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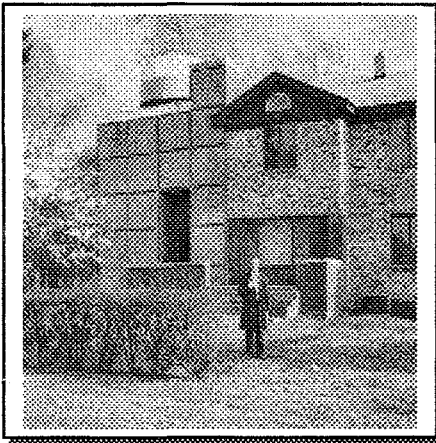
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## REFLECTIONS ON BABA REXHEB & THE BEKTASHI PRESENCE IN NORTH AMERICA

Hüseyin ABİVA\*

Driving down one of Taylor, Michigan's broad thoroughfares, one spots amid the quaint spires of a number of Protestant churches a seemingly out of place sight. Atop a spacious redbrick building sits an oversized metal *Hüseyini tâc* painted white and green. For nearly four decades this symbol has quietly proclaimed the presence of the Bektashi Order of Sufis in the North America. The large bilingual sign that stands at the entrance to the building's parking lot gives the name of the place in both Albanian and English: this is the *Teqeja Bektashianë Shqiptarë*, The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery.

Since its establishment in 1954, The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery (affectionately referred to as the '*Teqe*' by the community) has been a prominent landmark in Albanian-American cultural and religious life, recognized not only in the greater Detroit metropolitan area but nationally and internationally as well. Notwithstanding religious affiliation,



individuals active in Albanian-American associations are well aware of the continuing importance of the *Teqe* to the ethnic community and the noteworthy contributions of Baba Rexheb as both a religious and cultural leader.

This significance is widely recognized outside of the Albanian-American community as well. Among Bektashis in Albania (the land of Baba Rexheb's birth) the *Teqe* enjoys a valued reputation and it is appreciated for its role in not only preserving Bektashi identity during the darkest days of communism but for its help in rejuvenating the Albanian Bektashi community after the ban on religion was lifted in 1991. The *Teqe* and its

founder have also been highly praised and acknowledged outside of the Albanian-speaking world, especially in Turkey. While interaction between the *Teqe* and the Bektashi community of Turkey over the last fifty years has not been as intimate as one might expect, when that contact has occurred it has been both constructive and beneficial.<sup>1</sup> In fact one is hard-pressed to find popular and academic works in Turkey concerning Bektashi tradition that do not make mention of Baba Rexheb and his "American" *Teqe* in a positive light.

Nevertheless, the symbolism behind the *Hüseyini tâc* and the significance of the building it sits over is probably lost on most of those who drive daily by the *Teqe*. Few Americans would

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<sup>1</sup> This is partially due to the hierarchical evolution of both communities since 1942. Albanian Bektashis and Turkish Bektashis have followed separate *dedebabas* since the death of Salih Niyazi Dedebaba in 1942 and from 1967 to 1992 the Albanian community had no hierarchical structure at all. Albanian-speaking Bektashis during this period looked to Baba Qazim Bakalli (d. 1983) of Prizren and Baba Rexheb for spiritual guidance.

know that for nearly fifty years this place was one of the last vestiges of a once flourishing Sufi order, much less what a "Sufi order" is. Such an indifferent response from the average passerby can be appreciated for a number of reasons: Albanian-Americans are simply one of many ethnic groups that make up the population of metropolitan Detroit; not all Albanians in America are Muslim (in fact they are outnumbered 2-to-1 by non-Muslim Albanians); and, out of this Muslim population, those with any level of connection to Bektashism are a definite minority.<sup>2</sup> For the majority of pre-9/11 Americans, Islam was something completely unknown and mysterious, and clearly Bektashism was utterly unheard of outside of academic circles or among those individuals with specific interests in Islamic mysticism.

In this paper I will offer a brief sketch of the Bektashi community in the United States along with my commentary on the history of The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery, and more importantly, the life and works of Baba Rexheb, a man of saintly stature whom I had the privilege of visiting regularly between 1991 and his passing in 1995. However, before I discuss the particulars of this institution, I believe it to be crucial that the presence of Bektashism in America be placed within the context of the wider Sufi and Albanian-American Muslim communities.

### Albanian-American Islam, 1900-2000

In the large sign that stands at the entrance to the *Teqe* we are presented with two identities; one ethnic, "Albanian", and the other religious, "Bektashi". Without a doubt, for the last fifty years the *Teqe* has served as both a cultural and religious institution, sustaining the long tradition of Bektashi spirituality intimately intertwined with Albanian patriotism. The double-headed black eagle on crimson field flag that flies beside the American in the front of the *Teqe*, as well as other symbols of ethnic pride, continue to be displayed as an expression of cultural identity throughout the *Teqe* grounds together with overtly religious decorations, such as Qur'anic calligraphy and photographs of long departed Bektashi *babas*.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2000 US census there were approximately 105,000 individuals claiming Albanian decent living within the borders of the United States, although the number is likely higher.<sup>4</sup> While it is known that Muslims make up some 85% of the nearly 5 million Albanians living throughout the Balkans, in the United States their Catholic and Orthodox compatriots have traditionally been in the majority. Today this reality persists, although over the last twenty years the large influx of immigrants from solidly Muslim Kosova and western Macedonia has narrowed the disparity between Muslim and Christian communities to some extent.

The story of the Albanian-American community goes back to the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the years prior to independence from the Ottoman State, large numbers of Albanians (largely male and predominantly Christian) began to arrive in the United States with hopes of taking advantage of the prosperity of the New World. Those Muslim who came to America with their compatriots had an apparent desire to preserve both their ethnic identity as well as their religious

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<sup>2</sup> Trix (1994: 365)

<sup>3</sup> As will be discussed below, this situation changed somewhat during the period under the direction of Baba Flamur Shkalla (1996-2003). In an attempt to give the *Teqe* a more spiritual atmosphere, he had many of the overtly nationalist symbols, such as images of Skanderbeg and photos of anti-Ottoman guerillas, removed and replaced with paintings of a strictly Bektashi nature. Following his resignation there were moves to restore the "Albanian"-ness of the *Teqe*.

<sup>4</sup> Non-governmental sources put this number much higher; Trix (2001) presents estimates ranging from 250,000 to half a million.

customs. To achieve the later, Muslims joined with Christians in setting up Albanian-language newspapers and journals that were nationalist and non-confessional in character.<sup>5</sup>

By 1915 enough Albanian Muslim men had settled in the town of Biddeford, Maine to open a coffeehouse (*kavhana*) on Main Street. In addition, the backroom of the building was used for social meetings, and *Bayram* festivities. The great majority of these immigrants worked at the Pepperell Mills textiles complex.<sup>6</sup> Several members of this community in Biddeford fell victim to the devastating nationwide influenza epidemic of 1918 (which killed over 600,000 Americans), and as a result a small cemetery was established in the town that exists there to this day. During the same period another Albanian Muslim community center was established in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1919, for individuals who worked in the local factories. Night classes were setup here to promote adult literacy in both Albanian and English as well as to provide religious education. An Islamic center was built generations later that still exists to this day.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of Bektashis during this first phase of Albanian immigration is insufficiently documented and subject to further study. But given that a large percentage of early Muslim Albanian immigrants came from regions in southern and central Albania long known for a strong Bektashi presence, there undoubtedly must have been individuals who had some type of bond to this Sufi Order, even if they were simply *asîks*.<sup>8</sup> We can safely assume this to be true, taking into consideration the travels of a certain Bektashi dervish, Dervish Kamber Ali Fratari. It is known that in 1916 (at the height of the First World War) he journeyed to the United States to raise money for the reconstruction of a Bektashi *tekke* in the town of Frashër that was destroyed by marauding bands of Greek irregulars.<sup>9</sup> As a result of America's entry into the war, he was forced to stay in the country for the next four years and did not manage to return to Albania until 1920.<sup>10</sup> Whatever plans were made to open a *tekke* in the United States during Dervish Kamber's stay, came to naught. However, *muhabets* continued to be held in private residences.<sup>11</sup> Considering the somewhat meager financial situation of Albanian immigrant laborers at the time, a proposal to establish a permanent *tekke* would have been difficult to realize in any case.

This initial phase of Albanian immigration came to an end with the enforcement of the Immigration Act of 1925, a regulation that severely hindered immigration from Eastern European countries. One notable characteristic of these early Muslim immigrants was that very few brought with them their womenfolk. They either remained single - since most of them had the intention of earning money in American and returning home to start families - or they sooner or

<sup>5</sup> The first Albanian organization in America was The Pan-Albanian Association (*Vatra*) and the earliest periodical published for Albanian immigrants was *Kombi* (Nation) that began in 1906. Albanian Christians (primarily Orthodox) dominated these early cultural institutions.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Muhammed al-Ahari for this information on early Albanian Muslim immigrants.

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later intermarried with Americans.<sup>12</sup> Those Muslims who had not returned to Albania with their hard earned American money remained in the United States, frequently taking Christian brides.<sup>13</sup> The impediments to passing on Islamic belief in general, and Bektashi tradition in particular, to the children of such mixed marriages, at a time when few religious institutions were on hand, contributed to a rapid absorption into the American mainstream. There is little indication that any Islamic religious traditions beyond the celebration of the *Bayrams* or commemoration of funerals survived in any significance beyond the second generation.<sup>14</sup>

The second phase in Muslim Albanian immigration to the United States came about as a direct result of the Second World War and it lasted well into the 1960's. Following the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945, Albania came under the control of Enver Hoxha and his Communist party, who quickly initiated an unrelenting and brutal campaign against all those who contested their authority. As a result this new political reality that beset their homeland, hundreds (if not thousands) of anti-communist Albanians fled to the West and the Middle East, with many putting down roots in the United States. It was during this period that the two major (and most enduring) religious institutions for Albanian-American Muslims were established: The Albanian American Moslem Society (along with its mosque) and The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery, both of which were centered in the Detroit area.

