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BEKTASHI CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ALBANIANS

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Abstract: This research aims to elaborate on the spread of the Bektashi order into Albanian lands and its interaction with local cultures, the conversion of Albanians into Bektashi, the role of Bektashism during Albanian National Awakening period, and Bektashi cultural heritage.

During the XIVth-XVth centuries the Ottoman Empire extended its territories towards the Balkans. Extension over Balkans was followed by spread of Islam, which, in Albanian lands, beside its main alternative - the Sunni, was followed even by sectarian movements like Bektashi, Halveti, Rufai, etc. Initially the Bektashism was portrayed as a liberal Islamic sect with many common features to Christianity. Such liberal and eclectic nature of Bektashi was attractive for a major part of Albanian inhabitants, where Christianity was coexisting through strong elements of pagan heritage of Pre-Christian period.

Therefore, the first converters were Bektashi followers since it was a tolerant order with many relations to Christian tradition and philosophy. Thus, the Bektashi became a spiritual movement for major part of Albanian people. During the XIXth century the Bektashism played an important role into Albanian National Movement. This was reflected in the cultural and political reborn of Albanian national sentiments and its fight for national emancipation.

Documentary sources and early research/works of various scholars were used to compile such this work. This work relies on both analysis and comparative methods.

Keywords: Hajji Bektash, Bektashi Order, Albania, Mohammed, Ali, Saint Spiridon, Dede, Ali Pasha Ioannina, Abdyl Frasheri, League of Prizren, Naim Frasheri.

BEKTAŞI KÜLTÜREL MİRASI VE ARNAVUTLAR

Özet: Bu çalışma Bektaşî tarikatının Arnavutluk topraklarında yayılışını, yerel kültürlerle etkileşimini, Arnavutların Bektaşî oluşlarını, Arnavut ulusal uyanışında Bektaşîliğin rolünü ve Bektaşîliğin kültürel mirasını değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. 14-15. yüzyıllarda Osmanlı İmparatorluğu topraklarını Balkanlara kadar genişletmiştir. Balkanlara yayılmayı Arnavutluk topraklarında İslam'ın yayılması takip etti. Sünniliğe alternatif olarak Bektaşî, Halveti, Rufai vb. mezhep hareketleri burada yayıldı. İlk başlarda Bektaşîlik Hristiyanlıkla olan birçok ortak özelliği ile birlikte İslam'ın liberal mezhebi olarak resmedildi. Bektaşîliğin bu liberal ve eklektik doğası Hristiyanlık ve Hristiyanlık öncesi pagan mirasının güçlü unsurlarının bir arada olduğu Arnavutluk halkının önemli bir kısmı için dikkat çekiciydi. Bundan dolayı ilk din değıştirenler Bektaşî oldular zira bu mezhep Hristiyan geleneği ve felsefesiyle ilişkilerinde müsamahakâr bir mezhepti. Böylece Bektaşîlik Arnavutluk halkının büyük bir kısmı için manevi bir hareket haline geldi. 19. yüzyılda Bektaşîlik Ulusal Arnavutluk Hareketi'nde önemli bir rol

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oyladı. Bu durum Arnavut ulusal duygularının kültürel ve siyasi olarak tekrar ortaya çıkmasında ve ulusal bağımsızlık savaşında kendini gösterdi.

Belgesel niteliği olan kaynaklar ve çeşitli bilim adamlarının ilk araştırma/çalışmaları bu çalışmanın derlenmesi için kullanıldı. Bu çalışma hem analiz hem de karşılaştırma metotları üzerine kurulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hacı Bektaş, Bektaşî Tarikatı, Arnavutluk, Muhammed Ali, Aziz Spiridon, Dede, Ali Paşa İonnina, Abdil Frasherî, Prizren Ligi, Naim Frasherî.

Introduction

First contacts between Islam and Albanian people can be found before the Ottoman conquest of Albanian lands; in the pre-Ottoman age Albanian lands had been visited by tradesmen, military forces or other representatives of Oriental-Islamic world. However, commencement of Islamization of Albanian people in the shape of a historical process is temporally related with deployment of Ottoman rule into Albanian lands.³

Falling under the Ottoman rule resulted with mass-Islamization of Albanians; various factors and circumstances influenced conversion of Albanians to Islam. Certainly, amongst other factors, nomad *dervishes* and religious mystical *tariqats* played an important role on spread of Islam and on cultural and intellectual advancement of Albanians.

