

## Hadji Bektash and Bektashism

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**Abstract:** This essay is an analysis of the literature on the order of Bektashism and its eponymous founder, Hadji Bektash. As an important figure in the Islamization of Anatolia, Hadji Bektash and his historical personality is distinct from, albeit not unrelated to, the development of the order of the Bektashism and its doctrine. Many of the non-orthodox features of Bektashism gained more weight after the transformation of the order by Balim Sultan at the turn of the sixteenth century. This essay questions the link between the unorthodoxy and Hadji Bektash and proposes that the issue of unorthodoxy was a later development that could be attributed to the order of Bektashism.

**Keywords:** Hadji Bektash, Bektashism, Anatolia, Sufism, Orthodoxy

**Özet:** Bu çalışma Bektaşilik tarikatı ve kurucusu Hacı Bektaş üzerine yazılmış mevcut literatürün bir değerlendirmesidir. Anadolu'nun İslamlaşmasında önemli bir rolü olan Hacı Bektaş ve onun tarihi şahsiyeti, tamamen ilişkisiz olmasa da Bektaşilik tarikatı ve öğretilerinden farklılık göstermektedir. Bektaşiliğe atfedilen Ortodoks olmayan özelliklerin birçoğu 16. yüzyılın başında Balım Sultan'ın gerçekleştirdiği dönüşümle birlikte Bektaşilik içinde ağırlık kazanmıştır. Bu çalışma Hacı Bektaş ve Ortodoks dışılık ilişkisini sorgulamakta ve Ortodoks İslam'a aykırılığın Bektaşiliğe daha sonra eklenmiş bir unsur olduğunu önermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hacı Bektaş, Bektaşilik, Anadolu, Tasavvuf, Ortodoksi

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## Introduction

One of the most significant elements of the history of Islam in Anatolia and the Balkans has been Bektashism and its eponymous founder Hadji Bektash. The history of Islam in the Anatolia would never be complete unless the role of the Bektashism and Hadji Bektash was omitted or ignored. The importance that Bektashism carries can be analyzed in two ways. Firstly, the geographical distribution of the Bektashism in Anatolia and the Balkans throughout the history of the order until present tells much about the share of the Bektashism in Turkish-Islamic culture. Bektashism has been widespread in these geographies, which requires to pay due attention on its role in order to understand the development of Islamic culture since the twelfth century when Turks began to immigrate to Anatolia. Secondly, the historical personality of Hadji Bektash and the evolution of the Bektashism were significant in course of the Islamization of Anatolia.

An extensive literature on the personality of Hadji Bektash and the order of the Bektashism approaches the issue in various perspectives and emphasize different aspects of the history of Islam after twelfth century.<sup>2</sup> Who was Hadji Bektash? When did he live? What was his lineage among Sufi orders? What kind of role did he play in the Islamization of Anatolia? What was his primary teaching? Who were his immediate audience? What was his influence for later periods? The questions similar to those on the historical personality and historical role of Hadji Bektash try to discover the origins of the Bektashism as a Sufi order. There is also another set of questions centered on the order of the Bektashism: what was the relation between Hadji Bektash

<sup>2</sup> My survey of the literature in this essay is by no means exhaustive. The works that I selected are those: Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar*, 9th ed. (Ankara: Akçağ basım yayım, 2003); John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac & co, 1937); Irène Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach: Un Mythe Et Ses Avatars: Genèse Et Évolution Du Soufisme Populaire En Turquie* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Irène Mélikoff, "L'ordre des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach: Survol du problème," in *Bektachiyya: Études Sur L'ordre Mystique Des Bektachis Et Les Groupes Relevant De Hadji Bektach*, ed. Alexandre Popović and Gilles Veinstein (Istanbul: Les Editions Isis, 1995), 3-7; Claude Cahen, "Baba Ishaq, Baba Ilyas, Hadjdji Bektash et Quelques Autres," *TURCICA*, no. 1 (1969); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Alevi ve Bektaşî İnançlarının İslâm Öncesi Temelleri* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000); Ahmet T Karamustafa, "Early Sufism in Eastern Anatolia," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 175-198; Ahmet T Karamustafa, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism," in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernism*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Atatürk Supreme Council for Culture, Language and History, 2005), 67-95; Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, "Bektaş, Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli," in *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1940), 461-464; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 14 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988), 455-458; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Bektaşilik," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 5 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988), 373-379; R. Tschudi, "Bektashiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 1, Second Edition. (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 1161-1163

and the Bektashism? What were the basic characteristics of Sufi activities in Bektashism? What was the relationship between the Bektashism and Shiism? How did the order of the Bektashism evolve? What were the basic turning points in the history of the Bektashism?