The Albanian American Moslem Society (whose mosque is located in the Detroit suburb of Harper Woods) was founded in 1945, primarily as a response to the Communist takeover of Albania as well as the rapid assimilation that was underway among the earlier Albanian-American Muslim immigrants and their children. In 1949, Vehbi Ismail, an al-Azhar graduate from Shkodër who was living in Egypt at the time, was selected to lead the Sunni Muslim community. He was widely accepted as the chief *imam* of the Albanian Sunni community until his retirement in 1996. Imam Vehbi Ismail was a prolific writer and for a time was the editor of the journal of The Albanian American Moslem Society, *Jeta Muslimanë Shqiptarë* (Albanian Muslim Life), which was in print from 1953-1961. His work *Muhammed: The Last Prophet* has been in publication for several decades and has even seen widespread use by non-Albanian American Muslims.

During this period, a large Albanian Muslim presence began to form in the New York City area that prompted the organization of a similar center to cater to Islamic religious needs. The Albanian-American Islamic Center (*Qendrës Islamiqe Shqiptare*) was formed in the late 1960s and for many years was under the guidance of Imam Isa Hoxha (d. 2000). The mosque printed a periodical called *Përpjekja e Jonë* (Our Effort) since 1974.

Needless to say, it was the immigration of these Albanians that brought about the founding of America's first Bektashi *tekke* (discussed in detail below). Given that a large percentage of immigrants from this wave came from regions where Bektashism had traditionally found a strong presence (i.e. southern and central Albania), it is not surprising that they would seek to reproduce here, in their new homeland, the time-honored religious practice of their tradition.

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<sup>12</sup> This was also the case with Bošnjak immigrants during this very same period. In fact, the development of the Bosnian-American community over the last one hundred years mirrors that of the Albanian-American community. For a history of early Bošnjak immigration see Muharem Zulfic's, *100 godina Bošnjaka u Čikagu* (Džemijet ul-Hajrije, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Trix (1994: 364) estimates that there were still 5,000 Muslim Albanians resident in the United States in the 1930s.

<sup>14</sup> Intense assimilation was not something exclusive to Albanian immigrants. Other early Muslim immigrant groups, like Arabs and Bosnians faced the same issues, and often fared even worse in preserving ethnic identity.



Until the 1960s, the Albanian-American population had largely originated from Albania proper. This changed considerably as a result of the third wave of immigration. Although Enver Hoxha's draconian rule made it extremely difficult for Albanians to travel outside their country, in neighboring Yugoslavia the situation was not as severe. Following the removal of the notorious interior minister Ranković in 1964, Tito allowed large numbers of Yugoslav citizens to work abroad, hoping that the money sent back home would bolster the economy of this nominally communist state. Consequently we have what would be the third wave of Albanian immigration to the United States, one primarily composed of individuals from the Albanian-speaking regions of the then Yugoslavia (i.e. Kosova and Macedonia) who, like their counterparts in the first wave fifty years earlier, sought out the economic advantages of living in America. While a number of these émigrés established themselves in the Detroit area (which was by now the center of Albanian culture in America), many more (mostly Kosovars) chose to settle in the New York City area, while Albanians from western Macedonia settled in large numbers in the Chicagoland area. In both places mosques and community centers were established that continue to function.<sup>15</sup> This most recent wave of Albanian immigration was further augmented by large numbers of immigrants from Albania proper, who began to come to the United States following the collapse of the communist regime in 1990, as well as several thousand refugees from the 1999 conflict in Kosova, most of whom however have returned to their homeland.

The Bektashi presence among the members of this most recent wave has been somewhat minimal. Apart from the traditional Bektashi stronghold around the Lake Prespa region (from where a number of immigrants to the Detroit area came), those areas of the former Yugoslavia where this new wave of immigration originated had historically been devoid of the widespread Bektashi presence that was seen in southern Albania. Since the end of the Second World War, Islam in Kosova and Macedonia has become noticeably more Sunni in orientation, although several dervish orders still exist to this day, primarily Rifa'i, Khalwati, Sa'di and Qadiri.<sup>16</sup> As a result of this shift away from the traditional Ottoman-style Islam that was saturated with Sufi ritual and doctrine, attitudes towards the *tarikats* (Bektashis in particular) among Kosovar and Macedonian immigrants tends to be somewhat negative and this reflects the attitudes held by the Sunni populations of the regions they hail from.<sup>17</sup>

### Sufism in American Islamic History

The exact number of Muslims living in the United States is uncertain. Due to the fact that confessional association is not solicited on governmental census forms, demographic data regarding religious affiliation must be taken from various non-governmental organizations. According to figures developed by the Council for American Islamic Affairs (CAIR) there are

<sup>15</sup> The Albanian American Islamic Center, with its large membership hailing from western Macedonia, is found in the Chicago suburb of Berkeley. The community of The American Albanian Islamic Center of Kenosha, Wisconsin, is likewise comprised of Macedonian and Kosovar Albanians. On New York's Staten Island, Kosovars were primarily responsible for the founding of the expansive Albanian Islamic Cultural Center, which contains a full-time Islamic elementary school.

<sup>16</sup> Despite the abundance of dervish orders in Kosovo, the Bektashi *tarikat* never made significant progress among the population, and today there is only one small community functioning under the guidance of Baba Mumin Lama. A much larger Bektashi presence can be observed in Macedonia, where it historically had much more of a significant presence among the region's Albanian and Turkish population. Today there are several hundred Albanians living between the towns of Kičevo and Tetovo who would describe themselves as Bektashi. The Macedonian Bektashi community is currently under the guidance of Baba Tahir Emini and is centered in the expansive Harabati Baba Tekke of Tetovo.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the struggle between "tarikat" Islam and the official Sunni establishment in Kosovo see Ger Duijzings', *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2000)

approximately 6 million Muslims living in the United States, a figure that has been widely accepted in academic circles, albeit now challenged by individuals and institutions espousing Islamophobic positions, who often claim a ridiculously low 1.5 million! Of these 6 million roughly 2.5% are of Balkan origin, primarily Albanian and Bosnian.<sup>18</sup>

One would think that given the pronounced and growing presence of Islam in the United States that Sufism would play an influential role in the spiritual life of Muslims just as it had in other areas of the world. On the contrary, until the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 most practicing immigrant Muslims living in the United States had unreceptive attitudes towards Sufism in any form. The reasons for this are many, but the most important of them has to do with the type of Islam that has been preached in mosques and Islamic centers across the country. In the 1960s Muslim students from the Arab world and the Indian Subcontinent began to arrive at American universities in large numbers. Those who had any form of attachment to Islam were radicalized by two trends that were in vogue at the time: militant anti-colonialism and the radical religious ideology of Sayyid Qutb and Mawdoodi. This dangerous fusion of militant ideologies produced in these young students an Islam that was politically charged, unbendingly fundamentalist and ardently anti-traditionalist. To better organize and coordinate their activities, these students established the Muslim Students' Association (MSA). Many of these young men stayed on in the United States following the completion of their studies and established careers as medical doctors and engineers.

These individuals also formed several umbrella organizations (the most notable among them being The Islamic Society of North America, known popularly by its acronym ISNA) that in time, came to overshadow and dominate any Islamic expression among the new wave of Muslim immigration that had taken place since the mid-1960s. Those mosques that were established prior to the 1960s (which included most Albanian ones) were excluded from the growing MSA-ISNA network because they were seen as being too assimilated into the "decadent" American way of life.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the many Albanians who had fled from the grips of Communism could hardly have been expected to support the radical anti-Western and anti-Democratic inclinations that many MSA-ISNA officers continued to espouse well into the 1990s.

Such an Islam as this, weighed down, as it was, by three decades of "free-of-charge" Wahhabi educational material from Saudi Arabia and the Arab world, could hardly have been expected to condone any manifestation of Sufism at all.

Nevertheless Sufism *has* existed in America, and continues to do so, despite the intimidating Wahhabi influence over the majority of America's mosques and Islamic centers during the last thirty-five years. Even as many Muslim immigrants have viewed Sufism with disapproval, as a blameworthy innovation (*bid'at*) or backward superstition, it has been a means by which thousands of Americans have come to Islam. In fact, converts to Islam continue to play a disproportionate role in American Sufi life as opposed to their marginal role within the so-called "mainstream" Islam. In America, Sufism had once again become the vehicle for the spread of Islam among non-Muslim peoples, just as it had done for centuries; while the fundamentalist Salafi-inspired Islam taught in the majority of American Islamic centers failed outright in this respect.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/demograp.htm> for further demographic data regarding Muslims in America.

<sup>19</sup> Overall, not only Albanians, but Bosnians and Turks as well, had very little interaction with these self-proclaimed national Islamic organizations, which were dominated by Arabs and Indo-Pakistanis.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that there have been no American converts to non-Sufi Islam or even to aggressive Wahhabism, for there have been (the most infamous examples in the last few years

The earliest known Sufi presence in America dates back to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Indian mystic Hazrat Iyanat Khan (1882-1927) brought the message of Islamic spirituality to these shores.<sup>21</sup> His teachings continued on following his untimely death in the form of The Sufi Order of the West and The Sufi Movement. Members of these organizations were, for the most part, exclusively American converts. Other than the opening of The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery in 1954, there was to be no further Sufi activity until the 1960s.

The tremendous social revolution that took place in American society in the 1960's and early 1970's caused a tremendous growth in interest in Sufism. This was a time when chiefly young, White, educated Americans became fascinated with the spiritual philosophies from the East and during this period men like Idris Shah (1924-1996), "Sufi Sam" Lewis (1896-1971) and Shaykh Bawa Muhaiyadeen (d. 1986) were able to find followings and establish organizations. It is important to note that what was taught by these men cannot truly be called Sufism in the traditional sense, but rather a type of universalistic spiritualism often far removed from its Islamic context. Suffice it to say these groups had little if no contact with the mosques and Islamic centers that were established by immigrant groups.

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s there was a flowering of long-established "*ṭarīqat*" Sufism in North America. We have at this time the establishment and expansion in several major US cities of the Iran-based Ni'matullahi Order under the guidance of Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, as well as the introduction of the Mevlevi Order. Academic giants such as Frithjof Shuon (1907-1998) and Seyyid Hossein Nasr also achieved prominence during the 1980s as advocates of the intellectual origins of Sufism.<sup>22</sup>

Once again, these Sufi Orders, though more traditional than those of the previous decade, were still primarily organizations made up of American converts, and immigrant Muslims generally kept away from partaking in their rituals and programs. But this tendency soon came to an end with the introduction of a number of *ṭarīqats* that were of Turkish or Balkan origin. Shaykh Muzaffer Ozak (1916-1985) of the Cerrahi Order toured the United States in the early 1980s and attracted a significant following of Americans, Turks and Indo-Pakistanis. Currently there are Cerrahi groups functioning in the New York City area, Illinois, California and Canada.

