A Preliminary Account of Research regarding the Albanian Bektashis - Myths And Unresolved Questions

by Frank Kressing


1. The Origins of the Bektashis

The Bektashis are generally considered to be one of the many heterodox branches of Islam, being closely connected with the Alevis or Ali-orientated groups in Western Asia, namely in Turkey (Kızılbaş-Alevi), Syria (Alawites / Nusayri), Kurdestan, Lursatan (Ahl-e Haqq), and Azerbaycan including Nakhichevan. All of them refer to a popular saint called Haji Bektash, the difference being ‘that you can acquire the status of a Bektashi by your own will, but that you have to be born as an Alevi (to be part of the community)’, as one Turkish follower of the Bektashis once explained to me. Concerning further distinctions between the two groups, I would like to quote Mélikoff:

"The beliefs of the Kızılbaş-Alevi are identical with those of the Bektashis. Both groups refer to Hacı Bektas. But the Bektashis formed an organized group, whereas the Kızılbaş-Alevi, who lived in villages, remained more or less disorganized. The Bektashis follow an unchangeable ritual whereas the Kızılbaş-Alevi believe in myths in which legends are mingled with local folklore. The beliefs of both groups are syncretic. They contain elements from different origins, belonging to religions with which the Turkic people have"

1 I would like to thank all the members of the Alevi Culture Center (Alevi Kültür Derneği) in Ulm, Germany, namely Pir Hüseyn Ruzgat, Hoja Emrullah Eraslan, Mr. Mahmut Savaşan and Mr. Muhammed Arras, for their warm welcome to their community and for providing most valuable information and insights in Alevi / Bektashi lore and ritual, especially in the German diaspora, as well as Mimoza, Fatos, Arlind and Boris Dinollari, Vjollca Dede and Pluton Vasi in Tirana for their hospitality and very valuable contribution to my research, and especially the members of the Bektashi Kryegjyshat in Tirana, first of all Kryegjysh Haxhi Dede Reshat Bardhi and Baba ‘Mondi’ for their welcome and willingness to answer my questions, and their tolerance towards my curiosity.

2 The term Kızılbaş (literally "red-head") is generally rejected by Alevis from Turkey, since they regard it to be pejorative. The term is derived from the fact that Ali and Sheikh Ismail are said to have worn a red taç (headress), consisting of twelve pieces, but is nowadays often connected with a "red" (meaning leftist) political orientation of Alevis in public discourse in Turkey.

3 Cf. Mélikoff, Bektachis et groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach 4, Bektashi/Kızılbas, 1-7; During, A critical survey of Ahl-e Haqq studies in Europe and Iran, 105-126.

4 Or Haxhi Bektash in Albanian; cf. Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kızılbas, 1. For the convenience of the English-speaking reader and facilitated comprehensibility, most Turkish names and expressions appear in an anglicised version, e.g. haji instead of hacı, Bektashi instead of Bektasi. This applies also to some terms of Arabic origin, e.g. Nakshbandi (name of a dervish order or tarikat) is given instead of Naqshibendi (Turkish) or Naqshbandiyya (Arabic).

5 Personal communication, members of Alevi Kültür Derneği/Alevi Cultural Centre in Ulm, Germany; cf. Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kızılbas, 5: ‘Anyone can become a Bektashi if he wishes to and if he is found to be worthy. But one cannot become an Alevi if one is not born an Alevi.’

6 Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kızılbas, 6-7.
ben in contact: Buddhism, Manicheism, Nestorian or local Christianity ... Fuat Köprülü called the Alevi 'county Bektashis' because they present themselves a rough form of the same phenomenon ... Though Bektashis and Alevis go back to the same origin, they have formed two parallel groups. These groups have been subjected to different ethnical influences: the Bektashis were influenced by the Balkans, the Alevi by the people of eastern Anatolia: Iranians, Kurds and others.¹

Shortly after their emergence in Anatolia in the 13th century,² the Bektashis established themselves as one of the most influential dervish orders during the Ottoman period,³ their main places of distribution being - apart from Anatolia - the Balkans and Crete.⁴ Especially in the 14th and 15th centuries, the Bektashis were closely connected with the Janissary troops.⁵ Hasluck even refers to a legend claiming that Haji Bektash himself inaugurated the first Janissary troops during the reign of Sultan Orhan.⁶ According to Mélikoff,⁷

‘... the first Ottomans owed their military success to the stimulation of martial mysticism. War and religion combined together. The dervishes became gazis [military leaders] and the Janissaries were connected to the Bektashis. But things were to change during the 16th century with the Ottoman-Safavid wars.’

