beliefs and practices of the Bektāshīs, Khoja Ishāq Efendi chose to depend on examples of his personal experience, rather than on objective criteria. This situation caused him to, for the most part, abandon objectivity in his work. For detailed information on the content and the features of *Kāshif al-asrār* see Salih Çift, “1826 Sonrasında Bektāşilik ve Bu Alanla İlgili Yayın Faaliyetleri [The Bektāshī Order after 1826 and Their Literary Activities],” *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi [The Review of the Faculty of Theology, Uludağ University]* XII/1 (2003), 259 ff.

¹⁶ MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Mişriyya, 177, ‘*Aqā’id, Taymūr*. In the dimension of 21.5 x 14.5, the work is recorded under the microfilm number 9721.

¹⁷ MS Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Mişriyya, 31, *Kalām, al-Nihāl al-Islāmiyya*. In the dimension of 20 x 14, the work is recorded under the microfilm number 7677.

this translation was completed on commission or was the product of someone's desire who was aware of the issue requires further examination. Furthermore, none of the opposing publications described herein mention this work, nor are there any citations of it by Egyptian Bektāshīs who wrote on the Bektāshī Order, such as Aḥmad Sirrī Baba.

Binbir Ḥadīth: The Bektāshī Order in the Eyes of an Ottoman Bureaucrat

To the best knowledge of this author, the first text that was written and published in Egypt against the Bektāshī Order was authored by Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg (d. 1897), the statesman, lawyer, and writer.¹⁸ Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg, who worked for many years as head-clerk of Ghāzī Aḥmad Mukhtār Pasha (d. 1919) after serving in several ranks of the Ottoman Army, remained in Egypt with the Ottoman Army during his commission (Turkish High Commissioner) between 1885-1896, criticized the Bektāshī Order in his work titled *Binbir Ḥadīth* [*One Thousand and One Ḥadīth*], which was written and published in Egypt during his commission.¹⁹ The aim of the work was to compile and write commentaries on some selected traditions from al-Suyūṭī's *al-Jāmiʿ al-sagḥīr*. Prepared in Turkish, the work was published twice in Cairo, in 1901 and 1909.

In his work, Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg, as he interprets the prophetic tradition number 892, changes the subject to the conflict between Shīʿa and Ahl al-sunna. He then moves to the Bektāshī Order and begins to enumerate his criticisms, denying the claims that Bektāshīs are actually Jaʿfarīs. The following excerpt succinctly summarizes his opinions on the Bektāshī Order:

“... the other group knows nothing. If their reality is searched, it can

¹⁸ For Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg and his work, see *Binbir Ḥadīth* [*One Thousand and One Ḥadīth*] (Cairo: Jarīda Maṭbaʿasi, 1325 H [1909]), 1-10; idem. *Başımıza Gelenler* [*What Happened to Us*] (modernized version by M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ; Istanbul: Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser, n.d.), I, 25-29, 45-46; Ali Akyıldız, “Mehmed Ârif Bey [Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg],” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* [*Turkish Religious Foundation Encyclopedia of Islam*], XXVIII, 443.

¹⁹ See Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg, *Binbir Ḥadīth*, 401-415. In a later work, *Başımıza Gelenler*, Meḥmed ʿĀrif Beg repeats similar ideas on the issue in the same harsh wording, see III, 785-787.

be seen that they are followers of a particular path, which consists of Christianity, Freemasonry, Shī‘ism, Imāmism, Ibāhism and Islam.”²⁰

Like many of the opponents of the Bektāshī Order who will follow him, Meḫmed ‘Ārif Beg accepts this Sufi order as a current or movement that consists of several elements collected from different sources, rather than considering it as an original movement. Providing detailed explanations about the similarities between the Order and Christianity as he claims, the author specifically emphasizes the interpretation of the concept of the trinity in Bektāshī thought, a concept that, in his mind, was surely taken from Christianity. Similarly, he talks about the relationship between the Bektāshī Order and Freemasonry, stating that both group adhere to and engage in some common rituals.²¹ As he expresses his opinions, he gradually increases his tone of criticism and finally contends that the only connection of the Bektāshīs to Islam is restricted to their burials in the Muslim graveyard.²² Feeling the need to support his words with his own experiences, he explains that certain crowded groups that he encountered as he worked in several parts of Anatolia, particularly including Dersim and Erzincan, share similar beliefs and practices with the Bektāshīs, and, therefore, he gives detailed information about these groups.²³