The 1990s saw the continued increase in the presence of traditional Sufi *ṭarīqats*. What is noteworthy about Sufism in this decade is the increased participation of immigrant Muslims and their children in what had been until then largely the domain of American converts. During this time we have the establishment of three more orders of Turkish origin: the Qadiri-Rifa'i under Shaykh Taner Ansari (whose base is in Northern California), the Rifa'i-Ma'rufi under the hand of Baba Şerif Çatalıkaya (which has its chief gathering place in North Carolina) and the Naqshibandi-Haqqani Order under the celebrated Shaykh Nazim Kubrusi (whose main center is in Michigan). All three of these *ṭarīqats* have followers who are converts as well as first and second-generation descendants of immigrants of various ethnic persuasions. Sufi orders with almost exclusive appeal to immigrant groups also began to expand in the 1990s. Among the Indo-Pakistani community several shaykhs

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being John Walker Lindh, Jose Padilla and Randal Todd Royer). But even these converts, while not members of *ṭarīqats*, tend to be drawn to the more spiritual and intellectual aspects of Islam.

<sup>21</sup> The manifestation of Sufism in America has not received serious attention from academia. The only works known to me that discuss the history, development and impact of Sufism in the United States and Canada in any detail are Marcia Hermanson's "In the Garden of American Sufi Movements: Hybrids and Perennials" in Peter C Clarke (ed.), *New Islamic Movements* (1997) and Jay Kenny's "Sufism Comes to America" (*Gnosis*, No. 30, Winter 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Both of these men were also *shaykhs* in the Shadhili Order.

of the Chishti, Qadiri and Naqshibandi orders took root. Additionally, the Tijani and Muridi orders began to grow among the West African immigrant population. This increase of interest in Sufism among immigrants and their descendents continues to this day unabated, especially given that the vice-like grip that "Wahhabo-Salafism" once held over America's Muslim communities seems to have been broken since the events of 9/11.<sup>23</sup>

The period of the 1990s also saw the first involvement of Albanian-American Muslims in Sufism since the establishment of the Bektashi *tekke* in 1954. This was the time of substantial immigration from Kosova and Macedonia and, unsurprisingly, these immigrants brought with them to the New World various expressions of their religious heritage. Starting in the late-1980s, the well-known Rifa'i shaykh of Kosova, Xhemali Shehu (1926-2004), began traveling to the United States and Canada to organize his followers among the émigré Kosovar population. Within the space of a decade, Rifa'i *tekkes* were established in the New York City area and in Toronto, Canada. Kosovars with ties to the Sa'di Order (which has historically been prominent in the city of Gjakova/Yakova) established a modest group in Brooklyn. The membership of both groups has been primarily restricted to Albanian émigrés.

Yet through this century-long panorama of Islamic mysticism in America, the most enduring and longest-lasting Sufi association was the one established in 1954 by a man who was both an Albanian patriot and a spiritual master: Baba Rexheb.

### Baba Rexheb: His Life & Spiritual Heritage

As a religious and social institution, as well as a center for spiritual development, the *Teqe* could never have achieved the distinction it possesses today without the saintly magnetism of Baba Rexheb, an individual whose life story is noteworthy if only on account of the vast panorama of events that he witnessed during his lifetime. He was born at a time when Albania was an Ottoman province; by the time he was twelve his homeland had achieved self-determination, only to be soon after plunged into the destruction of the Balkan and First World Wars; he was nearly thirty when Albania became a kingdom and nearly forty when the Italians annexed it to their empire. He saw the rise of Communism, the devastation it caused to his beloved Sufi Order, and he lived to see freedom again restored to his motherland.

Any serious student of the Balkans surely knows of Albania's special relationship with the Bektashi Order. Ever since the traumatic suppression of the order during the infamous *Vak'a-i Hayriye* of 1826, Albania (chiefly the southern part of the country) was destined to be one of the few remaining bastions of Bektashism in the Ottoman Empire. Numerous dervishes and *babas* fled Istanbul and other locations throughout the Balkans to the relative safety of Albanian lands, where the sympathies of the local population afforded a measure of protection from the Sultan Mahmud II's enforcers. Prior to the era of the *Tanzimat* - when the restrictions against the order gradually eased - Bektashi dervishes carried out their rituals in a concealed or semi-clandestine manner, often under the guise of belonging to non-Bektashi orders.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, by the 1880s, many Bektashi *tekkes* were in unguarded operation throughout Albania and their number increased yearly. In 1920s, Bektashi *tekkes* were so pervasive in southern Albania that

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to take notice of the distinct change in current attitudes towards Sufism and traditional Sunni Islam displayed by "mainstream" national organizations (such as ISNA, ICNA, MSA etc.), groups that were in the 1980s and 1990s particularly unreceptive to such trends. In addition, several quasi-Sufi and pro-traditionalist Islamic organizations (notably the Zaytuna Institute and the Nawawi Foundation) have gained increasing popularity among non-convert American Muslims since 9/11.

<sup>24</sup> An obvious example of this was the use in the Asim Baba Tekke of Gjirokastër of a *tac* of four *terks* instead of the customary twelve.

one European traveler was forced to note that while north of the Shkumbin River Bektashis were only 1 in 10 out of the total Muslim population, to the south they were 9 in 10!<sup>25</sup>

It comes, then, as no surprise that one of the most celebrated figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century Bektashism, Baba Rexheb Ferdi, hailed from an area of southern Albania that was noticeably bestowed with a robust Bektashi presence. The future *baba* of America was born into the arms of a respected Muslim family living in the southern Albanian town of Gjirokastër (Ergiri). His father, Refat Beqiri, was a local *mullah* in the charming old *mahale* of Dunavat. Refat's family had originally migrated to southern Albania from the Kosovar town of Gjakova via the important central Albanian city of Elbasan.<sup>26</sup>

Baba Rexheb's mother was a woman deeply attached to the Way of Haji Bektashi.<sup>27</sup> Both her maternal and paternal uncles were Bektashi *babas* of considerable reputation. The later was Mustafa Baba Qefshi (d.ca. 1878), who, after spending time as a dervish in the *tekke* of Shemimi Dede in Krujë, was appointed spiritual guide of the Xhefaj Baba Tekke located on the outskirts of Elbasan. The former was Ali Hakkı Baba, a man whose life deserves further discussion, particularly given that his very prayer was believed to have been responsible for the birth of his grandnephew, the future Baba Rexheb. To be frank, given that Baba Rexheb spent the first forty years of his life in a world immersed in Bektashism, it would be fitting to present the background of his immediate predecessors.

Ali Hakkı was born in the city of Elbasan sometime following the outlawing of the Bektashi Order in 1826. As a baby he was blessed by a certain Baba Salih, a Bektashi *mürşid* who had recently come to Elbasan after the demolition of his *tekke* in Veles/Köprülü. In his youth, Ali studied in the city's *medrese* where he struck up a close relationship with Mustafa (Qefshi) Balteza. The two young men developed an interest in Sufism and resolved to go to the *tekke* of Melçan (near Korça) to take the hand of Baba Abdullah and thereby enter the Bektashi Way. They were given a cordial welcome and in the following years they regularly visited the *tekke*. After they attained the rank of dervish in the early 1850s, the two friends parted ways. Ali traveled to the *tekke* of Haji Bektash in Anatolia, while Mustafa went to Krujë.<sup>28</sup>

When Dervish Ali Hakkı arrived at the *Pir Evi*, the *dedebaba* was Haji Ali Turabi Dede (d. 1868). He remained there for seven years and was assigned to the post of *türbedar* to the tomb of Haji Bektash Veli. In 1861 word arrived that the position of spiritual guide for the influential Asım Baba Tekke (otherwise known as the *Teqene e Zallit*) outside of Gjirokastër, had become vacant with the passing of its *baba*. To address the needs caused by this vacancy, the *dedebaba* conferred the rank of *baba* on Ali Hakkı and dispatched him to Gjirokastër.

The first days in Gjirokastër were somewhat challenging for the newly arrived Ali Hakkı Baba. It seems that in the months following the death of its previous *baba*, the local *mühids* often came to the *tekke* to drink and sing. When Ali Hakkı Baba discovered that vulgar songs were being recited during these "*muhabets*" instead of the traditional *nefes*, he smashed the liquor bottles and forbade any further use of alcohol in the *tekke*. The locals were noticeably upset by this and told him that he had no place in the *tekke* and a plot was fermented against him. However, it was subdued in due course on account of the *baba's* remarkable personality.

<sup>25</sup> Hasiuck (1929:321)

<sup>26</sup> During the time I spent in the company of Baba Rexheb, I regrettably never asked about his father's *tarikât* affiliation, although in view of the extensive ties of his wife Sabrije to the Bektashis it can be safely assumed that he was attached to them in one way or another.

<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with the late Ms. Zejnep Çuçi.

<sup>28</sup> For a more thorough account of Ali Hakkı Baba's life see Baba Rexheb (1970: 291-302).

