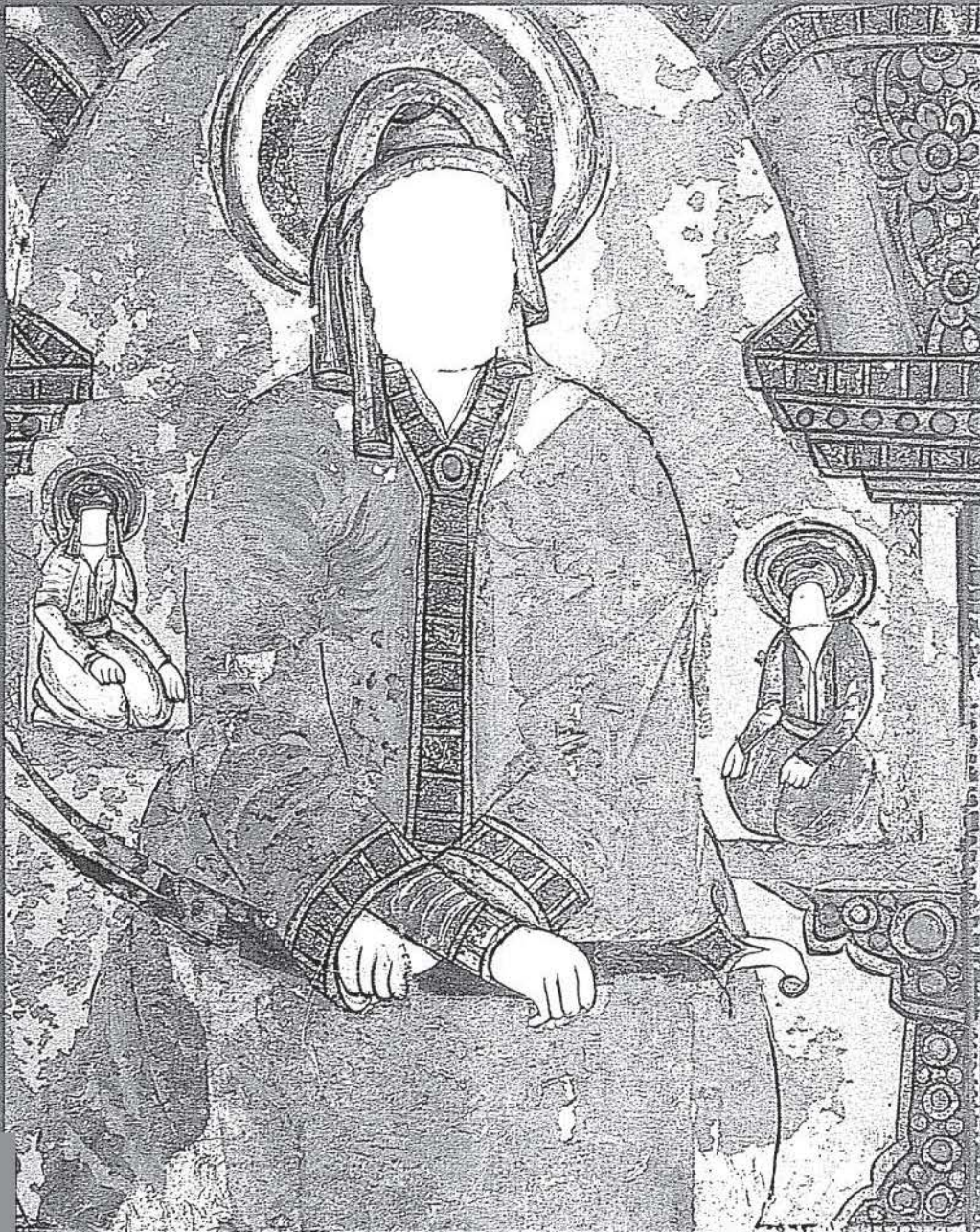


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ALEVI IDENTITY

CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES

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Catharina Raudvere



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Bektashi / Kızılbaş: Historical Bipartition and Its Consequences

IRÈNE MÉLIKOFF

Bektashism, as well as Alevism are both, in their earlier stages, examples of religious syncretisms. However, it is not possible to explain in so short a space the formation of these syncretisms, nor to discuss the elements which compose them.¹ So I shall mainly try to describe the genesis and the different evolutions of these phenomena.