The history of Bektashi Tariqat emerged through life and deeds of its founder, Haji Bektash Veli. Haji Bektash Veli as a great Sufi was educated by sheikhs of Jasevi Tariqat. We know only few things about the life of this man who left great traces on the history of Islam. All we know about the life of Haji Bektash Veli derives from numerous legends related to him. Vilayetnames, written two centuries after his death by his *murids* (other committed Sufis), are the oldest sources depicting the life of Haji Bektash Veli.⁴

Haji Bektash Veli and his real followers were people with sincere faith, who accepted Prophet Mohammed as a guide, while they shaped their life based on devotion to Prophet Ali. In order to avoid prosecutions by Ottoman authorities, fourteenth century Batini propaganda followers were sheltered in Bektashi *tekkes*, in different locations, and since that age they were able to deviate serious paragraphs of pure teachings of Haji Bektash Veli.⁵ Moreover, appearance and presence of Sufis' marginal propaganda (*hurufi*) in Anatolia by the end of XVIth century will influence teachings of Bektashi Tariqat. Those ideologies which were free of Islam grounding will influence on Bektashi followers who gradually deviated from the teachings of Haji Bektash Veli. Certainly, the region where Bektashi missionaries operated was another important element influencing Bektashi practices. For example, in the Balkan area inhabited by Christian people Bektashi preachers had to exercise Christian practices in order to adopt people, by using other words to make Islam or Bektashism more attractive for inhabitants of those areas.

The ideology and organization of the Bektashi order were systematized and structured by

³ Histori e Popullit Shqiptar, Akademia e Shkencave te Shqiperise, Toena, Tirane, 2002, p. 587.

⁴ Metin Izeti, Kllapia e Tesavvufit, Fakulteti i Shkencave Islame Shkup, 2004, p. 177.

⁵ OpCit, p. 178.

Balim Sultan in the sixteenth century after which this order took its final shape.⁶

The Bektashi Order was even heterodox in essence, thanks to an alliance with Ottomans and claims on its origin through Caliph Ali and Ebu Bekir (also, Abu Bakr), who was the loveliest successor of the Prophet amongst Sunni Muslims, and many doctrines they made contradictory to Sunni interpretations, the nonetheless obtained the approval from Ulama. The Order was wide-spread through nomads of East Anatolia and in South-Eastern Europe.⁷

Conversion of Albanians into Bektashi

Based on documentary sources, Bektashi Tariqat was spread into the Balkans through early Bektashi leaders related to the name of Sari Saltuk and through missionaries delegated by Sejji Ali Sutan's Tekke in Dimoteka.

First missionaries arrived in Albanian lands under the name of Christian Orthodoxy. One of those missionaries who spread Bektashism in Albania was known by the name of Saint Spiridon and he corresponded to personality of Sari Saltek. Hiding under orthodoxy facilitated acceptance of Islam (initially in the shape of Bektashism) before invasion of imperial military forces.

This holy man, Sari Saltek or Saint Spiridon, during the thirteenth century established an institution in Corfu, which operated as a Christian Orthodox Church with its branches in Skopje, Kruja, Ohrid, Ioannina, Sarajevo and Budapest.⁸

Although there are many scripts about Sari Saltek in the world, but unavailable here, his historical and missionary background still remains obscure, covered by mystical and mysterious elements representing a specific difficulty. There are many theories about the life and deeds of Sari Saltek, even leading to that point considering Sari Saltek as a real Sunni preacher and that various *tariqats* had appropriated his name to adopt masses. This is the reason that majority of *tariqats* in Balkans had appropriated the name of Sari Saltek. But, it is true that Sari Saltek is very famous amongst Bektashi followers in the Balkans and he was known as a member of Bektashi Order. Some sources describe Sari Saltek as a hero, both as a dervish and fighter who spread the Islam through the Europe. He, dressed as a Christian monk, preached Islam in churches and by his wooden sword murdered monks who contested him.⁹

According to other sources, Sari Saltek was used to live in a cave near the city of Kruja, at the place known as *Mali i Sari Saltekut* (Mountain of Sari Saltek), while a polyphonic Albanian song described him as:

“At the Corfu he showed up alive
When Christians saw him
Spiridon arrived, they said”.¹⁰

⁶ Hist. e Pop. Shqiptar, p. 594.

⁷ Stanford J. Shaw, *Historia e Perandorisë Osmane dhe Turqisë Moderne, Vëllimi I*, Jehona Study Center, Tiranë, 2006, p. 192.

⁸ Ali Tyrabiu, *Història e Bektashinjëve*, Tiranë, 1929, p. 49.

⁹ Halil Inalxhik, *Perandoria Osmane 1300-1600*, Drita e Jetës, Gjilan, 2002, p. 244-245; Nexhat Ibrahim, *Islami në trojet iliro-shqiptare gjatë shekujve*, Logos-A, Shkup, 1999, p. 238.

¹⁰ Shyqri Hysi, *Misioni Bektashian*, Tiranë, 2004, p. 18.

It makes sense, under such circumstances, that early Bektashi missionaries operated under cover as Christian missionaries.

The spread of Islam into Albanian lands was a phenomenon caused by the interaction of numerous elements of various characters: politic, economic, cultural and religious. The Ottoman Empire was an Islamic state which recognized the right of other non-Islamic communities to live within the borders of this empire; those communities had to recognize Sultan's authority and to pay a certain tax as a "protection" under Sultan's authority. Thus, even in Albania Ottoman conquest was not associated with use of organized and direct force, thus neither aiming to eradicate existing religion (Christianity) nor imposing Islam.¹¹

Turkish Islam has always operated at two levels; first, at a formal legal level, as a dogmatic state religion in schools and hierarchy; secondly, at a popular mystical level through intuitive mass beliefs, which was expressed through the great order of dervishes.¹² Therefore, when Albanian lands fell under the Ottoman rule, it was easier for missionaries of different sects such as the Bektashi, Halveti, Rufai, etc, to appear in Albania and this generated conversion of local population into Islam; on the other hand consolidation of Bektashi order in Albanian lands started up.