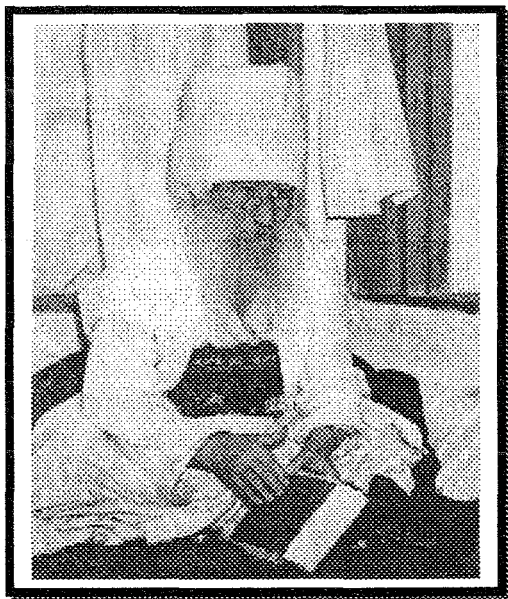
In the early 1870s Ali Hakkı Baba traveled once more to the *Pir Evi* to be bestowed with the rank of *dede*. With this added authority and the force of his personality, Ali Hakkı Baba played a major role in the spread of the Bektashi Order throughout southern Albania. It is said that he initiated scores of dervishes and that he had some two thousand *mühîbs* (both men and women), among whom were many *muftis*, *kadis*, *begs* and other local notables. In time, Ali Hakkı Baba's reputation for piety spread far beyond the borders of Albania and he was even asked to once more travel to the *Pir Evi* and assume the position of *dedebaba* after the death of Haji Mehmed Ali Hilmi Dede in 1907. However, Ali Hakkı Baba declined this offer and remained in Gjirokastër where he passed away shortly thereafter, having presided over the Asım Baba Tekke for more than four decades. His nephew, Selim Ruhi Baba, succeeded him.

Selim Ruhi Baba was born in the Elbasan in 1869CE/1285 AH. Bektashism, unsurprisingly, played a significant part in the formation of his youth, as his mother was the sister of Ali Hakkı Baba and his father, Xhemal, was the brother of Mustafa Baba Qefshi. Like his two uncles, the young Selim studied in the main *medrese* of Elbasan. At the age of sixteen, his father took him to Gjirokastër to be looked after by his maternal uncle, Ali Hakkı Baba. Selim remained there from then on. He continued to study in the city's *medrese* and he acquired not only an education in Islamic theology but was able to master Turkish, Arabic and Persian. In 1887 he received his diploma (*icâzetname*) from the *medrese*. A year later he made the oath to Baba Ali to enter into the Bektashi Order and three years later, in 1891, Selim donned the garb of a Bektashi dervish.<sup>29</sup> For the next sixteen years he served both his uncle and the Asım Baba Tekke with great devotion. Because the turbulent political climate in the Ottoman Balkans during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century made travel to the *Pir Evi* impractical, Dervish Selim took *mücerredlik* (vows of celibacy) at the hands of Ali Hakkı Baba.<sup>30</sup> He also received the rank of *baba* from him as well and when Ali Hakkı Baba left this world in 1907, he appointed Selim Ruhi to be his successor and spiritual guide of the Asım Baba Tekke.

Following the *coup d'état* which overthrew Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II in the spring of 1909, the Young Turk regime's tolerance for Albanian nationalist expression proved transitory. The Ottomans lost considerable sympathy in the Gjirokastër region following the arrest of several dervishes belonging to the Haydar Baba Tekke in 1905.<sup>31</sup> Like the majority of Bektashi clergy, Baba Selim stood behind the patriotic appeals of his countrymen. In the wake of the assassination in the spring of 1908 of Gjirokastër's particularly oppressive governor by Çerçiz Topulli and his band of guerillas, Baba Selim offered his *tekke* as a place of temporary refuge for these men since they

were hotly pursued by Ottoman troops.

Baba Selim was a passionate intellectual and



Selim Ruhi Baba, ca. 1940

<sup>29</sup> Baba Rexheb (1970: 303)

<sup>30</sup> Clayer (1990: 293)

<sup>31</sup> Skendi (1967: 212)

he immersed himself in the books and manuscripts that arrived at the *tekke* every year from Istanbul.<sup>32</sup> He not only studied topics of a spiritual nature, but he delved into history, geography, literature, the physical sciences, and philosophy as well.<sup>33</sup> He was considered by many to be the most cultured and refined Bektashi of his time. In the best of Sufi tradition, Baba Selim was also a gifted poet, composing three *divans* of mystical verse: one in Turkish, another in Persian and a third in Arabic.

In the years before his death, Ali Hakkı Baba's sister approached him with a dilemma. After seven years of marriage, her daughter Sabrije failed to give birth. Ali Baba told her not to be troubled, for two sons and four daughters would soon be born to his niece.<sup>34</sup> However, one of the sons had to be given over to the service of Haji Bektash Veli, and that son was Rexheb.

Rexheb was six years old when his great-uncle died, and it fell on the shoulders of his uncle, Baba Selim, to make sure the child was gradually groomed to become a future servant of the *tarikat*. When he reached the age of seven, Rexheb was enrolled in one of Gjirokastër's *mektebs*, where he obtained an elementary education in Islam and learned to read and write Turkish.<sup>35</sup> Following the completion of his elementary studies, Rexheb entered the city's *medrese*. In addition, for several years he received private tutoring at the hands of one of southern Albania's leading *ulema*, Delvineli Mullah Ragib, from whom he learned Turkish, Arabic and Persian.



Baba Selim and young Dervish Rexheb, ca. 1918

In 1912 the Ottoman Empire was plunged into a disastrous war with its Balkan neighbors. Despite the longing for cultural and political autonomy, most Albanians rallied to the defense of the Sultan's realm, if only for the fact that their own homes were in jeopardy. Southern Albania was particularly hard hit during the initial phase of the Balkan Wars as Greek irregulars inflicted mayhem and destruction in an attempt to ethnically cleanse "Northern Epirus" of its Muslim population. Bektashi *tekkes* were particularly targeted not only as Islamic cultural institutions, but also as centers of patriotic resistance. Scores of Sufi *tekkes* (both Bektashi and non-Bektashi) were burned to the ground, while others were plundered and appropriated

for military use. Baba Selim and most of his dervishes narrowly escaped certain execution when Greek irregulars encircled the Asim Baba Tekke. However one old dervish named Sulo Kuka was found in the *tekke* and cruelly beaten. The Greeks then proceeded to loot and desecrate the *tekke* and over the next three years utilized it as a barracks.<sup>36</sup>

During the Greek occupation of southern Albania, Baba Selim and his dervishes resided at his sister's residence in Gjirokastër, which was virtually transformed into a *tekke*. For the twelve-year-old Rexheb, this move of Baba Selim into the family home must have brought him all the more closer to his uncle. In 1914, the Greek occupation authorities learned of Baba

<sup>32</sup> Kaleshi (1980: 10). Over time the *tekke* acquired a vast library.

<sup>33</sup> Baba Rexheb (1970: 303)

<sup>34</sup> Trix (1996: 118)

<sup>35</sup> Albanian was, of course, a subject forbidden by Ottoman authorities. Given the prominent role Gjirokastër played in the nationalist movement, it is very likely that Baba Rexheb was exposed to the new Albanian alphabet in his childhood.

<sup>36</sup> Baba Rexheb (1970: 305). Needless to say, Baba Rexheb's work contains a more detailed account of Baba Selim's life.

Selim's presence in the city and his continued agitation for resistance.<sup>37</sup> As a result they moved against his residence and had him arrested. However, in a demonstration of national solidarity, the Albanian-speaking Orthodox notables of Gjirokaštër intervened and persuaded the Greeks to release him.

As soon as the Greeks pulled out of Gjirokaštër in the wake of the Central Power's 1916 offensive in the Balkans, the faithful swiftly began restoration of the Asim Baba Tekke. Once the renovation was completed, Baba Selim and his dervishes moved back in. Along with them came sixteen-year-old Rexheb.

Although he had been raised in surroundings permeated with Bektashism, it was not until he turned seventeen that Rexheb was granted his *nesip* (initial vows) to enter the *tarikāt* as a *mūhib*. During this time, he continued his studies with Mullah Ragip. For the next four years Rexheb served Baba Selim and the *tekke*.<sup>38</sup> Once he had concluded this initiatory phase, he was advanced to the rank of dervish at the age of twenty-one. Not only had Rexheb taken the oath to become a Bektashi dervish, but at the age of twenty-four he took the additional vow of *mücerredlik* (celibacy).<sup>39</sup> A year later he completed his studies at the *medrese* and received his diploma (*icâzetname*) in 1925.

Because of the learning earned through years of study, as well as his devotion to the Bektashi Way, Dervish Rexheb's talents were put to use as his uncle's personal assistant and secretary. He accompanied his uncle in 1924 to the second nation-wide meeting of Bektashi *babas* held in the nearby Haydariye Tekke and in 1929 he represented Baba Selim at the Third Bektashi Congress held at the Turan Tekke of Korçë.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1930s, a decade that can aptly be called the 'Golden Age' of Albanian Bektashism, the *tekke* of Asim Baba flourished. The number of dervishes had increased slowly from the seven that resided in the *tekke* when Dervish Rexheb entered, to twelve.<sup>41</sup> Selim Baba had many *mūhibs* and at one time, scores of students from Gjirokaštër's *medrese* had taken his hand. During the weekly *muhabets* it was not unusual to see 40 to 50 people meeting in the *tekke*.<sup>42</sup>

Dervish Rexheb was, in due course, selected to succeed Baba Selim, but the outbreak of the Second World War forever changed not only that, but the rest of his life as well. On April 7th, 1939 Italian troops invaded Albania, ousted King Zog I, and annexed the country to the newly revived "Roman Empire". Given that the majority of Bektashi *babas* had supported nationalist causes in the past, their resistance to foreign occupation should have been anticipated. Initially, however, this seems not to have been the case; as Bektashi response to the new authorities appears to have been one of subtle antipathy, or in some cases, reserved cooperation (at least publicly).<sup>43</sup> The Italians were aware of the influence the *tarikāt* held over much of Albania and they endeavored to pacify influential *babas* through a number of methods, including the financing of a new *asithane* for the *dedebabalik* in Tirana and public displays of interaction with

<sup>37</sup> Clayer (1995: 303)

<sup>38</sup> Traditionally there was a period of time (usually 1,001 days) between the initial vows of *mūhiblik* and the vows of dervish-hood.

<sup>39</sup> Gülçiçek (2000 : 222)

<sup>40</sup> One of the outcomes of this congress was that the Asim Baba Tekke was made the center of one of the county's six *dedeliks*.