The Bektashis, as well as the Alevis or the former *Kızılbaş*, refer to a popular saint called Hacı Bektaş. I shall therefore begin by that charismatic and legendary figure who is nevertheless endowed with historical reality. I shall also try to insert him into his social background.

The 15th century historian Aşıkpaşazade, who was a descendant of Baba İlyas, one of the main leaders of the *Baba'î* revolt that shook the Seldjuk Empire during the years 1239-1240,² describes Hacı Bektaş as a disciple of his ancestor.³ The same thing is reported by Elvan Çelebi⁴ who wrote in the 14th century and who was the grandson of Baba İlyas. We may also mention another 14th century testimony, that of Eflâki, who says that Hacı Bektaş Horasani was a *Halife-i-has*, a favorite disciple, of Baba Resûl, alias Baba İlyas.⁵

We therefore know that Hacı Bektaş "came from Khorassan", following Baba İlyas. "Coming from Khorassan" is a cliché, often used in ancient chronicles and hagiographies. It mainly refers to the idea of migration. The Turkmen tribes started coming to Anatolia at the end of the 11th century. Their migration became more intensive during the 12th and especially throughout the 13th century when they were obliged to escape the Mongol invasion. The road followed by the migrants, generally coming from Central Asia or Transoxiana, passed through Khorassan and followed the Caspian shore into Iranian Azerbaijan. It was the usual road that avoided the Iranian deserts. So the mention "coming from Khorassan" meant that the people involved were not autochtones, but immigrants.

1 On that subject, see the following articles: I. Melikoff, 'Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme bektâşi-alevi', in *Studia Turcologica Memoriae Alexii Bombaci Dicata*, Naples 1982, pp. 379-395; I. Mélikoff, 'L'Islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie: non-conformisme-synchrétisme-gnose', in *TURCICA XIV*, 1982, 142-152 Reprints in *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc - Recherches sur l'Islam populaire en Anatolie*, ed. ISIS, Istanbul, 1992.

2 On the *Baba'î* revolt, see: Claude Cahen, *EP²*, s.v. *Baba'î*; C. Cahen, 'Baba Ishaq, Baba Ilyas, Hadji Bektash et quelques autres', in *TURCICA I*, 1969, 53-64; C. Cahen, 'A propos d'un article récent et des *Baba'î*', in *Journal Asiatique CCLXVIII*, 1980, fasc.1-2, 69-70; A. Yaşar Ocak, *La révolte de Baba Resûl ou la formation de lé hétérodoxie musulmane en Anatolie*, TTK, Ankara, 1989; A. Yaşar Ocak, *Babailer İsyamı - Aleviliğin Tarihsel Altyapısı yahut Anadolu'da İslam-Türk Heterodoksinin Teşekkülü*, İstanbul 1996.

3 Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Âl-i Osman*, ed. Âli, İstanbul, 1332, pp. 204-206; Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Âl-i Osman*, in *Osmanlı Tarihleri I*, ed. Çiftçioğlu Atsız, İstanbul, 1949, pp. 237-239.

4 Elvan Çelebi, *Menâkibü'l-Kudsîyye fî Menâsibi'l-ünsîyye - Baba İlyas-i Horasânî ve Sülalesinin Menkabevi Tarihi*, İsmail E. Erünsal ve A.Yaşar Ocak (eds.), TTK, Ankara, 1995, pp.169-170.

5 Şams el-dîn Ahmad al Aflâki al-'Arifi, *Manakib al-'Arifin*, I, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı, TTK, Ankara, 1959, p. 381.

Hacı Bektaş, a Turkish dervish, came to Anatolia towards the year 1230, perhaps in the company of the Kharezmians who were seeking refuge after the conquest of Kharezm by the Mongols.⁶

The Seldjuks who reigned in Anatolia were tolerant and understanding rulers. They had to be so for their country was inhabited by people of different races and religions. Seldjukid towns were centers of culture and welfare. But the Turkmen tribes were rather turbulent and brought trouble to the peaceful and well-organized people of the cities. They occupied lands where they could find pastures for their herds and became more and more troublesome as their numbers increased.