According to his explanations, either deliberately or because of his lack of knowledge about the subject, Meḫmed ‘Ārif Beg equalizes certain groups, one of which is the Anatolian Alevism. This is not a homogeneous structure either in beliefs or practices, nor is it akin to the Bektāshī Order, which is different from these other groups in almost all aspects. However, it must be acknowledged that the samples he provides in this context are surprisingly similar to the ones identified in the above-mentioned *Kāshif al-asrār*. Thus, it is evident that most of the details he purports as facts with his occasional exaggerated expressions are in need of correction. Accordingly, a contemporary Bektāshī, Aḫmad Rifqī (Sakalli Rifqī) (d. 1935), objected to the claims made by Meḫmed ‘Ārif Beg and the relevant examples given by him. To refute these claims, Aḫmad Rifqī gave his word that he would dedicate the second volume of his work to the real history,

²⁰ Meḫmed ‘Ārif Beg, *Binbir Ḥadīth*, 402.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

²² *Ibid.*, 404.

²³ *Ibid.*, 406 ff.

ādāb, and *arkān* (practices) of the Bektāshī Order²⁴ and he kept his promise.²⁵

Opponents in the Modern Period

Contrary to previous times, beginning in the first half of the 20th century, it became possible to access and examine information about the activities against the Bektāshī Order in Egypt and the relevant publications. While not abundant in numbers, the content of these publications are, for the most part, generally similar to one another. The publications generally focus on topics such as the history of the Bektāshī Order, the attitudes of the Bektāshīs with respect to theological issues, the practices of the Sufi, the historical development of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt, the activities of the Bektāshī tekke in the Muqāṭṭam mountain in Cairo, the relations of the followers of the tekke with the family of Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala, with other courtiers and with contemporary bureaucrats.

In this regard, the first text to be addressed, due to the popularity of its author both in the Ottoman history of politics and the Arab world, is included in a work titled *Ḥāḍir al-‘ālam al-Islāmī* 1352 H [1933]), which was published in Cairo and written by the famous Lebanese thinker Amīr Shakīb Arslān (d. 1950),²⁶ who originally be-

²⁴ See Aḥmad Rifqī, *Bektāshī Sirri I [Bektāshī Secret I]* (Istanbul: ‘Aṣr Maṭba‘asi, 1325 H [1907]), 157.

²⁵ Aḥmad Rifqī, *Bektāshī Sirri II [Bektāshī Secret II]* (Istanbul: Manzūma-i Afkār Maṭba‘asi, 1328 H. [1910]).

²⁶ In the words of Aḥmad al-Sharabāsī, “the *amīr al-bayān* (the prince of rhetoric) who wants to be more Ottoman than Ottomans,” Amīr Shakīb Arslān was born into a Druze family in Shuwayfa village of Lebanon, in 1869. His father was a low-degree local official. The Arslān family was regarded as the noblest of the Druze clans in Jabal Lebanon. At the turn of the 20th century, some family members became officials, some became diplomats, members of parliament, and men of letters. After leaving the Druze identity and turning to Sunnī Islam, Shakīb’s family became famous in the Arab-Ottoman party. His older brother Naṣīb (d. 1927) appeared in the literature and participated in the Arab protest movement against the activities of the Committee of Union and Progress (Itiḥād wa-Taraqqī Jam‘iyyati). His brother, ‘Ādil Beg, after graduating from Faculty of Letters in Istanbul, became the district governor of Shūf in 1914-1916 and a member of the Ottoman parliament from 1916 to 1918. He joined the liberation movement of the Syrians against the French in 1925 to 1926. He became the minister of the first independent government of Syria from 1946 to 1949 and died in 1954. For detailed infor-