<sup>41</sup> Clayer (1990: 281)

<sup>42</sup> Baba Rexheb (1970: 304)

<sup>43</sup> Clayer (1990: 208). Baba Rexheb stated that the Bektashis were opposed the Italian occupation of Albania, but saw little prospect in offering active resistance.



various *babas*.<sup>44</sup> Italian officers occasionally visited the Asim Baba Tekke to converse with Baba Selim, along with his personal assistant, Dervish Rexheb, and they were impressed with the pious qualities of the former.<sup>45</sup>

This delicate coexistence between occupier and occupied came to an end with the murder of Salih Niyazi Dedebaba in November of 1941. The details of the slaying remain confused, with official Italian accounts maintaining that pro-communist guerrillas killed him in an attempted robbery. Other accounts, however, seem to hint that the act was carried out with the tacit approval of the Italians. This being the case, it would point to growing dissatisfaction among the Bektashi clergy with the occupation. Two months after Salih Niyazi Dedebaba's murder, a meeting was held in which representatives of the six *dedeliks* met to choose his successor. Due to his age, Baba Selim could not attend and instead sent the forty-one year-old Dervish Rexheb to speak on his behalf.<sup>46</sup>

By this time the increasingly oppressive policies of the Italians caused widespread and violent resistance to intensify throughout Albania. An ardent patriot, Dervish Rexheb, along with other notable Bektashi *babas*, joined those actively opposing the Italian occupation. He became a member of the Balli Kombëtar (National Front) and quickly established himself as one of its leading representatives in the Gjirokastrë area.<sup>47</sup> Formed in November of 1942, the Balli Kombëtar found support among the middle class, merchants, religious conservatives, and landowners. The goals of the Balli Kombëtar sought to restore the republic and push for the establishment of an Albania whose boundaries would embrace all Albanian-majority regions of Yugoslavia and Greece, something which appealed to those Bektashis who were wary of the communists' radical social ideals as well as their close ties to the Yugoslav partisans.

Although the Balli Kombëtar's initial military activity was directed against the Italian army, by the fall of 1943 (that is after the collapse of Italian authority) it came into increasingly recurrent clashes with Enver Hoxha's communist-dominated National Liberation Army. Fighting between the two rival groups was often fierce, with the Germans offering supplies to many Balli Kombëtar units. Life in southern Albania was increasingly disrupted by the war and many villages were completely destroyed. In addition, the region suffered from an outbreak of typhus.<sup>48</sup> The Asim Baba Tekke opened its doors to become a place of shelter for all those displaced by the fighting.<sup>49</sup>

Dervish Rexheb's support for the Balli Kombëtar was well known. In addition, he personally knew many of the men in the partisan ranks that he fought against. Both Enver Hoxha and Bedri Spahiu were from the Gjirokastrë area and both men came from families that were attached to the Bektashi tradition.<sup>50</sup> In fact, before Enver set off for France to study fourteen years earlier, his father brought him to seek the blessing of Baba Selim. The *baba* was not one to refuse the request of a petitioner and made a benediction over the boy. However, he told the father, "One day this young man will return and be the ruin of this place."<sup>51</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Baba Rexheb (1970: 356). Salih Niyazi Dedebaba met with King Victor Emmanuel III during the latter's visit to Albania in 1941 (see Clayer 1990: 208)

<sup>45</sup> Di San Savino (1965: 210)

<sup>46</sup> Ali Riza Baba was selected to be the new *dedebaba*. Nevertheless technicalities brought about a new election later in 1942, during which time Baba Kamber Ali Fratari of the Prishtë Tekke was named new *dedebaba*.

<sup>47</sup> Kallajxhi (1964: 30-31)

<sup>48</sup> Fischer (199: 209)

<sup>49</sup> Personal communication with Baba Rexheb.

<sup>50</sup> Korça (n.d.)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Toward the end of 1944 it was obvious that the communist-dominated National Liberation Army would win control of the country after the Germans began their staged withdrawal. Concerned that his anti-communist activities would soon cost him his life, Dervish Rexheb fled Gjirokastër in late August 1944.<sup>52</sup> He headed for Shkodër and in November boarded a ship for Italy shortly before the communists seized the city.<sup>53</sup> He would never step foot in his homeland again. By September the partisans were in control of Gjirokastër and it is said that Baba Selim died the very day that they entered the city.

For the next four years Dervish Rexheb lived the life of a refugee in a camp for displaced peoples in Bari, Italy.<sup>54</sup> In 1948 an opening came for him to leave and he headed to Cairo, where one of the last functioning Bektashi lodges outside of Albania was found: the Kaygusuz Sultan Tekke. There he continued his spiritual advancement under the supervision of the *tekke's* guide, Ahmad Sîrri Baba (1895-1965).

In many ways Ahmad Sîrri Baba's life mirrored that of Dervish Rexheb's. Both men hailed from the same region of Albania, both were highly educated, both entered the Bektashi Order as teenagers, both lived as refugees in Italy (Sîrri Baba following the First Balkan War) and both ended up at the Kaygusuz Sultan Tekke. The idyllic atmosphere of the *tekke* in Cairo must have provided Dervish Rexheb with a degree of tranquil relief following nearly a decade of ordeal and hardship.

However this serenity did not last long. On March 18<sup>th</sup> 1947, the Bektashi community was rocked by the news that Dede Baba Abbas Hilmi had shot two pro-communist *babas* to death and then (according to government accounts) turned the gun on himself. For nearly a year, attempts to choose a new *dede baba* proved unsuccessful, until June of 1948 when Ahmet Myftar Baba, a man viewed by many as a communist stooge, was selected to head the world's remaining Bektashis. Yet this choice prompted a rift, in view of the fact that the Bektashis living in the Free World refused to acknowledge this selection. In response to what was seen as obvious communist interference in Bektashi affairs, a gathering was held in the Kaygusuz Sultan Tekke in January of 1949 during which Ahmad Sîrri Baba was elevated to the rank of *dede baba*. To a large extent, those Bektashis living outside of the communist world (in Egypt, Turkey and Greece) recognized him as supreme leader of the Bektashi Order and rejected Ahmet Myftar Baba.

This rift in the community was shortly followed by another, more immanent, crisis. In 1952 Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolution placed considerable financial strain on the Kaygusuz Sultan Tekke. King Faruk (who was of Albanian descent), along with many wealthy and influential Albanian émigrés, were forced to flee the country. A number of these individuals were frequent visitors to the *tekke* and had regularly sent stipends for its upkeep. In addition, Nasser's pro-communist regime nationalized the *tekke's* *waqf* property, further depriving it of income.

It was in this year - 1952 - that Dervish Rexheb's sister, Zejnep Çuçi (who was then living in New York) requested that he come to the United States. Given that the existing financial situation in the Kaygusuz Tekke was making it extremely difficult to support the number of dervishes living within, Dervish Rexheb accepted this invitation. In the first year after his arrival in America, he and his supporters labored to organize an effort to establish a *tekke* in the New York City area, but the political struggles within the Albanian community between anti-communist and pro-communist factions made this unfeasible.<sup>55</sup> An opportunity came, however, by way of Dervish Rexheb's developing connections with the Albanian community of Detroit.

<sup>52</sup> A significant number of Bektashi *babas* and dervishes were executed in the coming years by Hoxha's "people's tribunals".

<sup>53</sup> Italy had by then joined the Allies.

<sup>54</sup> Kallajxhi (1964: 67)

<sup>55</sup> See Trix (1995) for a detailed account of the opposition to Dervish Rexheb in New York.

## The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery: the "Teqe"

In October of 1953, a group of fifteen men, all from families with Bektashi backgrounds, met at a hall in Detroit to plan the opening of a tekke for Dervish Rexheb. They immediately launched a fundraising campaign and set up a board of directors, which included a president, a treasurer, a secretary and five council members.<sup>56</sup> The plan had widespread support throughout Detroit's Albanian community, for within the space of a few days approximately \$8,000 dollars had been raised. With this money the board began to look for a site where a tekke could be established. In due course, a suitable location was found some 15 miles outside of the city, in the agricultural community of Taylor Township. The board purchased an already existing farm that sat on 18 acres of land, the cost of which totaled \$25,000.<sup>57</sup> Following renovations and state approval of its non-profit status, The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery opened on May 15, 1954 with a ceremony attended by some 200 people.<sup>58</sup>

In conjunction with the establishment of the very first Bektashi *tekke* in the New World, came Dervish Rexheb's promotion to the grade of *baba*. He had spent the last thirty years of his life faithfully carrying out his duties as a dervish, but a new *tekke* necessitated a new *baba*. Baba Selim had intended to promote Dervish Rexheb to *baba* and had even planned for him to be his successor in overseeing the Asim Baba Tekke, although this was barred by the unanticipated events of war. According to convention, for a dervish to be elevated to the rank of *baba*, the consent of a *dede* was needed.<sup>59</sup> Approaching the Bektashi hierarchy in Albania for this was out of the question and it is unlikely that given Dervish Rexheb's wartime activities that they would have been permitted to entertain such a request in any case. At this time the only individuals



The Teqe, ca. 1960

with the authority of *dede* outside of the communist world were Said Seyfi Baba of the Durbali Sultan Tekke in Greece and, of course, Ahmad Sîm Baba of Cairo, who, as mentioned above, was recognized as the legitimate *dedebaba* by Bektashis outside of Albania.<sup>60</sup> It was the latter who sent Dervish Rexheb an *icâzetname* raising him to the rank of *baba* along with a letter of recommendation to the Albanian Bektashi community in America bestowing his heartfelt backing to all their endeavors.<sup>61</sup>

In the coming years, four Bektashi dervishes arrived in the United States and moved into the Teqe. The first to come were Dervish Arshi and Dervish Lutfi. Originally from the southern port

<sup>56</sup> Kallajxhi (1964: 2). The members of this committee were Gani Mosho (president), Nevrus Selfo (treasurer), Selman Zagari (secretary) and five board members: Jashar Petrusha, Qani Prespa, Dule Këlcyra, Abaz Myrtezaj, and Resul Shkëmbi.

<sup>57</sup> An additional \$5,000 was spent on renovations.

<sup>58</sup> Kallajxhi (1964: 3) and Trix (1994: 368). Trix erroneously relates that the event coincided with the Ashura ceremony. Actually, May of 1954 overlapped the month of Ramadan not Muharram.

<sup>59</sup> *Zëri Bektashizmës* 1/1: 4. "Vendimi i popullit i referohët Gjyshates me të voliteshme ose Kryegjyshates dhe ajo, po t'a pëlqejë, i lëshon dekretin e shenjtë (*ixhazetin*) dervishit të zgjidhur dhe e ermon Baban e Teqes vakante."