Bektashi-Janissary relations played an important role regarding the presence of Bektashism in Balkans. As a result breakthrough of Janissary corps was followed by Bektashi missionaries; but sometimes it happened the other way, nomad dervishes went through lands which were not already invaded by Ottomans thus preparing the field and local population for a possible spiritual admission to Islam.

During the sixteenth century for the first time an Albanian man was put on the head of Bektashi Order. He was Server Ali Pasha, who was born in Tetovo, where he built the well-known *tekke* of Sersem Ali Baba Dexhah (Harabati Baba).¹³

During the XVIIth-XVIIIth centuries *tekke* of Turballi in Thessaly played an important role in spreading the Bektashi order through Albanian lands. This can be heard in several Albanian songs, while one of them says:

"Hey Turballi
Through dervishes you educate and
Sending them into Albania
You convert Albanians into Bektashi".¹⁴

Besides other religious orders the eighteenth century held the development of Bektashism and its massive spread amongst all levels of Ottoman society.

Tekkes which were built in numerous locations are evidence of a presence of those mystical sects into Albanian lands. Amongst other Islamic sects, Bektashism gained popularity and was widely spread through Albanian lands, especially in south.

¹¹ Hist. e Pop. *Shqiptar*, p. 596

¹² Bernard Lewis, *Lindja e Turqisë Moderne, Shtëpia e Librit dhe Komunikimit*, Tiranë, 2004, p. 452.

¹³ A. Tyrabiu, *Historia e Bektashinjëve.....*, p. 60-61.

¹⁴ OpCit, p. 65.

Kruja was one of the most famous centres of Albanian Bektashism; some interesting evidence like grave stones with Bektashi symbols bearing dates 1717-1728 clearly demonstrate the presence of this order at least in first decades of the 18th century. Connections between Kruja and Bektashism are more obvious if you consider the fact that beside small *tekkes* it was a mountain and a holly location bearing the name of Sari Saltek, a well-known pilgrimage centre not only for Bektashi followers, but also for people of other beliefs.

Why Bektashism was Acceptable for Albanians

In the beginning Bektashism was portrayed as a liberal Islamic sect and in many aspects close to Christianity. Bektashism relied on three main elements: truth (*hakikat*), knowledge (*marifet*) and law (*Sharia*). Those elements are considered as grounds of this belief and as leading principles of human deeds. Thus the followers of this belief were asked to be upright and sincere everywhere and at all times, to strive for education and to respect laws of area they live.¹⁵

Bektashism was the main element related to the spread of Islam amongst Christian population in Rumeli. Due to a conflict with Islam, Bektashism gained a religious tolerance in regards to Christianity, even having some common points in religious life. The liberal and eclectic character of Bektashism made it very acceptable and attractive for Balkans, particularly for Albanians where the Christian religion co-existed with strong elements of pagan heritage of pre-Christian age. For example, Bektashism was tolerant to all other religions, paid more importance to inner and not to outer world, didn't oblige people to exercise some of the Islamic practices like praying and fastening, allowed the use of wine, allowed uncovered woman and allowed women to keep company with males. The efficient propaganda of Bektashi leaders attracted Christians into this mysterious and democratic sect, which, for them, was not so different from Christianity.¹⁶

Furthermore we have to emphasize circumstances under which this nation lived. Arberit, as Albanians were named in Middle Age, lived in borderland between two Christian religions, between Catholicism and Christian Orthodoxy. Since the year 1054 distinctions between those two religions got deeper and brutal. This period was marked as a period of anarchy in the field of Christian religious organization in Balkans and therefore Islamization of Albanians more or less was an estrangement or boycott against Christianity - initially against Greek, Serbian or Bulgarian orthodoxy which aimed towards ethnic assimilation of Albanians.

It was not important for Bektashi followers which holy scriptures, Bible or Kur'an, the connection with God is established. In this manner it was possible for Christians or Jewish people to adhere into Bektashism, regardless the holy scripture they use. Only the final result was important: to be good and perfect people.¹⁷

The simplicity of the Bektashi Order made it very similar to the Protestant Christianity, which also refused ceremonies, formalities, hierarchy and adoration of idols.¹⁸ Thus in many reports by the British Bible Society which related to Albanians during the nineteenth century,

¹⁵ Hist. e Pop. *Shqiptar*, p. 594.

¹⁶ H. Inalxhik, *Perandoria.....*, p. 257.

¹⁷ A.Q.SH, Fondi 483, Dosja 1, viti 1932, p. 1.

¹⁸ OpCit, p. 2.