longed to a Druze family, though he and his clan changed to Sunnism after the writing. In his study, dedicating a short chapter to the Bektāshī Order, the author introduces the Order with negative comments and criticisms. The expressions and descriptions Amīr Shakīb Arslān uses when he discusses the beliefs of the Bektāshīs are quite harsh. Accordingly, Arslān claims that the Bektāshīs share the beliefs of “Alevīs in the Kurdish lands and ‘Alī-ilāhīs” and are, therefore, not any different from them. According to Arslān, even though they claim otherwise, the Bektāshīs are not Sunnīs, because they read Faḍl Allāh Ḥurūfī’s (d. 796/1394)²⁷ *Jāwidān*.²⁸ As in all studies written against the Bektāshīs, the starting point of Amīr Shakīb’s criticisms is that the Bektāshīs read *Jāwidān*, which is the main source of Ḥurūfism.²⁹

A contemporary of Amīr Shakīb Arslān, the Sheikh of al-Azhar Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhluḥ (1890-1990)³⁰ at the time, released a

mation about his life, see William L. Cleveland, *Batıya Karşı İslam, Şekip Arslan’ın Mücadelesi* [=Islam against the West: Shakīb Arslān and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism] (translated into Turkish by Selahattin Ayaz; Istanbul: Yöneliş Yayınları, 1991). For his memoirs see Amīr Shakīb Arslān (as Emir Şekip Arslan), *İttihatçı Bir Arap Aydınının Anıları [Sırat Amīr Shakīb Arslān]* (translated into Turkish by Halit Özkan; Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2005).

²⁷ For Faḍl Allāh Ḥurūfī and Ḥurūfism see Fatih Usluer, *Hurufilik: İlk Elden Kaynaklarla Doğuşundan İtibaren [Ḥurūfism: From its Emergence through First-Hand Sources]* (Istanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2009).

²⁸ Amīr Shakīb Arslān, *Hādīr al-‘alam al-Islāmī* (expanded version of the Arabic translation of Lothrop Stoddard’s *The New World of Islam* which was translated into Arabic by ‘Ajjāj Nuwayhid; vol. II: Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyya ‘Isā el-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakā’uh^ū, 1352 H [1933]), 349-350.

²⁹ The connection between the Bektāshīs and the Ḥurūfīs has always been a discussion point. Aḥmād Rif‘at Efendī, as one who belongs to the Order, denies the claims in his work on the Bektāshī Order: “Therefore, Bektāshīs are not Ḥurūfīs and Ḥurūfīs are not Bektāshīs. It is possible that Ḥurūfīs penetrated Bektāshīs and gave them the book titled *Jāwidān* to corrupt them. However, in our time, it is said there is not any Bektāshī who knows the meaning of *Jāwidān* and practices it.” See Sayyid Aḥmad Rif‘at Efendī, *Mir‘āt al-maqāşid fī daf‘ al-mafāsīd* (Istanbul: Ibrāhīm Efendī Maṭba‘ası, 1293 H [1876-1877?]), 231.

³⁰ Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhluḥ al-‘Adawī (1890-1990) served as the *muftī* of Egypt between 1946-1950 and 1952-1954. Rather close to the Salafī approach, Makhluḥ has many published works. He was the head of the institution that issued the *fatwā* on the abolition of foundations in Egypt according to article 180, which was issued in 1952, just after the Revolution. For his life and *iftā’* activities, see Fāṭima Maḥjūb, *al-Mawsū‘a al-dhababīyya li-l-‘ulūm al-Islāmīyya* (Cairo:

fatwā on the Shīʿī sects issued on Dhū l-ḥijja 1368/August 1949 which included the Bektāshī Order among the sects and leveled harsh criticisms against the Order.³¹ In the *fatwā*, after he provides general information about the history of Bektāshism, he deals with the issue of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt and contends that it was the Albanian-born Kaygusuz Abdal who originally brought the Order to Egypt.³² Later, the author provides information about Meḥmed Luṭfī Baba (d. 1944),³³ who served there just before the last sheikh of the *dargāb*, Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, and states that he passed his position on to Aḥmad Sirrī Baba in accordance with official notice (*iʿlām-i sharʿī*), dated 1354 H [1936]. He also mentions that the information he presents about the Bektāshī Order is based on Aḥmad Sirrī Baba's *al-Risāla al-Aḥmadiyya*, published in 1939. Commenting that the Bektāshī Order's own declarations, traditions, and actions reveal its adherence to one of the extreme branches of Imāmī Shīʿa, Makhlūf says that the followers of the Order created many bad innovations (*bidʿa*) that have nothing to do with the religion of Islam, and furthermore, they follow Bāṭinī Ismāʿīlīs with respect to other issues as well. Makhlūf is of the opinion that "the seven cycles concept," which they base on the issue of *walāya*, is one of the obvious products of the interaction between these groups. With respect to this issue, Makhlūf claims that, along with their sanctification of the fourteen "maʿsūm-i pāk" [four-

Dār al-Ghad al-ʿArabī, n.d.), XIV, 136-142. The fact that he was awarded the "Service to Islam" by the Saudi Government in 1983 may be strongly related to his relation with the Salafī thought.

³¹ The relevant *fatwā* can be found at <http://www.islamic.council.gov.eg> and <http://www.alazhr.org> (01/12/2011), the official websites of the institutions in Egypt. Additionally, see *Fatāwā dār al-iftāʾ li-muddat miʿad^h ʿāmⁱⁿ*, mawḍūʿ: 679.

³² One of the examples that shows that the Egyptian people are ignorant about the Bektāshīs and to what, one need only consider the inaccurate information in the *fatwā* issued by Makhlūf, an educated one who attempted to issue a *fatwā* against the Order. Judging from the fact that the two previous sheikhs were Albanians, or had relations to the Albanian origin of the Khedive family, he assumes that all sheikhs who served in the Bektāshī *dargābs* in Egypt are also Albanians. This mistake can be observed in other texts that were written against the Bektāshī Order.

³³ Meḥmed Luṭfī Baba is the sheikh of Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, who is the last master of the Bektāshī tekke in the Muḥaṭṭam mountain. Having served in the tekke for a long time, he contributed to the acceptance of the tekke and the Bektāshī Order in Egypt. For a biography of Meḥmed Luṭfī Baba, see Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, *al-Risāla al-Aḥmadiyya*, 12-16, 18-22.

teen pure infallibles], who are not from Ahl al-bayt, the fact that they bless fire and offer prays for the *sirāj* (candle) are among the elements that cannot be found in other Sufi orders. To Makhlūf, most of the customs the followers of the Bektāshī Order have been adopting have nothing to do with religion. Furthermore, he argues that their beliefs and practices of ‘*āshūrā*’ and mourning are *bida*‘ (innovations) as well and that their claim that they belong to Ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a is, accordingly, wrong.

The section at the end of his statement shows why Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf, as one who occupies the highest place in the religious bureaucracy of Egypt, needed to offer such an explanation:

I think that it would be wrong for the Egyptian State, which has been the protector of the call to God and the Sunna of his Messenger from the time of the collapse of the Shī‘ī Fāṭimid State and the foundation of the Sunnī Ayyūbī State to these days, to officially acknowledge such a movement (Bektāshī Order). Hence, the Turkish historians state that this movement supported *ibāḥism* and was prohibited by the Ottoman Sultan Maḥmūd II... Due to all these reasons, I reckon that their request should not be positively met.