<sup>60</sup> Baba Qazim Bakalli (1895-1983) of Kosovo, who was raised to the rank of *dede* by Xhafer Sadik Dedebaba in 1945, was living as well but residing in communist Yugoslavia. There was also Ali Naci Baykal Baba (d. 1960) of Turkey, whose affiliation with the Albanian Bektashis since the time of Salih Niyazi Dedebaba remains unclear at this point.

<sup>61</sup> The Albanian text of this letter can be found in Kallajxhi 1964: 3-4.

city of Vlora, Dervish Arshi left Albania shortly after the war and went to live in the Durbali Sultan Tekke in Rimnio/Rini, Greece. Dervish Lutfi (originally from Gjirokastër) came from the Cairo *tekke* where he lived since 1929. A few years after these men entered the *Teqe*, an additional member of the Kaygusuz Tekke, Dervish Bajram (who was originally from Gjakova, Kosova) had arrived after being personally invited by Baba Rexheb. Finally, a Turk of Albanian descent, Dervish Bektaş Karamartin, arrived from Turkey after he had been made dervish during a visit to the country by Ahmad Sîm Baba.<sup>62</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s were a time of expansion and promise for the *Teqe*. Not only were a *baba* and four dervishes residing in it, but they had turned the 18 acres of property into a prosperous farm. Baba Rexheb and his dervishes worked the farm full-time, often with the help of occasional volunteers. The property included a large orchard of pear and apple trees (which partially exists today), an expansive vegetable garden, and wheat and barley fields. The yields of these provided food for the *Teqe*, and the surplus was sold in local farmers' markets providing supplementary income. The *Teqe* also had several head of cattle and sheep as well as some two thousand chickens. Each year for the festival of *Sultan Nevruz*, a great picnic was organized and the community partook in the bounty of the sacred farm. During the festival, individuals purchased lambs from the *Teqe* to be sacrificed, as was the age-old custom.<sup>63</sup> All of the property of the *Teqe* was deemed a *vakıf*, and all income went solely to its upkeep and expansion.

The original farm house that was now the *Teqe* was comprised of two floors. It had a living room, a kitchen, a room for Baba Rexheb, four rooms for the dervishes, a social room for entertaining guests, along with a sizeable basement. However in its nearly ten years of service, this space grew to be inadequate. In 1963 a massive expansion was carried out, during which time a new structure was added on to the east wing of the house. This two storied building included on its top floor, a spacious room for the *meydan*, next to which was a sitting hall that also contained the library (which contained a great number of books on Sufism that were part of Baba's collection) as well as additional guest rooms. Most of the lower floor was taken up by an enormous meeting hall with an attached kitchen, where, in the decades to come, hundreds would gather yearly for the holidays of *Aşura* and *Sultan Nevruz*. In addition a large metal *Hüseyini tâc* - painted in the traditional green and white colors of the Bektashis - was placed atop the new structure. This expansion was inaugurated on June 9, 1963, a day that also marked the commemoration of the *Aşura*.

Over the next two decades a small block of apartments was added to the *Teqe* grounds; two of which were initially intended for use by any future *baba* and his family and the other for "women".<sup>64</sup> These apartments were slowly rented out to private individuals, the income from which went to the *Teqe*.

In the summer of 1989, the portion of the *Teqe* that was the original farmhouse was completely replaced by a massive new structure composed of a splendid and open sitting room where Baba Rexheb received visitors, an expanded bedroom for him, several guestrooms on the second floor, and a kitchen/dinning hall in the basement where meals were served daily. Another significant structure was added to the property at this time: the large *türbe* where Baba Rexheb would be interred following his departure from this life.<sup>65</sup> By this time the rural setting of the *Teqe* had completely disappeared. Except for a row of fruit trees, all of the original farm, the

<sup>62</sup> Kallajxhi 1964: 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Bayraktari (1980: 22). Baba Rexheb's sister, Zejnep, resided in one of these during the final years of her life.

<sup>65</sup> Communication with Mr. Pertef Fama.

livestock and all the fields had been discarded. This was partially in response to Taylor's rapid urbanization over the years and partially due to the advanced ages of both Baba Rexheb and Dervish Arshiu.

By the time these latest renovations were in place, Baba Rexheb and Dervish Arshiu were the only members of the original group of five permanent residents living. Dervish Lutfi passed away in the early 1960s and Dervish Bektaş had long since returned to Turkey. It was intended that Dervish Bajram succeed Baba Rexheb as head of the *Teqe* and he was even raised to the rank of *baba* for this purpose. However Baba Bajram passed away in 1973.<sup>66</sup>

Despite this depletion in the number of dervishes, the quantity of *mühîbs* continued to steadily increase. Trix noted that in the 1950s there were some seventeen initiates and by the 1980s that number had increased to forty-three.<sup>67</sup> Many of these affiliates lived outside of the Detroit area (notably New York and New Jersey) and visited the *Teqe* only during major holidays. Those *mühîbs* who did live within driving distance came to the *Teqe* Thursday nights for *muhabet* and the *ayin-i cem* ceremony.<sup>68</sup>

Outside of religious services, *mühîbs*, *aşîks*, and other visitors could be found calling on the *Teqe* every day to sit with Baba Rexheb in the grand new sitting room or, on sunny days, outside underneath an expansive shade tree. Nor was this place exclusively for Bektashis or even for Muslims. As a center of Albanian-American life, Catholic and Orthodox individuals frequently visited and the representatives of their respective churches were always invited as guests of honor at yearly gatherings. The fact that he was greatly appreciated and loved by those within and without the community certainly says much about the strength of Baba Rexheb's character and personality. Even as his health began to fail in the last two years of his life and he was repeatedly hospitalized, Baba Rexheb continued to receive visits by the admirers and well-wishers.

Two significant events occurred during the final years of Baba Rexheb's life that are worth mentioning. Baba Rexheb had always maintained cordial relations with the Bektashi community of Turkey throughout his forty years at the *Teqe* and he often received them as guests. In June of 1990, Prof. Bedri Noyan, the only recognized *dedebaba* since 1967, visited the *Teqe* and bestowed Baba Rexheb with the rank of *dede* (*halife-baba*) and this *icâzetname* was hung with pride in the main sitting room of the *Teqe*.

Baba Rexheb also lived to see Bektashism re-established in his native Albania. Between 1967 and 1990 Albanians had to endure the most stringent anti-religion policies ever enacted by a government in modern times. In 1967 all religious institutions in Albania were ordered shut down and all clergy were directed to remove their garb and assume conventional lives. Those who refused were sent to forced-labor camps or simply executed. The destruction this caused to the Bektashi Order was dreadful. When religious freedom was restored 1991, there were only five *babas* and one dervish out of the hundred or so that were living in 1967.<sup>69</sup> In 1994, Baba Bajram Mahmutaj and Baba Reshat Bardhi made an extended visit to the *Teqe* and ties to the motherland were reestablished. And when Baba Rexheb finally "walked to the Truth" on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1995, these two men, along with Baba Selim of Kruja, Dervish Flamur Shkalla and 600 other people (including myself), were present at his *cenaze* prayer and interment in the *türbe*.

<sup>66</sup> Trix (1993: 106)

<sup>67</sup> Trix (1994: 374). This information conflicts with Bayraktari's observations that there were only two elderly *mühîbs* remaining in 1980. It would also be worth noting that to the best of my knowledge, Baba Rexheb had never promoted a *mühîb* to the rank of dervish.

<sup>68</sup> Personal communication with Ms. Zejnep Çuçi.

<sup>69</sup> Trix (1995: 53)

## Baba Rexheb's Writings

Baba Rexheb spent his years in the service of Bektashism as a guide, counselor, and a spiritual therapist. The primary means of transmission of the knowledge and wisdom he gathered through a lifetime of devotion was normally of a personal and intimate nature. Yet it is to the benefit of those who may have not had the opportunity to sit with him that did write.

Baba Rexheb's first major work was a translation of the *Vilayetname* of Haji Bektash Veli into Albanian. This work was made prior to his coming to the United States, at a time when he was living at the Asim Baba Tekke. To the best of my knowledge the manuscript was never published.

After having settled in the *Teqe* in 1954, Baba Rexheb immediately began the publication of a semiannual journal entitled *Zëri i Bektashizmës* ("The Voice of Bektashism"). In the lead article of the first issue, Baba Rexheb (the chief editor) described the reasons for the publication:

Bektashism is celebrated worldwide, particularly in our Albania, where it left an extraordinary trace. This is why at the time of the foundation of first Bektashi tekke here in the United States of America, a great curiosity was revitalized about it in many circles. All now want to know what Bektashism is; what its philosophical base is; what its past was in the world history and in particular, Albania. To truly satisfy these desires - with our small budget - we made the decision to publish our journal *Zëri i Bektashizmës*, which will strive to bring knowledge to all those interested, in all that they want to know about Bektashism, its religious principles and its history.<sup>70</sup>

Baba Rexheb had originally planned to keep the journal going into the foreseeable future and had suggested, given interest and funding, that the frequency of publication could be expanded to quarterly, and perhaps, even beyond. He also solicited articles from individuals with a talent for writing, stating that the pages of the journal were open to all articles "dealing with moral, social, and economic issues that promote the general good."<sup>71</sup> It seems, however, that the appeal for community participation was unsuccessful in moving individuals to participate, even financially. Only four issues of *Zëri i Bektashizmës* were ever published (1954-1955) and all the articles (barring letters) contained within were written by Baba Rexheb himself.<sup>72</sup>

Yet despite its fleeting existence, *Zëri i Bektashizmës*, proved to be a veritable goldmine of information on Bektashi history, doctrine and practice. Each of the four issues is a uniform 32-pages in length and, surprisingly, each contain articles in English. The reason for this may have been a reflection of Baba Rexheb's desire to make Bektashism accessible not only to second-generation English-speaking Albanian-Americans but to the general American public as well. The English pieces are direct translations of most of the Albanian articles that appear in each of the four issues. I have no knowledge at this point as to who the translator(s) of these articles was, though it is unlikely that Baba Rexheb's English at this stage in his life was voluble enough to allow him to undertake such a task.