Bektashi followers were described as “Protestant Mohammedans”.¹⁹

Scientists like Jacob and Hasluck emphasized that Bektashism in the Balkans was influenced by local paganism and Christianity, and that some Bektashi ceremonies and practices derived from the Christianity. For example, the Bektashi belief reflects the concept of the Trinity, and that God, Mohammed and Ali are one; bread, wine and cheese were offered to people when they initially adhered to *tariqat*; students accepted their faults in front of the sheikh in a manner reminiscent of Catholic confessional.²⁰

The result of their philosophy was a moral orientation: “God is everywhere, but only as an ideal man you may see the light of the God”. This was a primary element regarding the tolerance towards the Christianity, but later on this became an element for a successful spread amongst the Albanians. The Bektashi order gained popularity in part because all literature, songs, prayers and doctrines were translated into native languages of local followers, which didn’t happen with Sunni Islam or other Islamic sects.

Another similarity with the European Renaissance was the fact that Bektashi Order considered Mohammed as the last prophet who continued job of other predecessor prophets and who brought only external changes which did not affect the internal essence of the overall holy teachings. For Bektashi followers, Prophet Mohammed symbolized perfection, while Ali was man of deeds and Ali was the one who organized a secret society aiming to preserve the holy truth.²¹ This sect had its motto: “Belief-brotherhood-integrity”. So this means that the philosophy of Bektashi relied on same principal values like European civilization during the XVIIIth-XIXth centuries.

The active missionaries of the Bektashi and their aim to include even non-Muslim practices made them the main converters of Christian peasantry in the Balkans, which provided them a considerable power. On the other hand during the decadency of empire Janissary members penetrated within the Ottoman people as handicraft or tradesmen, so as a result at the same time the Order spread its influence to the masses.

If you analyse the activities of early dervishes in Balkans you can see that they didn’t appear only as religious figures, but they also cultivated lands, established villages and cities, and dealt with science and art. In the early period, upon establishment of the Order, the *Tekke* was obliged to deal with agriculture, to seed and harvest, and to distribute products to poor people. In this way they tried to offer a human love based on divine principles to people who never tested love, respect and mercy thus facilitating them to perceive Islam and a Sufi dimension of Islam. In addition to the overall social function of Sufi’s, they even tried to build the personality of certain individuals and to instruct them to accept the Creating Power as well as to arrange their life in compliance to principles introduced by Kur’an.

Several centuries later, upon consolidating the Ottoman rule in Albania, *tariqats* played an important role in craftsmanship and economic life of the people, respectively they were closely related to different occupations. First of all, *tariqats* played a primary role on spiritual headships of guilds. Thus for centuries Bektashi kept under control and inspired guilds of butt,

¹⁹ BSA/D1/7/117, Cambridge University Library, Bible Society Agency, p. 22.

²⁰ H. Inalxhik, *Perandoria*, p. 257.

²¹ A.Q.SH, Fondi 483, Dosja 4, p. 3.

wool and hat makers, etc. Ideology and religious attitudes of those guilds were closely related to these sects, which, even relying on main principles of Islam allowed a wide freedom for deeds and religion.²²

Bektashism assimilated many elements of popular Christianity and provided an important link between Turkish and Christian inhabitants of the empire, facilitating their conversion into Islam. Bektashi were closely connected to the Janissary corps and served as leaders for newly Islamized recruits.²³

Since the sixteenth century dervishes who lived in Tekkes had to remain single; in many ways Bektashi shelter centres looked like monasteries. Influence over their area was important for Bektashi; locations which were considered as holy places for the Christian people were suitable for Bektashi to build tekkes or to organize pilgrimage, and to adopt all old Christian or pagan legends related to these locations.²⁴

It is well known that Bektshi relied on the selected corps of Janissaries. Janissaries consisted of Christian boys who were taken by Turks and who were converted into Islam, but anyway it was not easy for them to forget their previous religious background; therefore it was the Bektashis who were the ones who established a synthesis and a *Modus Vivendi* which made them able to conduct a meaningful cohabitation acceptable within their concepts, and in special service that they exercised a form of specific religious order.²⁵

The Albanian National hero of this period, Georg Castriot Scanderbeg, was living in the Sultan's court as a vassalage guarantee from his father to the Sultan. The entire Christian elite under Ottoman rule was educated and prepared to serve to Sultan.²⁶ For sure they had been converted into Bektashi which was a leading ideology for Janissaries. Anyway, this particular fact is not mentioned in official history of Georg Castrioti Scanderbeg even though there are certain proofs that while being a member of Janissary corps within Sultan's court Scanderbeg and his nephew Hamza were converted into Bektashi.²⁷

The rhythm of Bektashism spreading amongst Albanians accelerated during the second half of century eighteenth and first decades of century nineteenth, when the above-mentioned Order obtained support from Ali Pasha Tepelena, ruler of Pashalik of Yanina. Being in opposition of the central administration, Ali Pasha spontaneously approached to Janissaries who were also an opposed to the Sultan's rule. Through this action he expressed his adoration to the Bektashi Order, which was a religion of Janissaries. However, it was claimed that Ali Pasha accepted Bektashism and did everything to enforce this Order in Albania.