As it appears from the words of Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf, the main reason behind this *fatwā* is the inconvenience of the situation that the Bektāshī Order were officially recognized by the Mashīkhat Ṭuruq al-Şūfiyya, which is responsible for controlling the activities of the Sufi orders in Egypt.³⁴ Although they were in close

³⁴ For the process of the official recognition of the Bektāshīs in Egypt, see Frederick de Jong, “Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi Orders in Twentieth Century Egypt (1907-1970), an Exploratory Stock-Taking,” in idem. (ed.), *Sufi Orders in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Egypt and the Middle East* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1995), 172. After Farouk I dismissed Aḥmad Murād al-Bakrī from the position of Sheikh Mashāyikh Ṭuruq al-Şūfiyya and replaced him with Aḥmad al-Şāwī al-‘Imrānī in 1946, there were not any important changes in the official status of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt. At the time of the presidency of Aḥmad al-Şāwī, the sheikh of the Muqaṭṭam Bektāshī tekke, Aḥmad Sirrī Baba and, thus, the Bektāshī order were officially being recognized. This is because he was attending all official meetings, as an equal to other leaders under Sufi orders, and under the protection of Sheikh al-Mashāyikh, according to the directions of Farouk the King. This gesture of Farouk the King was important as it showed support for Aḥmad Sirrī Babā. This case also reveals the connection between the Bektāshī Order and the Palace. Many courtiers were already followers or lovers of the Order. Accord-

relations with the courtiers, they represented a Sufi order that was not officially recognized by the state until that time. Being responsible for regulating the issues related to the Sufi orders and superintending them, there are two reasons behind the Mashīkhat's official recognition of the Bektāshī Order. First, in this period, Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, the sheikh of the Bektāshī tekke in Muqāṭṭam, was elected as the leader of all the Bektāshīs in the world in a meeting in Cairo held in January of 1949, where some of the main representatives of the Bektāshī Order were in attendance.³⁵ As may be assumed, the second reason is because of King Farouk's close relationship with the tekke and its sheikh and the privileges provided to the Bektāshīs because of this relationship. Therefore, as the head of al-Azhar, which had the authority to adjudicate the religious problems in Egypt at the time, Mashīkhāt must have felt the need to write and publish such a text that is inundated with deceptive and fallacious information about the thoughts and the history of the Bektāshī Order. This is because he wanted to show the public that neither he nor the institution he presides over approves of the situation.³⁶

Another study against Bektāshism in recent times in Egypt deals with the problem of the relationship between Meḥmed 'Alī Pasha of Kavala, the Egyptian royal family, and the Bektāshī Order. The long article, which was based primarily on groundless announcements and subjective comments, is titled "Meḥmed 'Alī Pasha min wijhat naẓarⁱⁿ 'Uthmāniyya^{uin}" and was written by Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Daghīm when he was a researcher at the SOAS in the U.K. In 10-17.11.2005, al-Daghīm also presented a long summary of this text at a large scale symposium held in Cairo and Alexandria and titled "Mu'tamar 'an

ing to the narrations, the relationship between Farouk the King and Aḥmad Sirrī was because of Farouk I's "miraculous" recovery from a child illness, the recovery of which was attributed to Aḥmad Sirrī. For this same reason, Farouk the King made considerable donations to the tekke. According to another rumor, the reason was that Farouk I used Aḥmad Sirrī's tekke as a meeting place for his love affairs. See, *Ibid.*, 171. The information Jong offers is without any reference and seems to be based on disinformation produced by Gamal Abdel Nasser and his group, in an effort to defame the previous monarchy.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁶ Another personality who was, like Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhḷūf, appointed as the sheikh of al-Azhar and published an article against the Bektāshī Order during the same period is 'Abd al-Majīd Salīm al-Bishrī. His opinions do not differ from those of Makhḷūf's.

Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha,” which was organized to commemorate the bicentennial of Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala’s accession in Egypt.³⁷

Al-Daghīm’s study is based primarily on Bektāshī Order’s relation to Bāṭinism, and it aims at deciphering the connections between Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala along with his descendants and the movement and criticizing it from this point. Putting forth a very ironic thesis in the study, al-Daghīm considers the Bektāshī Order a branch of Bāṭinism, as he connects it to Fāṭimids (‘Ubaydīs, in the author’s words) who ruled the near region, where they claimed Egypt as their capital for some time. In his opinion, since the Kavalali dynasty took over the government in Egypt, Bektāshīs’ real objective was to transform the region into a new center, to attack the Sunnī Ottoman State and to demolish the Caliphate.

Tracing the problem back to the establishment of the cave in which Kaygusuz Abdal first settled at the foot of the Muqaṭṭam mountain, the author points to its use for similar purposes during the reign of the Fāṭimid King al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh (d. 365/975). Later, the sheikh of the *zāwiya* Ni‘mat Allāh al-Ḥusaynī (Ni‘mat Allāh-i Walī), who came to Egypt in 820/1417, remained there. In 905/1499, his disciple, Nūr al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Ījī, re-created the place. According to him, Albanian-born Kaygusuz Abdal settled the cave, called Kahf al-Sūdān in 761/1359. When he died in 818/1415, he was buried there.

According to the author, the easiest way to determine how distant Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha was from Sunnī Islam is to see that, instead of Muslims, Pasha appointed Jews, Christians, etc. to several positions when he governed Egypt.³⁸ Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha’s struggle with Wahhābīs (the Sunnī Saudis, in his words) and his rebellion against

³⁷ As I concluded that neither text was published, I will refer to the author’s website. See <http://www.dr-mahmoud.com/content/view/244/39/> (01.12.2011).

³⁸ It is known that Meḥmed ‘Alī Pasha of Kavala was quite tolerant towards the followers of Abrahamic religions. In this regard, although there are many indications about this fact, I confine myself to state that not only Catholic nuns, but also Jesuits and Franciscans, settled in Cairo for the first time in the 1830s and freely engaged in their activities. See Gilbert Sinoué, *Kavalalı Mehmet Ali Paşa: Son Firavun [Meḥmed ‘Alī Paşa of Kavala: the Last Pharaoh, =Le Dernier Pharaoh]* (translated into Turkish by Ali Cevat Akkoyunlu; Istanbul: Doğan Kitapçılık, 1999), 180-181. This case should be accepted as evidence that he was not an enemy of Islam, but that he adopted the same political attitudes of the Ottoman palace towards several religious groups, an attitude that he also adheres to.

the Ottoman state must be evaluated in this regard. To him, this rebellion gave way to the French and English invasions, which happened soon thereafter.

It seems that al-Daghīm's knowledge about the history and the culture of Bektāshī Order is very insufficient. In the following pages of his study, he comes up with very bizarre explanations that never seen before and he could not provide with any source to support his claims. Perhaps the strangest of these claims is best presented in the following: After they emptied their tekke in Muqāṭṭam and moved to the Ma'ādī district in 1957, due to the order of the government, the Bektāshīs intensely maintained their secret activities; they founded schools and institutions, made connections with the Ismā'īlī Agha Khan organization, took financial support from the Iranian Embassy in Egypt for their publications. Finally, many *abl al-bid'a* groups such as Nuṣayrīs in Syria contributed to them.

Moreover, advancing the connection between the Bektāshī Order and the Janissaries, the author discusses the activities of the Janissaries against the Ottoman sultans throughout history as he explains how sinister the Bektāshī organization is. According to al-Daghīm, behind all of the Janissaries' rebellions against the state that occurred throughout the Ottoman history are the Bektāshīs. Furthermore, he contends that the Bektāshīs collaborated with the Jews, that they found the Committee of Union and Progress and that they made contact with the Freemasonry organizations. In all of these claims, al-Daghīm is intent on proving that the Bektāshī Order, since its emergence, is a movement that has been acting against the Ottoman State and that Meḥmed 'Alī Pasha and his descendants who had relationships with the Bektāshīs had the same agenda.