After repeated revolts and rebellions, the Janissary troops were finally dismissed in 1826, with resisting forces being massacred.⁸ This meant that also the Bektashis were subject to state supression and had to move to the margins of the Empire.⁹ A hundred years later, the Bektashi tarikat was again subject to state prosecution, and was officially abolished altogether with the other dervish orders in the newly founded Turkish Republic.¹⁰ Mélikoff summarises Bektashi history in the late Ottoman Empire as follows:

‘In later Ottoman history, Bektashism has become synonymous with non-conformism in matters of religion. During the 19th century, after the collapse of the Janissaries in 1826

---

¹ Ibid., 2. According to Haas, Die Bektashi, 9, the Bektashis were founded in the 13th century during the times of the collapse of the Seljuk dynasty in Anatolia, when political power had passed to the Mongol invaders.
² Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 52.
³ Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 35.
⁴ Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes; Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 59; Haas, Die Bektashi; Jacob, Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Derwisch-Ordens der Bektaschi; Köprülü, Les origins deu Bektachisme, The Origins of the Ottoman Empire, The Seljuks in Anatolia, Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion.
⁵ Hasluck, The non-conformist Moslems of Albania, 388.
⁶ Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kızılbas, 8.
⁷ These events took place during the reign of Sultan Mahmut II. Bektashi adherents were murdered, their sacred books burned, their graves and 16 tekkes (dergâh) destroyed. A mosque was rected in Hacibektaşköy, the order's centre in Cappadocia, Anatolia, Savasân, personal communication.
⁸ Bartl, Krypto-Christentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien, 100; Jacob, Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Derwisch-Ordens der Bektaschi, 8; Kissling, Die islamischen Derwischorden; Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien.
⁹ Cf. Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 225; Gashi/Steiner, Albanian, 76; Vorhoff, Academic and journalistic publications on the Alevi and Bektash of Turkey, 24. Vorhoff speaks about the ‘abolition of the Bektashi order in 1826, the suppression of all tarikat activity in 1925, and the closing of all the mystic orders (tarikat) and the tombs of the holy men (türbe) in 1925’.
and the closure of the tekkes, the non-conformist Bektashis became free-thinkers and later on, in the 20th century, progressivists ... They also joined the Young Turks.\textsuperscript{16}

2. Elements of Bektashi Lore and Doctrine

In this chapter I will not give an overview about Bektashism as a religion (which would under any circumstances be incomplete), but will rather confine myself to an enumeration of a very few characteristic features which distinguish Bektashism from other branches of Islam. The Bektashi order belongs to the many Sufi movements in Islam that developed from the 8th century onwards.\textsuperscript{17} The \textit{tarikat} established itself in Anatolia during the 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{18} and bears a Shi'a and pantheistic character,\textsuperscript{19} but has also many other, heterogenous origins. Shi'a influence on the Bektashis may even be a relatively late development of the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries,\textsuperscript{20} but is nonetheless manifested in the belief in twelve Imams and special worship of the sixth Imam Jafr Sadiq\textsuperscript{21} as well as in the celebration of Ali's birthday on the Iranian New Year's feast (\textit{newruz})\textsuperscript{22} and the celebration of \textit{muharram} (the 'ashura lament).\textsuperscript{23} Ali's sons Hasan and Huseyn are also highly venerated as martyrs. Usually three days of fasting are observed in \textit{ramadan}, compared to ten days during the Shi'a commemoration month of \textit{muharram}.\textsuperscript{24} As another Shi'a tradition, the Bektashis incorporated \textit{hurufilik}, a secret lore of letter and number symbolism (comparable to the Jewish Kabbala) that can be traced to Fazlullah Hurufi (1339-1401) from northern Iran.\textsuperscript{25}