Hacı Bektaş found himself involved in the *Baba'î* revolt during which his brother Mintash was killed while fighting for Baba İlyas.⁷ However, Hacı Bektaş took no part in the final phase of the revolt,⁸ which ended in a general slaughter in the plain of Malya. After some years of hiding, he reappeared in the village which bears his name today, but was then called "Soluca Kara Öyük" or "Karayol". The place was then occupied by the Oghuz tribe of Çepni. Though he was not himself a Çepni, Hacı Bektaş was welcomed to one of the seven houses of the village, that of Kadıncık Ana and her spouse Idris.⁹ There, he led a life of holiness and meditation. He founded no order and had no disciples.¹⁰ According to Aşıkpaşazade, the order that bears his name was founded after his death by a woman: the same Kadıncık Ana who was either his adoptive daughter, according to the historian, or his spiritual wife, according to the *Vilâyetnâme*, the hagiographical life of the saint. Kadıncık Ana founded the Order with the help of her disciple Abdal Musa.

Hacı Bektaş, who died, according to tradition, in 1270, at the age of 63,¹¹ belonged to the Turkmen tribes. Many of these tribes followed the religious teachings of the Turkic saint of Central Asia, Ahmed Yesevi, who died towards 1167/1168, at Yesi (now Turkistan).¹² However, all the tribes were not yet Muslims and those who had embraced Islam had not always assimilated Muslim culture. For instance, the Çepni tribes were known as being rather heterodox. Later on, they were to join the Safavid movement.¹³

Hacı Bektaş was no theologian. He had not studied in the Medrese as did Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî, who was his contemporary. He was a mystic, born among the people and who remained near to the people. Though he was a Muslim, he did not give up the ancient practices and customs of Central Asia.¹⁴

He was also a healer and a thaumaturge. This is clearly seen from his hagiography, the *Vilâyetnâme*. It tells us that Hacı Bektaş did not like to pray in mosques. He would climb a mountain with his *abdals*. That mountain, called Hırkadağı, "the mount of the cowl", is an ancient volcano. It is located near the present village of Hacıbektaş. In ancient days, juniper-trees grew on its summit. The dervishes used to light fires and dance around them, performing the *sema*, ecstatic dance. One day, in

6 See C. Cahen, 'Baba Ishaq, *Baba İlyas*, Hadjdji Bektash et quelques autres', 56-59.

7 Aşıkpaşazade, ed. Âli, p. 204; ed. Atsız, p. 237.

8 Elvan Çelebi, *op.cit.*, p. 169.

9 See Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Menâkib-i Hacı Bektaş-i Velî "Vilâyet-Nâme"*, Istanbul, 1958. This work shall be referred to as "*Vilâyetnâme*".