Relationships between Ali Pasha and Bektashism are mostly related to a politic background. Ali Pasha accepted and supported Bektashism because his ideological and organizational power supported his politics in general. Ali Pasha had an influence towards Bektashi clergy

²² Zija Shkodra, *Esnafet Shqiptare* (Shek. XV-XX), Akademia e Shkencave e RP të Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 1973, p. 274.

²³ B. Lewis, *Lindja*, p. 454

²⁴ OpCit, p. 258

²⁵ Moikom Zeqo, *Bektashizmi dhe shqiptarizmi, Sesioni Shkencor Ditët e Naimit*, Tetovë, 2000 (www.ditetenaim-it.org/simp.doc).

²⁶ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Skenderbeu*, Tiranë, 2008, p. 50-51.

²⁷ M. Zeqo, *Bektashizmi* (www.ditetenaimit.org/simp.doc).

and by adoration of new members in Bektashi and through this he would gain much more political power.

As a result, during the age of Ali Pasha the capital of Pashalik, Yanina, was turned on into a haven for many dervishes and missionaries of Bektashi Order who, due to different reasons, left Istanbul or other provinces of Ottoman Empire. Within the territory of Pashalik Bektashi dervishes found proper conditions and a privileged treatment from Ali Pasha. They received money and houses, sometimes large lands as well. Thus, Sheikh Bursali, who came from Anatolia, leader of a tekke in Preveza, obtained an annual income of 20.000 francs and an expensive house; another dervish who came from Morocco, Seid Ahmet Effendi (a diplomatic missionary of Ali Pasha) obtained an annual income of 20.000 francs and large lands, at the same time he was appointed as a Sheikh for a tekke near the city of Parga. Sheikh Ahmet from Syria was another Bektashi scholar living in the Pashalik of Yanina; he was a leader of a tekke located in the entrance of above-mentioned city, he also obtained considerable income and lands.²⁸

According to some Bektashi statistics, in 1826 there were 100.000 Bektashi followers in Albania.²⁹ The origin and establishment and institutional consolidation of Bektashi Order in Albania dates from the age of Ali Pasha Tepelena for the above mentioned reasons.

Role of Bektashism during the National Awakening Period

1826 was crucial for the Albanian-Ottoman and the Ottoman-Bektashi relationships. During this year Sultan Mahmud ordered the creation of a new army; furthermore the Sultan ordered to disband Janissary corps and Bektashi Order. Having realized that such actions will face an opposition, the Sultan ordered the killing of Janissaries (18.000) and destruction of their Tekke or their transfer to Naqshiband sect.³⁰

In such repressive conditions, following the year 1826 when the Janissary army and Bektashi Order were disbanded officially, this phenomenon might have been a reality only in Istanbul and other provinces where the central Ottoman authority exercised a power or direct rule. Since Albanian lands were outside of above-mentioned territories and since the Ottoman authority was almost negligible in Albania, Bektashi followers continued to live freely in Albania, enjoying a secure environment in comparison with their fellowships in other provinces of Ottoman Empire.

Almost at the same time, the Ottoman Empire implemented some reforms aiming to create a modern state based on European model. But this was opposed even by Albanians who were used to living almost independently. Formally, the Albanian-Ottoman conflict started in 1822 where by military force a semi-autonomous state of Ali Pasha Tepelena had been run down, the one who had supported spread of Bektashi Order through the south of Albania.³¹

In the first half of the nineteenth century Shemin Baba from Kruja was the most famous Bektashi leader, supposedly he had converted even Ali Pasha Tepelena to Bektashi. The Tekke

²⁸ Hist. e Pop. *Shqiptar*, p. 595.

²⁹ Roberto Moroco Dela Roka, *Kombësia dhe feja në Shqipëri 1920-1944*, Tirane, 1994, p. 38.

³⁰ A. Tyrabiu, *Historia e Bektashinjëve.....*, p. 71.

³¹ A.I.H Tiranë, Fondi A-III-125, p. 8.

of Kruja had 360 holy tombs and it was known as a small Khorasan. In addition to Mecca, Tekke of Haji Bektashi, and Qerbela, even the Mountain of Tomorr located in southern Albania is considered by Bektashis as a holy place. Having a strong support from the Albanian people, Bektashi followers were used to operate freely in Albania, but they had to conceal themselves as dervishes of the Naqshiband sect when they passed through Thessaloniki.³²

The second half of the nineteenth century was even more crucial for the Albanian people as well as for Bektashi Order. In the year 1874 Sultan officially delegated the title Sheikh Naqshiband to family of Celepinjs, while through this decision the title of Dede for Bektashi spiritual leaders became outlawed.³³

At the same time, during the Eastern Crises (1878-1881), the Albanians perceived that the Ottoman Empire could no longer protect them. Bektashi followers were very active during this period. One of first meetings during this period was held in the Tekke of Frasher. Furthermore, the spiritual leader of Albanian Prizren League (1878-1881), Abdyl Frasheri, was a Bektashi follower as well.³⁴ Tekkes were places where the Albanian leaders were hidden to avoid persecution of Ottoman authorities; such example is event with Sheikh Omer - the President of Prizren League, than with Haji Osman Effendi, etc.³⁵

After the Eastern Crises (1878-1881) the Albanian National Movement was orientated towards cultural and spiritual activities as a first step towards freedom. Tekkes were transformed into Albanian national schools where the teaching in Albanian through the alphabet of Istanbul (*Greek and Latin letters*) was organized; this alphabet was prohibited by the Ottoman authorities.³⁶ In this way Tekkes became centre of Albanian culture, contributing to the cultural and spiritual renaissance of Albanians. This is more understandable when in each Tekke entrance you may read following text: "There is no state without religion".