All of the articles in the four issues of *Zëri i Bektashizmës* are of a religious nature and deal with the subjects of standard Islamic knowledge ("Why is the Qur'an respected?", "Islamic Pilgrimage", "The Ka'bah: The Sacred Place of Islam" etc.), the general concept of universal mysticism (Baba Rexheb writes in considerable detail about Vedic, Buddhist, Greek and Egyptian philosophies) and, obviously, Bektashism. Articles discussing the latter include "What the Great Writers say about 'Ali'", "How Bektashism was Organized" (which discusses the lives

<sup>70</sup> *Zëri i Bektashizmës*, 1:1, 1954, page 1

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>72</sup> Personal communication with Ms. Zejnep Çuçi.

of Haji Bektash and Balım Sultan), "The Ritual Garb of Bektashism", as well as articles on the *Aşura*, *Matem* and the celebration of *Sultan Nevruz*.

In 1970, some fifteen years after the last issue of *Zëri i Bektashizmës* came out, Baba Rexheb released his monumental *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* (Islamic Mysticism and Bektashism). This work stands witness to Baba Rexheb's vast knowledge of Sufism as well as Bektashi spirituality and its history. The book was undoubtedly written for the general public, as it is evident that Baba Rexheb intended it to be a textbook of sorts for the initiated as well as for those wishing a deeper appreciation of the Order.

*Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* was composed in Albanian and it consists of 389 pages. The book can be divided into two parts: the first (pages 7-102), in which a comprehensive outline of Sufi history and doctrine is given; and the second (pages 103-385), where the basics of Bektashi thought and the lives of prominent Bektashi mystics are discussed. In this way Baba Rexheb affords the reader a solid background in the Sufi milieu from which Bektashism emerged before transporting him or her to the finer points of the Order.

Baba Rexheb's presentation of Sufism encompasses a number of relevant topics. He begins by putting forth evidence for the validity of Islamic mysticism from the Qur'an, *Hadith Qudsi* as well as Prophetic *Hadith*. This is followed by an extensive overview of the development of early Sufism from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries *Hijrah*, which includes discussions on Rabia Adawiyya and Hallaj. Baba Rexheb follows this with a discourse on the mystical philosophy of Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, the great Sufi thinker of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. He then moves the reader into the classical age of Sufism, presenting the lives and teachings of such distinguished Islamic saints as Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi, and Ibn Farid. The portion of the work dealing with general Sufism ends with a discussion of the foremost orders (*tarikats*) in the world since the late Middle Ages: the Qadiri, Rifa'i, Badawi, Yesevi, Naqshibandi, Khalwati, Sa'di and Shadhili.

Having presented the contextual foundation for Bektashism, the second half of the book discusses major themes in the Bektashi spirituality, such as *edeb* (etiquette), admission into the order, the centrality of mystical love, as well as the *mürşid-mürîd* relationship. The concluding part of *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* (a solid 244 pages!) details the biographies and poetic verse of a long line of Bektashi personalities, beginning with Haji Bektash Veli and ending with the great *babas* of pre-WWII Albania, including that of Baba Rexheb's own *mürşid*, Baba Selim. These biographies are quite extensive and Baba Rexheb's translations of the poetry out of the original Ottoman Turkish and into Albanian present the reader not only with a deeper appreciation of Bektashi thought, but witness to Baba Rexheb's genuine mastery of the two languages.

In 1984, a partial English translation of *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* appeared under the title *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism*. This translation was prepared by the late Bardhyl Pogoni and it is 173 pages in length. Although the effort is to be commended, the work, in general, is lacking in many respects and it appears that the translator had little background in the subject matter. Much of the religious terminology is imprecisely rendered into English and entire passages from the original work are not translated at all, disrupting the flow of reading. *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism* cannot be considered a complete translation and it only covers the first half of Baba Rexheb's book (i.e. the portion Sufism) and a trace of the rudimentary doctrines of Bektashism found in the second part. It is clear that there were plans to finish the translation of the remainder of *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme*, for the cover of *The Mysticism of Islam and Bektashism* is labeled as "Volume I". Unfortunately this plan has come to naught.

## The Teqe after Baba Rexheb

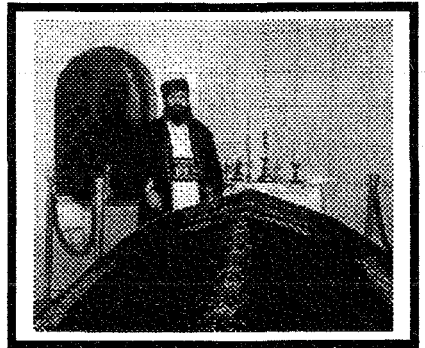
Before his passing away, the issue of who would succeed Baba Rexheb had been a source of immense concern. It seemed that as Baba became older the prospects for finding an individual capable to take his place grew dimmer and the continuance of the *Teqe* as a center for Bektashism came into question. This worry seemed to diminish greatly with the ending of religious prohibition in Albania and the reestablishment of the Bektashism there. In fact, in the year following his death, the *Kryegjyshata* (headquarters of the order in Tirana) sent 27 year-old Dervish Flamur Shkalla to oversee the spiritual life of the *Teqe* and its community.

Dervish Flamur was born into a mixed Sunni/Bektashi family and was from the important port city of Durrës. Following the collapse of the communist government and the reinstatement of religion, he displayed a great interest in Bektashism. In 1993 he took the vows of a *mücerred* dervish and enthusiastically worked to restore the spirituality that had been eroded by nearly twenty-five years of enforced atheism.<sup>73</sup> Dervish Flamur was sent to the *Teqe* in the year following the passing of Baba Rexheb and he was raised to the rank of *baba* shortly thereafter. For the next seven years, Baba Flamur brought renewed vitality to the Albanian-Bektashi community by means of his youthful energy and enthusiasm.

In addition to a revived sense of continuity, Baba Flamur brought noticeable renovations to the *Teqe* during his stay, primarily in ornamentation. The expressions of nationalism that were so prominently displayed in past decades were replaced with pictures and decorations of a more religious nature. One room on the first floor was used as an office, whose walls were graced with photos of Albanian *babas* and another Baba Flamur turned into a *kafe-odasi*, complete with a decorative *ocak*, low-lying divans and a plethora of Islamic and Bektashi wall ornamentations.

Despite this seeming reemphasis on the Bektashi nature of the *Teqe* at the expense of its Albanian character, Baba Flamur remained heavily involved in Albanian-American community affairs. In 1999 he was part of a delegation of Albanian-Americans lobbying the administration for intervention in the Serbian aggression against Kosova. He has met with Presidents Clinton and Bush as well as several leading senators and has since become an American citizen.

Nevertheless this seemingly optimistic chapter in the long story of the *Teqe* came to a close in 2003 with the resignation of Baba Flamur. This move was the end result of a gradual deterioration in relations between Baba Flamur and the *Kryegjyshata* of Tirana. There appears to have been a degree of contention between two factions within the Albanian Bektashi community since 1991 over the order's relation vis-à-vis the wider Islamic and Shi'i world. While the exact nature of the dispute is unclear at the moment, the first group (lead by Baba Reshat Bardhi and Baba Edmond Brahimaj) favored strengthening relationships with Iran and the Turkey's large Alevi community. The other, smaller group (centered on Baba Selim of Kruja) wanted the Bektashi community to stand on its own. Baba Flamur supported the stance of Baba Selim and he was outspoken and adamant in his opposition to what he saw as unnecessary and dangerous "foreign influences". This disagreement was seen as insubordination and it caused considerable strain with his relationship with the *Kryegjyshata*. In 2002 Baba Flamur traveled to Turkey and



Baba Flamur Shkalla in the  
Turbe of Baba Rexheb

<sup>73</sup> Personal communication with Baba Flamur Shkalla.



was well-received by the Bektashi community there. He was raised to the rank of *halife-baba* (*dede*) by Mustafa Eke Dede-baba, a move that clearly disturbed the *Kryegjiyshata*, given that the Turkish and Albanian *dedebabaliks* do not recognize the authority of the other.<sup>74</sup>

Another growing point of contention manifested itself between Baba Flamur and the board of directors regarding the position of the *Teqe* (and its members) vis-à-vis the Sunni community of Detroit and its *hoxhas*. Since the days of Baba Rexheb, many Albanian Bektashis maintained a degree of "dual affiliation" with both the *Teqe* and the mosque, often holding paid membership in both. This in fact, was the traditional pattern of institutional attachment in Ottoman Albanian society, where the *tekke* and the mosque played complementary roles. However during the post-Ottoman period Albanian Bektashis increasingly saw themselves as a distinct Islamic sect, rather than simply a Sufi *tarikat* within the framework of traditional Sunni Islam. In fact, Albanian Bektashism, in many ways, became more and more an ethnic badge (much like with the Alevis in Turkey) where an individual who was born into a family with Bektashi connections was automatically counted as "Bektashi". This distinction became even more visible in the two decades prior to the outlawing of religion by the Communists. In this regard, Baba Flamur was fervently opposed to what he saw as Sunni "interference" in the affairs of the community and over the years his contact with the mosque in Harper Woods gradually ground to a halt, especially after the arrival of the assistant *imam*, Shuaip Gërguri, whose attitudes towards Sufism seems to mirror that of Wahhabi fundamentalists.

Within months after his return to America from Turkey, the growing antagonism between Baba Flamur and the *Kryegjiyshata*, as well as the board, caused him to resign from the post he held for nearly eight years. Since that time he has relocated to another major US city. Baba Flamur remains determined to continue his work as a Bektashi *baba* and foresees the institution of a Bektashi Order in America that is inclusive of all peoples, not just Albanians. He is currently in the process of looking for a location to establish a new *tekke*.

Following Baba Flamur's departure, the *Teqe* board desperately tried to find a suitable replacement. Tentative leadership was handed over to the aged Baba Arshi (who had earlier been raised to the rank of *baba*) and the *Kryegjiyshata* sent its head secretary, Aliko Tomori, to manage the day to day affairs of the *Teqe*. In 2004 a new *baba* was sent from Albania, Sadik Baba, but, after a term of only a few months, he abruptly resigned from his position and left the country. In the fall of 2004 another *baba* was sent, Baba Xhemal Shkembli, but his tenure was also short-lived and he left the *Teqe* in the spring of 2005. At the time of this writing there is no other *baba* resident in the *Teqe* other than Baba Arshi, the last remaining member of Baba Rexheb's original group of dervishes.