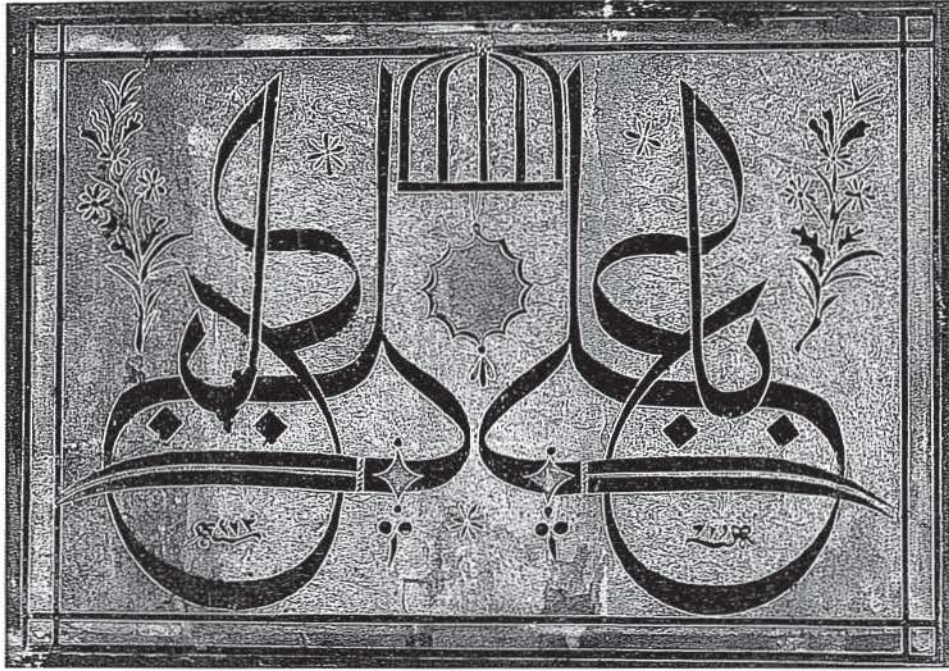
10 Aşıkpaşazade, *op.cit.*, *loc.cit.*

11 See *Vilâyetnâme*, pp. XIX-XX.

12 On Ahmed Yesevi, see: Fuat Köprülü, *I.A.*, s.v. Ahmed Yesevi; Fuat Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar*, Ankara, 1966, pp. 5-153; I. Mélikoff, 'Ahmed Yesevi et la mystique populaire turque', in *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc*, pp. 139-150.

13 On the Çepni, see; Faruk Sümer, *Oğuzlar (Türkmenler) - Tarihleri-Boy Teşkilâtı-Destanları*, Istanbul, 1992 (4th ed.), pp. 241-248, 317; Faruk Sümer, *Safevî Devletinin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü*, TTK, Ankara 1992, pp. 50, 104.

14 According to Eflâki, Hacı Bektaş, though being a Muslim, did not confine himself to follow the prescribed laws of Islam: see *Menâkib-al 'Ârifin*, p. 381.



Symmetrical inscription of "Ali" adorned with the crown of Hacı Bektaş Veli.
Glass-painting, Şahin Paksoy collection, *Camaltında Yirmibin Fersah*, İstanbul 1997,
Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık.

a state of ecstasy, Hacı Bektaş threw his cowl into the fire. That was why the mount was called Hırkadağı.¹⁵

The juniper-tree is well known among the shamans. When burning, its branches bring on a state of ecstasy. It is therefore considered a sacred plant and is still used among the Kalash and their shamans in Pakistan,¹⁶ as well as in Tibet, for purification purposes.¹⁷ The smoke from the burning branches of the juniper goes to the skies and calls down the "Invisible Beings" (*Ga'ib Erenleri*), the tutelary spirits of the shamans; without those spirits, no ceremony can be performed.¹⁸ In the *Vilâyetnâme*, a whole chapter is devoted to these "Invisible Beings" who revealed their presence to Hacı Bektaş and his dervishes. They perceived lights burning on the Hırkadağı. They went up and spent three days with the "Invisible Beings". During these three days, time stopped so that nobody in the village was aware of their absence.¹⁹

Kaygusuz Abdal, a disciple of Abdal Musa and one of the first Bektashi poets, has given us, in one of his poems, a description of these healing dervishes with their cowl, their coarse woolen cloak and prayer-rug of animal skin :

Rum Abdalları gelür "Ali dost" deyû	The Abdals of Rum come calling upon Ali,
Hırka giyer, aba deyü, post deyü	They wear the cowl, the cloak, the rug.
Hastaları gelür derman isteyü	Those who are ill, come to them for healing
Sağlar gelür Pir'im Abdal Musa'ya ²⁰	The sound ones go to my master, Abdal Musa.

¹⁵ See *Vilâyetnâme*, pp. 24-25, 35-36, 57, 74.

¹⁶ See Viviane Lièvre and Jean-Yves Loude, *Le chamanisme des Kalash du Pakistan*, éditions du CNRS, Paris-Lyon, 1990, pp. 50-53, 496-500.

¹⁷ See S. G. Karmay, 'Les Dieux des terroirs et les génévriers: un rituel tibétain de purification', *J.A.*, tome 283, 1995, no.1, pp. 161-207.

¹⁸ See V. N. Basilov, *Samanstvo u narodov Srednej Azii i Kazakhstana* (Shamanism among the people of Central Asia and Kazakhstan), Moscow, 1992 (Nauka), pp. 229-278. A review of this book has been made by I. Mélikoff in *TURCICA XXVII*, 1995, pp.269-277.

¹⁹ See *Vilâyetnâme*, p. 66.

²⁰ See Fuat Köprülü, *Türk Halk Edebiyatı Ansiklopedisi I*, İstanbul, 1935, s.v. Abdal, p. 29; İsmail Özmen, *Alevi-Bektaşî Şiirleri Antolojisi*, Ankara, 1995, p. 228.