The reason that I selected a study that has no scientific grounding at all, and one that was written totally in a speculative form and from an emotional perspective, is because it is one of the anti-Bektāshī Order publications in Egypt. I did not evaluate the study as a scientifically and historically valuable text.³⁹

³⁹ Al-Daghīm's inaccurate information and exaggerated explanation has affected people who do not know the nature of the topic. Thus, on one of the websites broadcast for the Christian community in the area, the information on the Bektāshī Order was quoted from al-Daghīm's article. See http://www.coptichistory.org/new_page_7412.htm (30/05/2010).

The Bektāshī Order from the Salafī Perspective

Other opinions on the history of tafsīr, many of which resemble the previous ones, were expressed in *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn* written by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (1915-1977),⁴⁰ who was previously a professor at the University of al-Azhar and then appointed Minister of Foundations of Egypt in 1975. According to al-Dhahabī, the Bektāshīs do not differ from the Ismā‘īlīs/Bāṭinīs in their approach to the Qur’ān and its interpretation, because in his mind, the Bektāshīs are the Bāṭinīs of the modern period, similar to the Alevi Kurds, Bahā’īs, Bābīs, and Qāḍiyānīs. The author states that the Bektāshīs could have been found in Egypt until recent times; however, the new government expelled them from Egypt after the 1952 revolution because of their mischief and trouble.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī remains silent on what the accusation of “mischief and trouble” entails.

As he enumerates his criticisms against the Bektāshīs, he presents a wealth of inaccurate information, and by so doing, he unintentionally confesses a truth that is mostly unspoken. That is, the end of the adventure of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt is the consequence of the new official ideology’s perspective of the public, rather than a consequence of the wrong, unethical acts and declarations of the Bektāshīs, as claimed.⁴² Hence, it is known that the new government, which has strong bias against any non-Arab origin groups, shows the same attitude to any person or group that is known to have been close to the Palace at the time of the monarchy. It is already an established fact that the relatively moderate attitude of the revolutionists toward the *ṭarīqas* in general is the result of a policy that promotes and supports the political agenda.⁴³ During the given period, the claim that the head of the Muqaṭṭam Bektāshī Tekke, Aḥmad Sirī

⁴⁰ For the life of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī see Muṣṭafā Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, “Tarjamat al-shahīd al-Dhahabī” in Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), I, 5-8.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufasssīrūn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2005), II, 222.

⁴² In the words of Bedri Noyan, who is the holder of one of the claims see Bedri Noyan (Dedebaba), *Bütün Yönleriyle Bektâşilik ve Alevilik [Bektâshism and Alevism in All Aspects]* (vol. 5, Ankara: Ardiç Yayınları, 2002), 233.

⁴³ See de Jong, “Opposition to Sufism in Twentieth-Century Egypt (1900-1970): A Preliminary Survey,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 319-320.

Baba, is a Bāṭinī seems an attempt to find an acceptable reason for persecuting him, and thus the Bektāshīs, in the eyes of public. The fact that Aḥmad Sirrī Baba is Albanian, not Arab, and that he had very close relations with the Palace in the previous period is the main reason why the leader of the 23 July 1952 revolution in Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and his group treated Baba so roughly. During this the same period, other non-Arab sheikhs were subjected to similar treatment.⁴⁴

Last, I will deal with ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Khāliq’s opinions, who was born in one of the suburbs of Cairo, Manūfiyya, in 1939, and who struggles to spread his Salafī thoughts, especially in al-Kuwait, after his graduation from one of the universities in Medina/Saudi Arabia. While his opinions are not actually different from the above-mentioned stances, one of the points that distinguishes him from the others is that, when he expressed his thoughts on the Bektāshī Order, he referred to *al-Risāla al-Aḥmadiyya fī tārikh tarīqat al-Bektāshiyya* by Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, an Arabic work that is among one of the rare studies in the Arab world written by an insider on the Bektāshī Order. The author, after quoting Aḥmad Sirrī Baba’s words on the history, philosophy, and practices of the Bektāshī Order, offers his own remarks and closes the topic with the following question:

How could followers of a Sufi Order that accepts the Shī‘ī belief, manage to shelter and hide their true ideas for a long time, in such countries as Turkey and Egypt, whose populations are mostly Sunnī Muslims?