As it can be detected from the presence of two sets of questions in the literature, the historical personality of Hadji Bektash and the order of the Bektashism have been dealt with as two different phenomena though this does not mean that they are disparate and unrelated. In that sense, the relation between Hadji Bektash and Bektashism in respect to religious and cultural elements has been a highly complicated issue that the researchers have worked. In this essay, I will first analyze the historical personality and religious teaching of Hadji Bektash and then I will deal with the development of the order of the Bektashism.

### Hadji Bektash

It is almost impossible to trace the life of Hadji Bektash from contemporary sources. The fact that most of the sources that we can read about this great Sufi were written at least one or two centuries later makes it difficult to recount the realities about his origin and the course of his life. In addition, some of the contradictory statements in these sources creates more complicated image of Hadji Bektash. Elvan Çelebi's *Manâkibu'l-Kudsiyye fî Manâsibi'l-Unsiyye* is the earliest source (fourteenth century) that mentions Hadji Bektash. Eflâkî's *Manâkib al-Ârifîn* (fourteenth century) includes very brief paragraph about Hadji Bektash. The most detailed source is the *Manâkib-ı Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî*, known also as *Vilâyetnâme*, was written in late fifteenth century<sup>3</sup> and it has been attributed to Uzun Firdevsi who was the author of lengthy *Suleymannâme* (Ocak, 2000: 32-33; Gölpınarlı, 1958: XIX-XXV; Mélikoff, 1998: 49; Karamustafa, 1999: 188). However, it has also been accepted that the content of the book was composed of the miraculous stories that had been narrated since the death of the Hadji Bektash. Therefore, the book was actually a compilation of the stories about Hadji Bektash whose contents were formed throughout two centuries.

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<sup>3</sup> Claude Cahen thinks that it must have been written in the years towards 1400 and John Kingsley Birge also considers this possibility as true. According to him the inexistence of Hurufism in *Vilâyetnâme* shows that it must have been written before the Hurufi ideas spread in Anatolia in the fifteenth century. However, the researchers have generally accepted the date around late fifteenth century.

The birth date of Hadji Bektash is not precisely known but he died probably 669/1271 (Ocak, 1988a; Karamustafa, 1999: 187). According to Birge, who depends on a *vakfiye* dated 1291, which mentions Hadji Bektash as ‘*merhûm*’ (the deceased), he must have been dead before 1291 (Birge, 1937: 34-35). In general, 1271 seems more correct date for the date of his death. In *Vilâyetnâme*, his genealogy is attributed to Ali b. Abu Talib and the prophet Muhammad through the seventh Imam Musa el-Kazim (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 1). Yet Gölpınarlı asserts that it does not seem to be true, because creating genealogies that were commonly taken back to the prophet and Ali was a widespread tendency of the period (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 100-101). He came to Anatolia from Khorasan and settled in the village Sulucakarahöyük (today’s Hacı Bektâş) and was hosted by Kadincik Ana who would become his disciple and spiritual wife (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 26-28).

One of the points that the researchers disagree is his religious/Sufi genealogy. Aşıkpaşazâde mentions Hadji Bektash as disciple of Baba Ilyas, the leader of the Babai Revolt against the Seljuks of Rum. Elvan Çelebi and Eflaki assert that he became one of the *halifes* of Baba Ilyas (Ocak, 1988a: 456; Köprülü, 1940: 461). In *Vilâyetnâme*, however, he was the disciple of Ahmed Yesevi, the great Turkish Sufi, through his master Lokman-i Perende (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 5). It is also said that he belonged to Khorasani Kalanderi order and came to Anatolia with the migration of dervishes after the conquest of Chingiz Khan (Ocak, 1988a: 454).

For the link with Baba Ilyas, it is said that Hadji Bektash came with his brother Mintash from Khorasan and joined to the Wafâi order of Baba Ilyas. Two brothers participated in the Babai revolt, which started in 1239, and Mintash died in the battle around Sivas against the Seljuks while Bektash avoided from participating in this particular battle. For a period of time, he hid himself in order to protect himself from Seljuks’ antagonistic attitudes to the Babais, and then he reappeared in the village Sulucakarahöyük (Ocak, 1988a: 454; Mélikoff, 1998: 31-32; Mélikoff, 1995: 3; Cahen, 1969: 56). However, the emphasis on the participation of Hadji Bektash and his brother Mintash in the Babai revolt was a result of the propagandas of the rival Mevlevi order (Tschudi, 1960-: 1161). Ahmet Karamustafa who is inclined to depict him as a member of the Sufi order of Ahmed Yesevi emphasizes that the link between Hadji Bektash and Baba Ilyas was not real (Karamustafa, 2005: 83).