Hacı Bektaş is usually represented in the image of a holy man wearing the *Elif Tacı*, a bonnet in the form of the letter "elif" that was to become the headwear of the Janissaries (Ottoman army corps). In his right arm, he holds a deer and his left hand is petting a small lion. We shall always remember this picture symbolizing both his kindness and strength, but it would surely be more appropriate to look for him in the miniatures of *Siyah Kalem*. There we can see dancing dervishes, sometimes hairy and bare-footed, dressed in short tunics, sometimes wearing caps, long cloaks or animal skins.²¹

Though historical sources are rather scanty, they all describe Hacı Bektaş as a Sufi belonging to the Turkmen tribes. His environment was the same as that of the Ottomans who belonged to the Oghuz tribe of the Kayı. That can probably explain the relationship between the Ottomans and the first Bektashis. They came from the same social background.²²

In his hagiographical life of Baba İlyas, Elvan Çelebi says that Hacı Bektaş was closely connected to Edebali, who was to become the father-in-law of Osman Gazi. He describes Edebali as a companion of Hacı Bektaş.²³

Though we cannot suppose Hacı Bektaş to have known Osman Gazi, for the former died before the latter appeared on the world stage at the end of the 13th century, yet among the companions of Orhan Gazi we find quite a number of dervishes including Abdal Musa, the founder of the first Bektashi Order.

Those dervishes took part in the conquest of Thrace and the Balkans. They had become *gazis*, Islamic war heroes. They received land in the conquered territories. They built *zaviyes* and *tekkes*, dervish lodges, which often became centers of Turkic culture and religious teaching.

In a well-known work, Ömer Lütfi Barkan has studied the role of these colonizing dervishes and their *zaviyes* at the time of the Conquest.²⁴ The Bektashis who settled in the Balkans, gave up their monastic way of life.

The Ottoman historian Oruç tells us about the close connection between the brother of Orhan Gazi, Ali Pasha, and the Order of the Bektashis. Ali Pasha, who was himself to become a dervish, advised his brother to put the newly founded army corps of the Janissaries under the protection of Hacı Bektaş.²⁵ This is of course a legend, as Hacı Bektaş was already dead, but nevertheless the Janissaries were connected to the Bektashi Order of dervishes. They were recruited from elements of foreign stock, at an early age, so it seemed appropriate to place them under the moral and spiritual protection of an Order of colonizing dervishes.

We have seen the spreading of Islam in a tribal society. We shall now describe two different currents: on the one side, we see the gradual transition of one group to a sedentary way of life and its adjustment to urban centers. On the other side, we have those who remained in the Anatolian countryside, leading a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life and who became exposed to periods of turbulence and trouble.

Sedentary life led to the settlement of the dervishes in *tekkes* located near the towns. During the first three centuries of Ottoman rule they were protected by the

21 See M. S. İpşiroğlu and S. Eyüboğlu, *Fatih albümüne bir bakış - Sur l'album du Conquérent*, Istanbul, 1955; Beyhan Karamağaralı, *Muhammed Siyah Kalem'e Atfedilen Minyatürler*, Ankara, 1964.

22 See I. Mélikoff, 'L'Origine sociale des premiers Ottomans', in *The Ottoman Emirate (1300-1389)*, Elizabeth A. Zachariadou (ed.), Institute for Mediterranean Studies, Halcyon days in Crete I. A symposium held in Rethymnon 11-13 January 1991, Rethymnon, 1993, pp.135-144.

23 Elvan Çelebi, *op.cit.*, p. 169 (verse 1995).

24 Ö. L. Barkan, 'Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda bir iskân ve kolonizasyon metodu olarak vakıflar ve temlikler I: İstila devirlerinin kolonizatör Türk dervişleri ve zaviyeleri', *Vakıflar Dergisi* V (1942), 279-386.

25 See Oruç, *Tarih-i Âl-i Osman*, ed. Franz Babinger, Hannover, 1925, pp. 15-16; Oruç Beğ Tarihi, ed. Atsız, Istanbul, 1972, p. 34.



A young Tahtacı (Turkoman Alevi) girl.

Sultans, who bestowed on them donations and gifts. The Ottomans also made use of the beneficent influence of the *tekkes* in colonizing their newly conquered lands.²⁶ And they also used them in their efforts to control the heterodox and turbulent elements that had remained in the Anatolian countryside, where there appeared a number of anarchical dervish groups: Abdal's, Torlak's, Işık's and others known under the more general name of Kalender.²⁷ These groups had their religious chiefs, their local saints. But soon, as the result of the efforts of the Ottoman rulers, all these saints became concentrated under the name of one single figure: Hacı Bektaş Veli who came to control the religious life of the people.