Despite a seeming decline in activity, the *Teqe* perseveres in its role as a center of Albanian ethnic identity in America, albeit more in the form of a social club rather than a *tekke*. In 2004 the board of directors launched an unpretentious quarterly, four-page newsletter primarily used to announce community events and affairs. In the spring of 2004, the *Teqe* held a celebration to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding and in conjunction released a 50-minute video on the life of Baba Rexheb (in Albanian), which unfortunately is not available to the general public. Other recent events include a January 2005 visit by Canadian-born Prof. Robert Elsie, who presented a lecture on Albanian Literature. Also in 2005 the *Teqe* launched its website at [www.teqeusa.org](http://www.teqeusa.org). It is encouraging to note that all of these initiatives were

<sup>74</sup> Despite this apparent coolness in relations, Baba Reshat Bardhi traveled to Turkey in 1992 where he received an *icâzetname* for the rank of *halife-baba* from the late Bedri Noyan Dede-baba. With this authority he returned to Albania where he was then elevated to *dedebaba* by his own community.

undertaken primarily through the work of second-generation Albanian-American Bektashis, who, despite their seemingly meager awareness of the intricacies of Bektashi theology and history, continue to have a deep and sentimental connection to the *Teqe*.

Nevertheless religious activities within the *Teqe* have been in noticeable decline. The number of *mühids* is now less than twenty, and most of these are of the 'older' generation and foreign born. Younger generations of Bektashi Albanian-Americans seem to see the *Teqe* as an institution that reflects ethnic heritage rather religious belief. Even though the location continues to emanate an aura of sacredness (especially given the presence of Baba Rexheb's *türbe* on the property) there has been a general inability in the community to pass Bektashism on to the younger generations. This current is somewhat understandable given the long-established secretiveness of Bektashi religious doctrine in both Albania and in Turkey. Yet this has led to an impediment of sorts to the continuation of the order; for if even the broadest beliefs of the Bektashi Order are veiled away from non-initiates, how can one expect for any Bektashi identity to be passed on to future generations, especially in America where the pressure to assimilate is inescapable. If 'Bektashi' has evolved into an ethno-religious label, then what does it mean then to be Bektashi if one has no idea of what that means?

Outside of the infrequent contacts with Turkish Bektashis, the *Teqe* has remained a center for an exclusively Albanian spirituality. In the history of the *Teqe* there have been no American "converts" to Bektashism and though outside visitors have been welcomed in the past, only a few developed long-lasting relationships with the community. The reluctance to "reach out" to the greater American public has made the American-Albanian Bektashi community insular and, to an extent, static, verging on decline. It is the opinion of this writer that if no effort is made in the coming years to reach out the deeply assimilated younger generation of Albanian-American Bektashis in order to encourage them to take up the long-held traditions of their forefathers, coupled with a willingness to expand the ethnic boundary of membership beyond "Albanian-ness", that the life of the *Teqe* will rapidly grow fainter.

Before moving on it is imperative at this point to mention the work of Prof. Frances Trix and its relation to the *Teqe*. Not only has Prof. Trix chosen The First Albanian American Bektashi Monastery and its celebrated *baba* as a subject of academic study, but she developed a long and intimate relationship with the community that stretches back to the 1970s. Her book *Spiritual Discourse: Learning with an Islamic Master* was the first work to be published dealing exclusively with Baba Rexheb and his teaching methods, and it achieved widespread appreciation from both academia and the general public. In the course of her long relationship with Baba Rexheb, Prof. Trix recorded countless hours of dialogue, conversation, and instruction with him. Her future plans to produce a book on the wisdom and teachings of Baba Rexheb generated from these exchanges will certainly only increase the interest in Bektashism among spiritual seekers in the broader American public.

All the same there has been growing interest in Bektashism among non-Albanian Americans that has come about as a result of the widespread interest in Sufism in both academic and popular circles. In 2003 an American convert to Islam, Ashik Huso, launched a multilingual website ([www.bektashi.net](http://www.bektashi.net)) exclusively dedicated to information on the Bektashi Order.<sup>75</sup> In the early 1990s Ashik Huso regularly paid visits Baba Rexheb and had spent time in

<sup>75</sup> Several key Bektashi texts are currently planned to be released to the English-speaking public. The famed *Vilayetname of Haji Bektash Veli* has been translated by Ashik Huso into English and is awaiting publication. In addition, the *Risalat ul-Ahmadiyyah* of Ahmed Simi Dede is currently being translated into English by Ashik Huso and Muhammed al-Ahari. Plans to make a complete translation of Baba Rexheb's *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme* are currently underway.

1997 with Baba Tahir Emini of the Harabati Tekke in Macedonia. He has recently established warm relations with Ilhami Baba and his community in Ankara, where one dervish of American origin is already active. One of [www.bektashi.net](http://www.bektashi.net)'s more valuable features is that the virtually inaccessible writings of Baba Rexheb have been made available to a wider audience and this has sparked considerable interest in Bektashism among Muslims and non-Muslims.

The prospect for the increase in learning about Bektashism among the sizable Muslim community in the United States is highly likely given the post-9/11 shifting of outlook away from anti-Sufi fundamentalism toward more traditional, moderate and even liberal interpretations of Islam. Through contact with [www.bektashi.net](http://www.bektashi.net) a considerable number of individuals of a variety of backgrounds and geographical locations have expressed serious interest in the Bektashi Path.

Interest in Bektashi mysticism among spiritual seekers in North America and Western Europe partially stems from its own reputation. There is scarcely a book on Sufism or Sufi history that does not make mention of the Bektashi Order and its perceived liberality, tolerance, and heterodoxy. This unprompted advertisement will certainly bring about the spread of Bektashism in North America beyond the Albanian-American community. As this interest in the Bektashi Order takes root among the American populace, the *Teqe* of Taylor, Michigan will be faced with the challenge of defining itself as an ethnically-exclusive social club or as a spiritual institution that will rise to meet the needs of a wider Bektashi community. I firmly believe the latter to be completely consistent with both the universal nature of Bektashism as well as the vision of the *Teqe*'s originator, Baba Rexheb. It is apparent that Baba Rexheb visualized a future for Bektashism in America given that he made an effort to present English-language material to the public with the bilingual *Zëri i Bektashizmës* and permitted the partial translation of his *Mysticizma Islame dhe Bektashizme*. But nothing can be clearer in this regard than his words stated on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the *Teqe* in May of 1964,

The doors of Bektashi Tekkes were always open for all men, Albanian or foreign without distinction of religion, color, race or social class. 'The House of Haji Bektash is the house for all men,' said Naim Frashëri. This is the tradition that is being followed by our Tekke, which keeps its doors open for all. And following the way of Haji Bektash, it always preaches peace, love and brotherhood among all Albanians and all people.

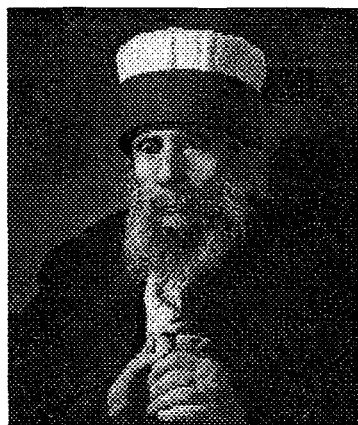


While on the Road I dared to tread  
There came a saintly man.  
He pointed out the way for me,  
And took my friendless hand.

Who is that one, I asked myself  
To which a voice did answer,  
"A hero you have found indeed!  
A Saint, a Shaykh, a Master!

In Allah's Month he came to be,  
With Sultan on the throne.  
But soon that would be toppled down  
For winds of change had blown.

His uncle took him by the hand  
And showed him to the Way  
The Shah of Khorasan did smile  
Upon that gracious day.



For years he noted down the words,  
The tekke true attended  
All those who sought the source of Peace,  
Their broken ways were mended.

Then came one day a red wind bloody  
And proclaimed itself a god.  
A hundred heroes met their fate  
With no more than wink and nod.

That man of God from Gjirokastër  
Refused to change his name  
And with permission from his murshid  
He left them to their game.

In Musa's land he found himself  
A servant to a Secret.  
And increased he on the dervish path  
With taj and haidariyyah.

A sister's call had beckoned him  
To leave the hallowed cave.  
And from the Nile he did move west  
Where bigger plans We'd laid.

His heart he made with brick and Stone  
And lovers gathered round.  
The Path of Hajji Bektash Veli  
In America was found."

To my surprise I saw myself  
In a place where none dared stand  
And gathered round me were the twelve  
In candle-lit meydan.

That man of God from Gjirokastër  
Who took my weary hand  
Pressed to my lips the drink of life  
With twelve did form a band.

The Kirkbudak soon did inflame  
And dem began to flow  
For all the pain of this dear life  
I couldn't let it go.

Look! O Baba Rexheb Ferdi  
Your glance has set me free!  
For this poor Ashik Huso found  
That your hand held the key!

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### Bidirinin Türkçe Özeti

Bektaşîlik tarihini bilenler için Detroit'teki Bektaşî tekkesinin kazandığı yüksek derecedeki popülerlik sürpriz değildir. Baba Rexheb tarafından 1954 yılında kurulan tekke Arnavut-Amerikalıların hayatında önemli bir yer kazanmaya başlamıştır. Ancak Baba Rexheb'in hayatı, öğretisi ve başarıları konusunda çok az bilgiye sahip bulunmaktayız. Amerikalılar yanında Arnavut asıllı Amerikalıların ikinci ve üçüncü nesli arasında Bektaşîliğe canlı bir ilginin varlığından söz edebiliriz. Bu Kuzey Amerika' da Bektaşî varlığının gelişeceğinin önemli bir göstergesidir. Bu tebliğ sosyal kontekste Detroit tekkesinin tarihi ve kurucusu Baba Rexheb'in hayatı ve eserlerini inceleyecektir. Ayrıca bu tebliğ Kuzey Amerika' daki Bektaşî topluluğunun sorunlarını ve günümüzde gelişmesi için sarfedilen çabaları da tartışacaktır.