According to foreign travellers who passed through Albanian lands, Albanian Bektashi followers differed in two elements from other Bektashis: they didn't maintain an aristocratic feeling of Islam and they were Albanians first before Bektashi. About the contribution of Bektashi on the national cause Eqrem Bey Vlora said: "Their teachings create a spirit of unity which may be very important for a nation like Albanians. They are used to give advices, instructions and reciprocal support amongst people; in their tekkes, meeting places, they create a ground for national ideas and intentions".³⁷

But anyway, when we talk about Bektashism, it is impossible to neglect the contribution of Frasheri brothers, particularly Naim, who besides being a Bektashi follower was also an author of several works related to Bektashi Order. During the nineteenth century, establishment of neighbouring countries were followed by an increase of their animosity against Albanians. In order to avoid assimilation, Bektashi followers started to translate religious literature. Trying to enforce national feelings through the Bektashism, Naim Frasheri published his well known

³² A. Tyrabiu, *Historia e Bektashinjëve.....*, p. 78.

³³ OpCit, p. 83.

³⁴ George Gawrych, *Gjysmëhëna dhe Shqiponja (1874-1913)*, Tiranë, 2007, p. 79.

³⁵ A.I.H Tiranë, Vj-3-4 (HHStA, PA, A).

³⁶ Jashar Rexhepagiqi, *Dervishët dhe Teqetë në Kosovë, Sanxhak dhe rajone tjera*, Pejë, 2003, p. 233.

³⁷ Peter Bartl, *Myslimanët shqiptarë në lëvizjen për pavarësi kombëtare*, Dutoria, Tiranë, 2006, p. 134.

works like “*Qerbelaja*”, “*Fletore e Bektashinjeve*”, “*Histori e Skenderbeut*” and “*Esenca e Kur’anit*”, etc.

Furthermore, Naim has published a Bektashi magazine to further these purposes.³⁸

Naim was a great supporter of teaching in the Albanian language; he even proposed to hold religious ceremonies in Albanian language.

Since the nationhood of the Balkan states were closely related to religion, and the nationalist motto “there is no state without religion” was used by Naim as well, he used Bektashisms as a unifying religion for the Albanians.

Naim attempted to mobilize the Shii and anti Sunni orientation of the Bektashi in order to express his opposition against the Ottoman rule and to articulate a specific (Muslim) identity for Albanians. He hoped that Bektashi, being heterodox and syncretistic may go beyond religious divisions in Albania and establish a bridge between the differences of Islam and West. Therefore, when he wrote the poem about Scanderbeg, he easily found identification with Scanderbeg, based on a synthesis between the main spiritual concepts of the Christianity and Islam.

Naim’s brother, Sami Frasheri, was an initiator for creation of *Shoqerine e Stambollit* (*Society of Istanbul*) and he was author of “*Shqipëria çka qenë, ç’është dhe çdo të bëhet*” (1899) which became a manifesto for the Albanian National Movement. Sami (1850-1904) wrote even in the Turkish language thus giving a great impact on Turkish language studies. His most famous works in Turkish language are: “*Kamus i Turki*” (1899-1900) – as a first etymological dictionary in Turkish, “*Kamus ul alam*” (1891-1898) – as a first historical-geographical encyclopaedia in the Ottoman Empire, then he translated a History of France, some works from French language, etc. In addition Sami wrote many articles in the Albanian language.³⁹

Bektashi played an important role within the Albanian nationalist movement even at the end of the nineteenth century. The Albanian Bektashi tekkes, which very often were places of prayer for Muslims and for Christians as well, were known in general as centres of Albanian nationalistic activities. Furthermore, the Order had an important role in the creation of illegal schools and distribution of books in Albanian language and at the same time giving an active support to nationalistic armed groups. When a debate about the alphabet for the Albanian languages was ongoing it was quite well known that Bektashi supported use of Latin letters, as opposed to other Muslims who supported use of Arabic letters.

But, regardless of such great contributions of Bektashism for the Albanian cause, it is very important to emphasize that the Albanian nationalism and the building of an Albanian state was not only a merit of Bektashism, but it was a result of all political and religious elements that zealously fight for the national cause.

It seems that Bektashism had close connections to the Young Turks; many leaders of the Young Turks like Talat Pasha and Riza Tevfik, were members of this brotherhood.⁴⁰

³⁸ Nexhip P. Asllan, Nesip Kaçi, *Shqiptarët në Perandorinë Osmane*, Albin, Tiranë 1997, p. 32.

³⁹ *Historia e Letërisë Shqipe I-II*, Prishtinë, 1968, p. 450-451.