As a Salafī propagandist and opponent of not only the Bektāshī Order in particular, but also of Sufi thought and Sufi orders in general, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Khāliq answers the question in a sweeping way, stating that “In fact, all Sufis hide their Bāṭinī beliefs behind their appearances.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The followers of the Demirdāshiyya Order, which was active in Egypt at the same time and represented by the Turkish-origin Sufis, were treated similarly. In addition, the branch of the Naqshbandiyya Order represented by Najm al-Dīn al-Kurdī was in the same situation. See de Jong “Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi Orders,” 176-178.

⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Abd al-Khāliq, *al-Fikr al-ṣūfī fī ḍaw’ al-kitāb wa-l-sunna* (3rd edn., al-Kuwait: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1986), 233 ff. Remarks similar to those in this book have been repeated in many studies about the Arab world. Due to the

Conclusion

Although the materials in opposition to the Bektāshī Order in Egypt and about its effects in the publication world are not abundant, the data presented herein are sufficient to determine the main characters of the anti-Order campaign that is directed against the Bektāshīs in the region. Accordingly, considering the contents and the qualities of the anti-Bektāshī publications in Egypt, the following statements can be made:

1. The anti-Bektāshī texts written in a given area are substantially based on publications that were produced in the capital of the Ottoman State, although there are some exceptions.

2. Since its appearance on the stage of history, the fact that the Bektāshī Order was treated as identical with certain movements such as Anatolian Alevism, which does not represent any homogeneous structure either in belief or in practice, has resulted in inaccurate observations that depend on sweeping judgments. This is why such erroneous remarks such as those mentioned herein have been frequently repeated. Hence, it happens that even many authorities make uniformed statements based on clichés and prejudices because they lack any comprehensive knowledge about who the Bektāshīs really are. This observation can be generalized to all anti-Bektāshī publications about the Bektāshī Order, not just those published in Egypt.

3. The fact that the Bektāshīs did not “truly present themselves” seems to be another reason for criticisms and accusations that are based on groundless claims. This is because they did not, or could not, get out of a private community that generally consisted of non-Arabic origin people, mainly Turks and Albanians.⁴⁶ Accordingly,

authors' ignorance about the Order, some of the writers struggle when presenting the problem using very exaggerated sentences. More precisely, they try to persuade their audiences to adopt their perspectives, which are based on, distorted declarations. In one of those claims, it is said that the Bektāshī Order was spread through Egypt with the support of Khedive Ismā'īl and his family, and even opened its doors to Christians. I will not go deep into the accusations made by the author as he is ignorant enough to claim that the Bektāshīs regard 'Alī as God. See Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Qāsim, *al-Kashf 'an ḥaqīqat al-ṣūfiyya li-awwal marra fī l-tārīkh* (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1992), 789-790.

⁴⁶ It can be seen that this statement is not just a claim, given that sheikhs of the Bektāshī tekkes in Egypt since the beginning, came from Anatolia and the Bal-

intellectuals of the Arab world have based their views about Bektāshism on second-hand sources and rumors, as these scholars typically do not speak or understand Turkish, the original language in this scope. For this and other similar reasons, it should be noted that comments made in the region regarding the Bektāshī Order are quite removed from objectivity.

4. It is a known fact that those who adopt the Salafī thought are not only excessively intolerant of the Bektāshī Order but of the entire Sufi organism. As a Sufi order, some beliefs and practices of the Bektāshī Order, which resemble those of Shīʿa, seem to be the main factor for the growing harsh criticisms of the Salafī stance.

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kans, if the records of Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, who is the last representative of the Bektāshī Order in Egypt, are taken into consideration. For these records, see Aḥmad Sirrī Baba, *al-Risāla al-Aḥmadiyya*, 27-28.

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