The name of the dervish order is derived from their legendary founder Haji Bektash Veli, living in Asia Minor in the second half of the 13th century and originally coming from Khorassan\textsuperscript{26} - a term often used in ancient chronicles and hagiographies to refer to

\textsuperscript{16} Mélíkoff, Bektashi/Kızılbaş, 7. Bartl, Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 110, 153-154, also stresses the connection between Bektashis and the Young Turks and the important role which Albanians played in the uprisings of 1903 and in the revolution of 1908.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 48; El-Kayati, Der ägyptische Sufi-Orden Al-Qâyâtîyya, 11, 12.

\textsuperscript{18} Frembgen, ibid., 52.

\textsuperscript{19} Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 594-595; Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 213; Claye, L’Albanie, pays des derviches 153; Fremdgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus 52.

\textsuperscript{20} Faroqi \textit{Faroqui, Suraiya}, The Bektashis 1995:26; Kehl-Bodrogi, Die Kızılbaş/Aleviten.

\textsuperscript{21} Claye, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 80.

\textsuperscript{22} Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 219-231. In Albania, \textit{newruz} is celebrated on the same date as the official 'Day of Democracy' on March 22nd, cf. Lakshman-Lepain, Religions between tradition and pluralism, 10; Popovic, La communauté musulmane d'Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 72.


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 79, 99-102.

\textsuperscript{25} Algar, The Hurufi influence on Bektashism, 39-53; Birge, the Bektashi order of Dervishes, 94; Clay-er, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 80; Fremdgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 52; Jacob, Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Derwisch-Ordens der Bektashi, 32; Haas, Die Bektashi, 150.

\textsuperscript{26} Or Bukhara, cf. Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 52. In the present days, Khorassan is the border region between Iran and Afghanistan, Bukhara is situated in presently Uzbekistan.
the migration of Turkoman tribes to Anatolia from the 11th until the 13th centuries.27 As in many other cases concerning Sufi hagiography, he probably was not the actual founder of the order but a patron saint chosen at a later date.28 Especially in Middle Asia, the region of origin of the Turkoman tribes and the followers of Haji Bektash Veli, Sufism mingled with local, pre-Islamic beliefs.29 Thus, it is not surprising that besides Shi'a and different Sufi doctrines, many different religious traditions contributed to the development and appearance of Bektashism, leading Popovic to the claim that ‘on peut donc dire que le caractère fondamental du bektachisme est son syncretisme’.30 According to Birge, the Bektashis ‘... combined in this order a considerable number of both doctrines and practices that show the influence of various types of Christian, Islamic, Greek and pagan thought’, thereby preserving pre-Islamic and non-Islamic thoughts originating in Christianity and antique religions as well as ancient Turkic elements, such as the participation of women in all major rituals and ritual significance of alcohol, just as among Turko-Mongols in pre-Islamic times.31 Thus, remnants of the ancient Turkic religion could be preserved until the present day in tales, legends, customs, magical practices and techniques of ecstasy among the Bektashis.32 Other origins of Bektashism are to be found in Manichaeism,33 Zoroastrianism, Mazdaism, Judaism and presumably even in Buddhism.34 Ocak stresses the prevailing syncretism between ancient, pre-Islamic Turkic and Islamic elements in Bektashi lore, putting his emphasis on the encounter of pre-Islamic Turks with ‘high religions’ in Central Asia and the position of the Bektashis at the crossroads of different cultures. Concerning the question of shamanic remainders among the Bektashis, he claims that their importance is

27 Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kizilbas, 1, points out that ‘Coming from Khorassan is a cliché ... [meaning] that the people involved were not autochtones, but immigrants.’ Whether Bektash Veli, who ‘came to Anatolia towards the year 1230, [and]... died, according to tradition, in 1270’ (ibid.) ever actually went on pilgrimage (haj) to Mecca, remains doubtful; cf. Eliade, Encyclopedia of Religion 14, 120; Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 36.