Hadji Bektash came from Khorasan with a strong Yesevi connection. Ahmed Yesevi was a famous Turkish Sufi in Turkistan who went to Bukhara, one of the important centers of learning, and became the student of a Hanafite scholar Abu Yaqub Yusuf al-Hamadani (Köprülü,

2003: 87-94). He preferred to return to his hometown Yesi and dedicated himself to convert Turks to Islam and introduce them his Sufi path (Köprülü, 2003: 94). Köprülü asserts that he sent *halifes* everywhere in Turkistan and two distinct Sufi orders emerged from his teachings and activities: Bektashism and Nakshibendism. Historically it was quite possible that Hadji Bektash had contact with Ahmed Yesevi and came to Anatolia (Köprülü, 2003: 128; Karamustafa, 2005: 79)

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak states that he was one of the Sufis of Khorasan (*Horasan Erenleri*), belonged to Khorasani Malamatiya order and came to Anatolia as a Haydari dervish (Ocak, 1988a: 455; Köprülü, 1940: 461). According to this view, Hadji Bektash was one of the heterodox Sufis coming to Anatolia since thirteenth century. The existence of the motifs in *Vilâyetnâme*, like shaving heads and beard (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 69), which were basic characteristics of Kalanderi groups is shown as a proof for his common features with the heterodox Sufi groups. The story in *Vilâyetnâme* in which Hadji Bektash, by the order of Ahmed Yesevi, went to rescue Qutb al-din Haydar who was the master of the Haydaris indicates that Hadji Bektash, Qutb al-Din Haydar and Ahmed Yesevi had somehow some connection (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 9-13). Karamustafa's conclusion on this issue is that "it is best to view Hadji Bektash as a Sufi who came to Anatolia from Turkistan with a strong Yesevi connection but who, once there, chose to chart an independent course much like Qutb al-Din Haydar had done in Khorasan and left an indelible mark on his adopted country." (Karamustafa, 2005: 83).

The book, *Makâlât*, which has been attributed to Hadji Bektash was written in Arabic and translated into Turkish by Hatiboglu (d. 812/1409) in the fourteenth century. It is an important source about his teachings. He divides the stations of the way which goes to God into four categories: *şeri'at* (law), *tarikât* (Sufi order), *marifet* (gnosis) and *hakikat* (truth) (Hacı Bektaş Veli, Esad Coşan, 1982: 14-28). He analyzes people in four groups such as *âbidler* (servants), *zâhidler* (ascetics), *ârifler* (gnostics), *muhibler* (loved ones) (Hacı Bektaş Veli, Esad Coşan, 1982: 3-11). These four groups of people correspond to the conditions of the people in each stations of the Sufi path. In other words, *âbidler* are in the station of *şeri'at*; *zâhidler* are in the station of *tarikât*; *ârifler* are in the station of *marifet*; and *muhibler* are in the station of *hakikat*.

If we are to accept the authenticity of *Makâlât* and consider its content as Hadji Bektash's teaching, it appears that he was a learned Sufi contrary to what Aşıkpaşazâde described him as 'meccub' dervish and being un ecstasy to the extent that he was unable to be a Sufi master and

establish a Sufi order (Karamustafa, 1999: 187). In addition, the Shiite and Hurufi elements that appeared distinctively in the doctrine of the Bektashism later seem to be absent in the Sufism of Hadji Bektash.

Irène Mélikoff and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak have some doubts on the authenticity of *Makâlât* as a book written by Hadji Bektash. According to them, an Arabic text has not been found yet and it was less probable that Hadji Bektash knew Arabic. If he had intended to write a book, he would have written in Turkish, because literary Turkish had already been reached to a level at the time that provided basic means to compose a volume in Turkish (Mélikoff, 1998: 63-66; Ocak, 1988a: 457). In addition, Mélikoff emphasizes three themes in *Makâlât* that contradict with the life of Hadji Bektash. First, *Makalat* talks about *tarikât* (Sufi order), but Hadji Bektash did not found a Sufi order. Second, the book mentions pilgrimage, but Hadji Bektash did not go to pilgrimage in his lifetime and he went there only in his dream. Thirdly, *Makalat* encourages marriage, yet he never got married (Mélikoff, 1998: 67-68).