Nevertheless, two distinct groups appear: the Bektashis who led a sedentary life in organized *tekkes*, and the Kızılbaş who were still nomads or semi-nomads. For a long time, the Kızılbaş had no definite name. In the Ottoman documents, they are called *zındık*, heretic, *râfîzi*, schismatic, and also "shi'ite", *mülhid*, atheist. Later on they will become known as *Alevi*.²⁸ *Kızılbaş* is their historical name. It refers to the village groups and tribes who followed the first Safavids. Their name appears in the time of Sheykh Haydar (1460-1488), the father of Shah Isma'il. *Kızılbaş* means "red head". That name was given to them because of their headdress: a red bonnet with twelve facets. It was also called Tac-i Haydarî "the crown of Haydar". In the

²⁶ See Barkan, *op.cit.*; I. Mélikoff, 'Un ordre de derviches colonisateurs: les Bektasi. Leur rôle social et leurs rapports avec les premiers sultans ottomans', in *Memorial Ömer Lütfi Barkan*, Paris, 1980, pp. 149-157. Reprint in *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc*, pp. 115-125.

²⁷ See Fuat Köprülü, *Les origines de l'Empire Ottoman*, Porcupine Press, Philadelphia, 1978 (reed.); A. Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Marjinal Sufilik: Kalenderîler (XIV-XVII yüzyıllar)*, TTK, Ankara 1992.

²⁸ See I. Mélikoff, 'Le problème Kızılbaş', in *TURCICA VI*, 1975, pp. 49-67 (reprint in *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc*, pp. 29-43.

Ottoman documents, *Kızılbaş* has the meaning of “heretic” and “heretic rebel”. That pejorative meaning was the reason why the name *Alevi* took the place of *Kızılbaş* and became that of the heterodox groups in Turkey. The word *Alevi* refers to the worship of Ali who is regarded as divine by these groups. However, in Iran, those who worship Ali are called *Ali-ilahi*. *Alevi* there means a descendant of Ali, a *Seyyid*.²⁹

Nevertheless nowadays in Turkey, *Alevi* has received the same pejorative meaning as *Kızılbaş*. The beliefs of the *Kızılbaş-Alevi* are identical with those of the *Bektashis*. Both groups refer to *Hacı Bektaş*. But the *Bektashis* formed an organized group, whereas the *Kızılbaş-Alevi*, who lived in villages, remained more or less disorganized. The *Bektashi* follow an unchangeable ritual whereas the *Kızılbaş-Alevi* believe in myths in which legends are mingled with local folklore. The beliefs of both groups are syncretic. They contain elements from different origins, belonging to religions with which the Turkic people have been in contact: Buddhism, Manicheism, Nestorian or local Christianity.³⁰

We must also keep in mind that the Turks have often settled in territories which had been centers of heresies, so that there has often been a superposition of heretic creeds. For instance, the region of Erzincan-Divriği-Sivas was the center of the Paulician heresy (a strongly dualistic sect) before becoming the center of the *Kızılbaş-Alevi*.³¹ Anatolia -especially Eastern Anatolia- was throughout the centuries a melting-pot where people and creeds have been subjected to a permanent procedure of catalysis. It is therefore difficult to isolate elements which have been fused in this way.

Fuat Köprülü called the *Alevi* “country *Bektashis*” because they present themselves as a rough form of the same phenomenon.³² For instance, the rites of initiation of the *Bektashis* are the same as those of any secret society, whereas the initiation ceremony of the *Kızılbaş-Alevi* seems closer to the customs of tribal societies.

Anyone can become a *Bektashi* if he wishes to and if he is found to be worthy. But one cannot become an *Alevi* if one is not born an *Alevi*.