⁴⁰ B. Lewis, *Lindja*, p. 456.

The contribution of the Bektashi doesn't end here; it continued in other phases of National Awakening. On the eve of Independence of Albania Bektashis' were a considerable, numerous force with significant political influence.

Thanks to Congress of Lushnje, held in 1920, through which all religions were protected, the Albanian Bektashism continued through a Statute and a Council; such bodies were advanced each year. Since this period, beside the Sunni Islam, Catholicism and Christian Orthodoxy, Bektashism was considered as the fourth official religion in Albania. But anyway, it is worthy to mention that in entire lands inhabited by the Albanians the number of Bektashi followers never exceeded 15% of overall Albanian population.⁴¹

Many Bektashi leaders died for freedom and for nation relying on prophetic quote: "There is no nation without religion".

Later, many Tekkes were centres of resistance against Italians and Germans during the Second World War.

In 1925, when Ataturk implemented strict secular reforms aiming to create a modern Turkey, the headquarters of World Bektashi Community moved into Albania. Not many people know that a small country like Albania is a worldwide headquarters for Bektashis. It is worth mentioning that even during the age of atheism in Albania other countries didn't attempt to take over the headquarters from Albania.

Literature

The Albanians who received Islam, particularly those receiving Bektashism, started to follow Turkish-Ottoman schools, madrasahs and tekkes which were transformed into national houses. Those social-moral institutions of Islamic character in general were spread out through cities. The Albanians liked such cultural nests because those places were free of dogmatism and didn't force people to follow religious obligations within mosques, tekkes, etc. Thus, through schools, madrasahs and tekkes, the Albanians were introduced with Turkish-Ottoman language, culture and literature.

Inspired by their adorers, the Albanian Bektashi poets, known as Bejtexhi, wrote Albanian poems through Arabic letters. In this manner some Bektashis became pioneers of Albanian culture during the eighteenth century.

Albanian literature in Arabic letters didn't emerge occasionally. This literature emerged in urban areas where many intellectuals lived and there reigned mass of people who knew Arabic writing, which were in environments characterized by the presence of many madrasahs where cultural circles were formed. Such literature was needed at the time, because the authors who wrote in Arabic perceived that communication and transmission of messages to masses would be more efficient if their native language is used. As a result a new Albanian poetry style was formed, which was influenced by Islamic-Oriental poetry in the aspects of motives and techniques. This kind of poetry was developed for two centuries; from this period we inherit quality poetries bearing great artistic value. The most famous authors of this style were: Ibrahim N ezim, Hasan Zyko Kamberi, Muhamed  ami, Zenel Bastari, Dalip Frasheri, etc, who enriched Albanian literature by new to genres and types like recital, satire, *mesnevia*

⁴¹ M. Izeti, *Kllapia*, p. 184.

(poem), *kasida* (long poem), *ilahi* (religious poem), etc.

In the beginning of nineteenth century a rich religious literature in the Albanian languages was developed in tekkes of the Bektashi Order. The most important works are two historical poetries in style of epos “*Hakidaya*” of Dalip Frasheri (1842) and “*Muhternameya*” of his brother Shahin Frasheri (1868).

“*Hakidaya*” describes the holy history of Islam, particularly the history of Bektashism. The main story relies on tragedy of Qerbelaja, with the main figure being Imam Husein. Dalip wrote this poetry based on work of Fuzulli, the famous poet from Azerbaijan of the fourteenth century. Same story was treated even in the “*Myhternameja*”, but here main topic is the war between sons of Ali and their rivals.⁴²

Bektashi covered following topics: love, beauty, nature, religion, religious history, and events of time.

Another example of Bektashi civilization was freedom of expression in the field of painting. The painting of human beings was allowed within their tekkes, although it was prohibited by official Islam. This supported development of art at almost the same level as in European countries. Logically, the Bektashi Order became a spiritual ground for urban cultural and aristocratic Albanian elite during this period.

Bektashi Material Heritage

The History of Albanian Architecture emphasizes that different mystical doctrines had an important role in the Islamization of Albania; those doctrines were introduced by missionaries who came from abroad who built tekkes and shrines, initially in the city and then in village. Current Tekkes are relatively new in age, since the old tekkes - due to construction material - didn't survive.

Although, as mentioned above, the Bektashi tradition in Albania might have been even earlier (end of the fourteenth – beginning of the fifteenth century), the known historical sources register traces of such tradition since the second half of seventeenth century. Before this period we have some traditions related to Sari Saltek. Within the Albanian lands the traces of Sari Saltek are found in the *Mali i Sari Saltekut* (Mountain of Sari Saltek) 600 meters above the city of Kruja, where there is also the Tekke of Sari Saltek. There are the traces of his foot. Identical traces, thought to belong to Sari Saltek, were found even in Guricaj near the Durrës, a location named German in Opoja area, in the land of Zejnel Aga in the exit of Peja, in the village of Prilep in Deçan area, etc.⁴³ The Ottoman geographer Evlija Celebi, who travelled through Albania, emphasized presence of some holy places for dervishes like tekkes, shrines, etc, within the Albanian cities. The following objects were mentioned: Tekke of Haji Bektash Veli in Kanina of Vlora constructed by Sinan Pasha for charitable purposes, and Baba Sultan or Kuz Tekke in the city of Vlora. The presence of Bektashism during this period was observed even in the city of Gjirokastra where most of inhabitants were used to sit down and stand up

⁴² *Historia e Letërisë Shqipe*, p. 225-227.