The scholarship of Esad Coşan, who published *Makalat* and emphasized his orthodoxy in Sufi teaching, by no means deserves to be praised, because he fails to make a historical criticism of the book and limits himself only with the content analysis. The doubts of Mélikoff and Ocak, however, do not provide sufficient evidence to disprove the attribution of *Makalat* to Hadji Bektash. It is probable Hadji Bektash was a member of Ahmet Yesevi's order and was a learned Sufi. As Karamustafa asserted, the connection between the learned urban elites (great tradition) and rural uneducated masses did exist and they had a mutual affinity (Karamustafa, 1999: 197). The similarity between *Makalat* and *Fakrname*, which was attributed to Ahmed Yesevi, strengthens this point. In addition, the discrepancy between the theory and practice on the points of *tarikât*, pilgrimage and marriage does not convincingly show the inauthenticity of the book. Nevertheless, the problem on the authenticity of the book still persists.

## **Bektashism**

Although Hadji Bektash did not establish a Sufi order on his name, his followers chose to call the way that Hadji Bektash taught as Bektashism. It is almost without exception accepted that the Bektashism was founded after the death of Hadji Bektash. The issue is how much the teachings and worldview of Hadji Bektash has been followed in the order of the Bektashism.

How was Hadji Bektash influential in the formation of the doctrines of the Bektashism? How far did Hadji Bektash share the heterodox tendencies of the Bektashism? In addition, it is also important that how the Bektashism evolved after Hadji Bektash as a Sufi order and what were the significant turning points in the history of the order.

Just as it is widely accepted that Bektashism was founded after Hadji Bektash, it is also commonly agreed that the order entered into a new direction by the leadership of Balim Sultan (d. 1516) who was known as ‘second pir.’ Balim Sultan was appointed by Beyazid II (1481-1512) as the sheikh of the Bektashi order in 1501 and he gave the order its definite form with his reforms. Then, the Bektashi order began to include Shiite tendencies. Hurufi ideas that had entered into the teachings of the order in the fifteenth century together with Shiite motifs created a new synthesis in the Bektashi order (Ocak, 1988b: 375; Birge, 1937: 57-60; Mélikoff, 1998: 154-161; Mélikoff, 1995: 3-4).

Whether the followers of Hadji Bektash before Balim Sultan had heterodox tendencies or not is also a matter of dispute in the literature. Köprülü, in his book of *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar*, depicts Hadji Bektash as follower of Yesevi path and asserts that the order of the Bektashism was quite distinct from Yesevi path and Hadji Bektash despite the naming of the order (Köprülü, 2003: 128). However, in his article on Hadji Bektash in *İslam Ansiklopedisi* he views Hadji Bektash and his early followers, as having heterodox tendencies and most of the teachings and rituals had already been set before Balim Sultan (Köprülü, 1940: 461-462). Moreover, Ocak states that Hadji Bektash as a disciple of Baba Ilyas was a Kalanderi and his followers were also Kalanderi-Haydari sheikhs, thereby the antinomian tendencies had already existed before Balim Sultan (Ocak, 1988b: 373-374; Ocak, 1988a: 455). Karamustafa, however, argues that Hadji Bektash can by no means be accepted as follower of Wafaî path (the path of the Babais) because Wafaî path was originated not in Khorasan but in Iraq. Most of the orders in Anatolian Sufism were not originated from Khorasan and Turkistan except for the one of Hadji Bektash who belonged to Yesevi path. Therefore, according to Karamustafa it is not correct to describe Hadji Bektash and his early followers as heterodox Sufis like Kalenderis, Wafaî and Haydaris (Karamustafa, 2005: 84-90). Mélikoff notes that early followers of the order were not

called as Kalenders but *abdals*, which implies that Bektashis belonged to one of the common social groups of the time (Mélikoff, 1998: 91).<sup>4</sup>

It should also be emphasized that Hadji Bektash lived in the village of Sulucakarahöyük, which became a center of attraction already in his lifetime. Kadincik Ana who was a prominent member of *bacıyân-ı rum* was his first disciple and his *halife* (Mélikoff, 1998: 40). According to *Vilâyetnâme*, Sari Ismail was in charge of his personal service was appointed as his successor (Gölpınarlı, 1958: 82-83). Yet, the transmission of his teachings did not follow through Sari Ismail but through Kadincik Ana and her disciple Abdal Musa. Abdal Musa and other *Abdalan-ı Rum* participated in Ottoman conquests and told everywhere the miraculous stories about Hadji Bektash. In result, the name of Hadji Bektash gradually attained great respects. In addition, the syncretic character of the Bektashism facilitated conversions to Islam in the newly conquered lands and attracted easily many followers.