In *Bektashism*, the *baba* is the chief of the *tekke*. To become a *baba*, one has to have been initiated and to have attained the degree of perfection required for such an honour. But among the *Alevi*, the *dede* or spiritual chief of the community, must belong to an *ocak* (hearth), the genealogy of which goes back to Ali. Every *Alevi* village is connected to an *ocak* and the *dede* who belongs to that *ocak* is obliged to visit at least once a year all the villages in his dependence. The *dede* must be invested with supernatural powers. In the *Alevi* communities, myth takes the place of ritual and the ceremonies are the repetition on earth of archetypes that took place in the Other World, beyond Time. For instance, the *Ayin-i Cem* is the repetition on earth of the Banquet of the Forties that took place during the Night of *Mirac*, the ascension of the Prophet.³³

Turbulence has always been a characteristic of these socio-religious movements. Their followers were discredited and persecuted. They always remained marginal. For their safety, they had to resort to secrecy. As their beliefs were condemned, they took gnostical forms: secret teachings revealed by esoteric interpretation of sacred

29 See I. Mélikoff, ‘Le problème *Kızılbaş*’.

30 See supra, note 1.

31 See I. Mélikoff, ‘Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme *Bektaşî-Alevî*’, (reprint in *Sur les traces du Soufisme turc*, pp. 59-60.

32 See Fuat Köprülü, ‘Les origines du *Bektachisme*. Essai sur le développement historique de lé hétérodoxie musulmane en Asie Mineure’, in *Actes du Congrès international d’histoire des religions* (Paris 1925), 1926; Fuat Köprülü, *Influence du chamanisme turco-mongol sur les ordres mystiques musulmans*, Istanbul, 1929.

33 See I. Mélikoff ‘Le problème *Kızılbaş*’.

texts, initiation of the profane, ceremonies held by night in hidden places, hermetical language by which adepts could express themselves.³⁴

Asia Minor has always been a land of mystical and martial enthusiasm. That can be seen during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire. The first Ottomans owed their military success to the stimulation of martial mysticism. War and religion combined together. The dervishes became *gazîs* and the Janissaries were connected to the Bektashis. But things were to change during the 16th century with the Ottomano-Safavid wars.

In Eastern Anatolia the Kızılbaş movement owes its development to the impulse of the Safavids. Kızılbaş mystical ideology was combined with martial enthusiasm. The Kızılbaş ideology was the source of a series of religious revolts known in Ottoman history as the *Celali İsyânları*,³⁵ from the name of one of the first rebels. These revolts, though inspired by religious motives, often had social and economical aims. They are generally attributed to the Kızılbaş, but one cannot exclude the moral participation of the Bektashis who may have often inspired action by means of their spiritual and intellectual influence.

In later Ottoman history, Bektashism had become synonymous with non-conformism in matters of religion. During the 19th century, after the collapse of the Janissaries in 1826 and the closure of the *tekkes*, the non-conformist Bektashis became free-thinkers and later on, in the 20th century, progressivists. They often became Free-Masons, as sharing the same ideals: non-conformism and free-thinking.³⁶ They also joined the Young Turks. Later on, when the Turkish Republic took the place of the Ottoman Empire, they embraced the cause of Atatürk and supported his efforts for a secular state. The Alevi went even further and compared Atatürk to Hazret-i Ali.

Though Bektashis and Alevis go back to the same origin, they have formed two parallel groups. These groups have been subjected to different ethnical influences: the Bektashis were influenced by the Balkans,³⁷ the Alevi by the people of eastern Anatolia: Iranians, Kurds and others.

Though the Bektashis dominated the others under the Ottoman Empire, with the loss of the Balkanic provinces, the center of gravity changed. Nowadays, the predominant part is played by the Alevis, and the Bektashis find themselves more or less driven into the background. One is actually tempted to promote the "Alevi problem" and to suppress the Bektashis, though both groups continue to worship the same patron-saint: Hacı Bektaş Veli.

34 See I. Mélikoff 'Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektaşî-Alevî'; and 'L'islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie: non-conformisme-syncrétisme-gnose'.

35 See Mustafa Akdağ, *Celâli İsyânları (1550-1603)*, Ankara, 1963.

36 See I. Mélikoff, 'L'Ordre des Bektachîs après 1826', *TURCICA* XV, 1983, 155-178 (reprint in *Sur les traces du soufisme turc*).

37 See I. Mélikoff, 'Les voies de pénétration de l'hétérodoxie musulmane en Thrace et dans les Balkans', in *Halcyon days in Crete II* (a symposium held in Rethymnon 9-11 January 1994. *The Via Egnatia under Ottoman Rule (1380-1699)*, Elizabeth A. Zachariadou (ed.), Rethymnon, 1996.