⁴³ In regards to presence of Sari Saltek amongst Albanians you can read further: Kaleshi, Hasan, *Legjendat shqiptare për Sari Salltukun*, “Përparimi”, 1/1967, p. 86-103; Tirta, Mark, *po aty*; Ibrahim, Nexhat, *Islami në trojet iliro-shqiptare në periudhën paraosmane*, Shkup 1997.

calling for Imam Ali. According to above-mentioned source, Bektashi tekkes were located even in other Albanian areas like Pogradec, Mitrovica, Kaçanik, etc, and this fact demonstrates wide spread of this Islamic sect up to the 1670s.⁴⁴

During his visit to Kosovo in the seventeenth century Evlija Celebi observed Bektashi tekkes in Mitrovica, Dupnica and Kaçanik. He emphasized that the Bektashi tekke in Mitrovica was named as Mustafa Baba Tekke, which was followed by a tomb and was highly frequented by inhabitants. In Prishtina it was a Bektashi Tekke near the mosque of Piri Nazir, currently only a tomb remains. In the tomb rests the body of Isa Dede who was a leader of this Tekke. By the end of the nineteenth century Adem Vehxhi Baba established a Bektashi tekke in Prizren. Vehxhi Baba was one of most active Sheikhs during this period and he almost participated in all social organization established in the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁵

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Sheikh Shemsedin Baba established a Bektashi Tekke in Gjakova, which for decades, particularly in the second half the twentieth century had played a crucial role on existence of Bektashi Order within Albanian lands.⁴⁶

The common interaction between Bektashi and local leaders is clearly demonstrated by the Tekke of Harabati Baba in Tetova. Rexhep Pasha and Abdurrahman Pasha supported material and religious organization of Harabati Baba Tekke by all means and during this age this tekke flourished. But later on some leaders deviated from main principles of Islam; such deviation irritated Islamic inhabitants and as a result the number of Bektashi followers in Tetova and its surrounding was greatly reduced. The Harabati Baba Tekke paid a special attention to art, literature, music and painting. This reality is clearly demonstrated by portal inscriptions, epitaphs, poems and paints on walls of the tekke, etc. In addition to Harabati Baba Tekke, Javer Baba and Kojun Baba tekkes operated in the surroundings of Tetova. There were two Bektashi tekkes in Skopje: Tekke of Mustafa Baba constructed in the beginning of century nineteenth and Tekke of Sulejman Baba. Furthermore, other Bektashi tekkes were located in: Manastir – Tekke of Haxhi Baba, Kerçova – Tekke of Muharrem Baba, Makedonski Brod – Tekke of Hidir Baba, Dibra – Tekke of Ali Pasha, Kanatlar village Prilep – Tekke of Dikmen Baba.⁴⁷

Conclusion

It is very obvious that the Bektashi Order, different from other Sufi orders and Sunni clergy, was widely involved in social and cultural activities of the Albanians during the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Explanation of such phenomenon relies on their primary philosophical understanding on objective of their religion. The Sunni clergy of official Islam were more interested in respecting religious formalities and principles than the real needs of their believers and on the other hand they were not able to adapt new social, political and cultural requirements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. New cultural, moral and politic European values like gender balance, national emancipation, religious tolerance, etc, were the same moral values for Bektashi Order. This was a reason why they accepted the challenge of modern age and stayed on the head of fight for Albanian national emancipation.

⁴⁴ Hist. e Pop. *Shqiptar*, p. 594-595.

⁴⁵ M. Izeti, *Kllapia*, p. 181-182.

⁴⁶ OpCit, p. 182; further regarding the Tekke of Gjakova: Jashar Rexhepagiqi, *Op Cit*, p. 213-215.

⁴⁷ M. Izeti, *Kllapia*, p. 182-184.

Just for this reason a major part of Albanians, Bosnians and other people accepted Islam and through various tariqats protected their authentic culture.

But, in contrast to other nations of South-East Europe, traditionally the Albanians didn't follow only a single religion. Amongst the Albanians, excluding from general regulations, four different religions survived: Catholicism – spread mostly in the North; Orthodox Christianity – spread mostly in the South; Sunni Islam – spread mostly in Central and East regions; and Bektashism- spread mostly in the South of Albanian lands:

Bektashism amongst the Albanians was not an ideal, but it was an objective, religious-moral tool to contribute to the Albanian nationhood. This task was completed so perfectly that nearly all patriots, regardless religion or sect, express their appreciation to Bektashi.

There is need to explain further a range of historical events, for example sudden appearance and quick spread of a group Bektashi dervishes during the XIIIth-XIVth centuries, their transformation into a powerful Sufi order in the pre-Ottoman age and developments which occurred during the last Ottoman period in independent Albania and modern Turkey.

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