One of the consequences of the participation of Abdal Musa and others to the Ottoman conquests in the Balkans was the association of the Janissary army with the Bektashi order. As these *abdals* told the miraculous stories about life of Hadji Bektash among soldiers, the fame of Hadji Bektash grew considerably. According to one story, Ali Pasha, the brother of the second Ottoman Sultan Orhan, had joined the dervish circles and suggested that the spiritual protection of the Ottoman army should be given to the spiritual authority of Hadji Bektash (Mélikoff, 1999: 21). Although the stories similar to that might not be true, it was a fact that the janissaries were predominantly followers of Bektashi order and the weight of the janissaries in the order was always significant. When the campaign against the janissaries was set out in 1826, it was also directed against the Bektashis and the Bektashi lodges. Therefore, the Bektashi order was almost destroyed after 1826. Although it recovered itself late nineteenth century, the Bektashism never gained its previous significance.

Köprülü, Mélikoff and Ocak emphasize religious syncretism of the Bektashism. It is argued that the success of the Bektashism in spreading among new converts was due to the syncretic nature of the Bektashi doctrine and practices. Although it seems to be exaggeration in identifying the Bektashism as “Islamized Shamanism” like Mélikoff and Ocak do (Mélikoff, 1998: 104-105; Ocak, 2000: 70-74), the order was not strict in following the Orthodox Islam and

<sup>4</sup> Aşıkpaşazade mentions four social groups in thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Anatolia: *gâziyân-ı rum* (military class); *ahiyân-ı rum* (artisanal class); *abdâlân-ı rum* (religious class); *bacıyân-ı rum* (feminine spiritual class).

included many religious elements from Shamanism, Christianity, Shiism, and other religions. Ocak enumerates magic business, anthropomorphosis, controlling nature, controlling the power of fire and intermezzo as the cults that came from Shamanism (Ocak 2000: 143-182). He also mentions the beliefs of reincarnation, metempsychoses, incarnation, levitation etc. as the cults that Bektashism derived from Buddhism and Hinduism (Ocak, 2000: 183-251). The most prominent ritual of the Bektashism, *âyin-i cem*, also includes several Shamanistic cults like drinking alcohol and gathering of men and women together (Ocak, 2000: 175-179). Besides, the influence of Shiism and Hurufism on the Bektashism is more salient. The trinity of God, Muhammad and Ali, the reverence of the twelve Imams, observance of the passion of Imam Husayn in the tenth day of Muharram etc. are some of the Shiite cults in the Bektashism. The tendency to respect the numerical values of the Arabic letters and trying to find coincidences of letters are very popular tool of authority in the order. In short, the influence of Shamanism, Shiism, Asiatic religions, Hurufism etc are seen in the beliefs and rituals of the Bektashism.

In conclusion, the historical personality of Hadji Bektash and the order of the Bektashism are two different but not unrelated phenomena. Although Hadji Bektash did not himself found a Sufi order, people who showed great respect to him and claimed to follow his teachings preferred to all themselves as his follower. The issue is how far the Bektashis were in congruence with the Hadji Bektash's teachings.

The task of researchers is not easy to answer this question, because it is almost first of all very difficult to understand the historical personality and religious teachings of Hadji Bektash. Although it seems that he was a Sufi with a connection with Ahmed Yesevi, probably he was also related to Baba Ilyas and Kalenderis in Anatolia. If we accept that *Makalat* was his book, it appears that his teaching was in congruence with orthodox Islam unlike later beliefs and rituals of the Bektashism. Yet, it should also be asked how orthodox teachings evolve into a system in which many Shamanistic, Shiite and Hurufi ideas were included. Was Hadji Bektash not very much Orthodox? How far was the Orthodoxy important in the thirteenth century? Therefore, it seems that the reality was much more complex than one might think and it is not convincing to show irrelevance between Hadji Bektash and the Bektashi beliefs. They were by no means historically disconnected set of phenomena, despite the fact that they were definitely not identical.

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