28 Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 52; cf. Hasluck, Christianity and Islam under the Sultans, 488-493, who claims a merely nominal connexion of the Bektashi sect with Haji Bektash and denies the connexion of Haji Bektash with the Ottoman dynasty (with reference to Asılıpşazade Asılıpşazade, Tevarihî Âlî Osman, 237-239). According to Hasluck, Haciêbêtaşköy near Kırcıhîr had been more or less absorbed by the Hurufi sect, and the historical Haji Bektash was only a clan founder and ancestor of a Turkoman tribe. Apparently, even a tradition exists that Haji Bektash was a Christian.

29 Demidov, Sufismus in Turkmenien, 73.

30 Popovic, La communauté musulmane d’Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 5.

31 Birge, the Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 22; Kissling, Zur Frage der Anfänge des Bektaschitums in Albanien, 1, 5 f.; Über die Anfänge des Bektaschitums in Albanien, 3, 9; Müller, Kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien IX, 35-51; Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen des Islam, 478 ff., Sufismus und Volksfrömmigkeit, 194-196; Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 58; Kehl-Bodrogi, Die Kizilbas/Aleviten, 225-228; Esin, Thèmes et symboles communes entre le Bouddhisme tântrique et la tradition des Bekatchis ottoman, 31-37.


34 Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 217-218; Savaşan, personal communication.
far less than usually assumed and that even Birge ‘... did not regard shamanic survivals as particularly significant, devoting only a single page to the matter.’

Haas claims that the Bektashis preserved many traits of oppositional movements, heretic groups, pre-Islamic beliefs and customs and shaped them into a synthesis during times of a mutual penetration of Turkic and Byzantine. There is ample evidence for the participation of Haji Bektash himself and his adherents in the Turkoman uprisings against Seljuk rule in 1240 (the so-called Baba’î revolt under the leadership of Baba Ishaq and Baba Ilyas;), in which his brother Mintash was killed. Besides that, the craftsmen's guilds (ahilik) of Seljuk and early Ottoman Anatolia considerably contributed to the organisation of the order.

In their worship and veneration of saints, the Bektashis combine Christian and pre-Christian elements, with Haji Bektash Veli being regarded as a reincarnation of Saint Chorolambos. There are many examples for the mutual identification of Christian and Bektashi saints (e.g. Saint Athanasios with Hafiz Halil Baba in Romania). Christian influences on Bektashism are expressed in the celebration of the Holy Communion, and the conception of Ali, Muhammad and Allah as a Holy Trinity.

The order has a hierarchical structure consisting of the grades of ashik, talip or muhip (novice), dervish, baba or murshit, and halife or dede. The murshit occupies a primary position as a spiritual teacher (comparable to a guru) and master of initiations. The spiritual authority of the murshit is further enhanced by legendary lineages of tradition (silsile) which served to pass on secret knowledge. The secret lore includes the idea of four gateways (in Turkish: dört kapı) on the spiritual path, consisting of şeriat (law), tarikat (the way or path), marifet (knowledge), and hakikat (honesty). Due to the esoteric character of the Bektashi order, main ceremonies like nasıp ayını (initiation)
and *batın namazı* (inner, silent prayer) have until now very seldom been made accessible to the public. Both the ethical values of Alevis and Bektashis are expressed in the popular saying ‘*eline, beline, diline sahih olsun!*’ (be the master of your hand, your loins [in the sense of one’s private parts], and your tongue), meaning that you should not harm other humans, not indulge in adultery, and not lie.

There is a wide variety of religious doctrines within the Bektashi order as a ‘belief that has appeared in many manifestations’. Bektashi doctrines are often shared with other Sufi orders, and multiple membership is, or at least used to be, widespread. In historical times, most of the Bektashi adherents lived in western Anatolia and in the Balkans, but the Bektashiyiya could also be found in Egypt, Iran, and even in Eastern Turkestan. Within Ottoman dervish poetics (*tekke edebiyati*), the Bektashis are represented with very popular poems which are written in an easy style of stanzas. Besides Yunus Emre who died in 1320/21, Pir Sultan Abdal, who lived in the 16th century, is generally regarded as one of their most famous poets. Generally, the indifference of the Bektashis towards the official rules of Islam makes them an object of strong suspicion in their Muslim environment, though most Bektashis claim to orientate themselves to the *hadith*.  

### 3. How did the Bektashis come to the Balkans?

Until 1912, Bektashism was widespread in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire and beyond: apart from the Albanian-inhabited areas (including Kosovo and western Macedonia), Bektashi *tekkes* are known from a number of other southeast European countries and regions, for instance from Thracia, Dobruja (Romania), and Bosnia.
Following the loss of most of the Turkish Balkan provinces in 1912 and the subsequent, partly forced migration of large portions of the Turkish population to Thracia and Anatolia, Islamic mysticism was largely confined to Albania and the neighbouring Albanian-inhabited areas. Thus, Albania until 1967 was also a 'land of dervishes'. How did Islam originally spread to these regions?

During the 16th century, the territory of the present Albanian state was finally and definitely subjugated to Ottoman rule and incorporated into the Ottoman Empire after the fierce resistance led by the military leader Gjergj Kastrioti 'Skanderbeg' had finally been broken. At that time, the Albanians were - at least officially - either Roman Catholics (in the north) or Orthodox (in the southern parts of the Albanian-inhabited areas). Muslims in Albania cannot be traced back before the year 1423, and it lasted until the 17th and 18th century, before the majority of Albanians converted to Islam and embraced the new faith - the reason behind that being perhaps pure opportunism, as many travellers of the 19th century pointed out, and a special relationship to religiosity in general (cf. chapter 4).

According to Bartl, in 1610 only 10% of the Albanian population were Muslims. Cornell points out that 'Albania seems to have been Islamized as a matter of deliberate Ottoman policy to help suppress resistance after the Turkish-Venetian war in the seventeenth century'.

59 Cf. Cornell, Erik, On Bektashism in Bosnia, 9-13; Ilic, Der Bektaschi-Orden in Bosnien und sein Beitrag zur Osmanischen Literatur; Sanic, Traditions et moeurs des Derviches de Bosnie; Clayer, L'Albanie, pays des derviches, 1: "Les ordres mystiques musulmans étaient toujours une réalité omniprésente dans ce pays après 1912".

60 Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches. One centre of the Bektashis in the Balkans before 1912 had been the tekke/teqe of Kalkandelen near Tetova (Tetovo) in contemporary Macedonia (Popovic, La communauté musulmane d'Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 153). Concerning Bosnia, the existence of Sufi groups after the country's incorporation into the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1667 remains a matter of debate, cf. Cornell, On Bektashism in Bosnia, 13: 'The picture of a more or less total non-existence of Bektashism in Bosnia is not convincing, given the favourable climate for its acceptance in earlier days as well as the attitudes of contemporary Bosnians'.

61 Ibid., 10.

62 Malcom, Kosovo – A Short History, 106.

63 Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 16, 17; Frashëri, The History of Albania, 66-89.

64 Popovic, La communauté musulmane d'Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 7.

65 Ibid., 151.


Author's translation: Already travellers of the last century, especially the famous Albanologist Hahn, depicted Albanians as showing remarkable superficial religious feelings. People's faith changed according to political opportunism, and religious services turned into recreational events for small talk and gossip rather than serious worship. - Compare also the popular saying 'The religion of the Albanian is Albanianism' usually ascribed to Pashko Vasa Shkodrani, cf. Gashi/Steiner, Albanien, 101, and the general image of Albanians as treating religion loosely, cf. Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kizilbas.

67 Bartl, Die albainischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 18.

68 Cornell, On Bektashism in Bosnia 9; with reference to Malcom, Kosovo – Ashort History, 57. In this respect, it has also be taken into account that a 'distinction between Islamization and Ottomani-
Besides Sunni Islam, mystical forms of Islam spread in the country, directed at an individual, direct experience of the presence of God and thereby also deliberately making use of altered states of consciousness (ASC), such as sema (ecstatic dance) and zikr recitation. One of them was the order (tarikat) of the Bektashis. From later developments of Bektashism under Ottoman reign (cf. chapter 1, above) it becomes obvious that Albania often served as a kind of exile for the adherents of the Bektashi faith, although the origin of the Bektashis in Albania remains quite obscure. Reliable sources indicate that their emergence cannot be dated earlier than the turn of 16th to the 17th centuries, also taking into account the rather late Islamisation of the Albanian population (see above). According to legends and other, rather hagiographic sources though, Bektashis were already present in Albania during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Murat II (1421-1451). Dauer et al. refer to the legendary founding of a dervish convent in Albania as early as 1491, but it is not clear whether this convent belonged to the Bektashis or not. Other sources indicate the presence of Bektashi dervishes under their ‘prophet‘ Sari Sallit in Dobruja as early as the 13th century. According to Bartl, adherents of the Safavids and other heretics were deported from Anatolia to Rumelia in the 16th century and integrated into the Bektashi order thus laying ground for the presence of Shi’a Islamic elements in southeast Europe.

---

69 Cf. Bourguignon, Trance and shamanism.
70 Dauer, Kaleshi, Pllana & Kissling, Baba Kâzim, Oberhaupt der Bektâshi-Derwische in Djakovica, 7; Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus, 196. They were also using juniper smoke for ecstatic rituals (cf. Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kizilbas; Haas, Die Bektäsi, 127), a feature that resembles very much central Asian cultural traits (cf. Schenk, Schamanen vom Dach der Welt; Sidky, Shamsan and mountain spirits in Huzna). The prevalence of ecstatic rituals in Sufi congregations often lead to the assumption of shamanic origins or at least influences towards mystical Islam; cf. Birge, he Bektashi Order of Dervishes; Haas, Die Bektäsi, Oacak, Bektäsi menakbnamelerinde İslam öncesi inanc moti-fleri.
72 Ibid, 283; Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien.
73 Kissling, Zur Frage der Anfänge des Bektaschitums in Albanien, 282.
74 Dauer et al., Baba Kâzim, Oberhaupt der Bektâshi-Derwische in Djakovica, 9.
75 Cf. Barkan Istiklâl devirlerin colonizatör Türk dervişleri ve zâviyeler; Bartl, Die albanischen Muslimen zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitbewegung, 106; Haas, Die Bektäsi, 35-36; Zarconne, Nouvelles perspectives dans les recherches sur les kizilbas-Alévis et les bektachis de la Dobroudja, de Deli Orman et de la Thrace orientale, 2. The later stresses the general importance of the region of (present-day) southern Rumania, northeast Bulgaria and the coast of the Black Sea for the spread of heterodox dervish movements in the Balkans. For an account of the cult of Sari Saltik (also written Sary Salltyk or Saltuk, Turkish: San Saltuk), especially in Kruja, see Kiel, A note on the date of the establishment of the Bektashi order in Albania.
76 Bartl, Die albanischen Muslimen zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitbewegung; Kiel, A note on the date of the establishment of the Bektashi order in Albania, 104. ‘Rumelia’ designated the eastern parts of the Balkans under Ottoman rule, comprising of nowerdays Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Thracia.
77 Cf. Faroqhi, The Bektashis, 13. Concerning the connections between the Alevi-Kizilbas on one hand and the Safavid movement on the other hand, as well the later development of the Safavids into adherents of the Shi’a, a precise account is given in Kehl-Bodrogi, Kizilbas/Aleviten, 42–47.
Bartl also claims that the second Bektashi Pir Balim Sultan was crucial in propagating the faith in Albania in the beginning of the 16th century; other sources speak of a Bektashi tekke that was founded by a Tatar missionary from the Crimean peninsula in 1630.

Historical fact points to a large migration of Bektashi adherents to Albania taking place in 1644 when one of the order's major tekke was destroyed in Hizirlik near Adrianople (present-day Edirne), and that in the 17th century a Bektashi teqe existed in Kanina. At least it appears to be quite secure that the Bektashis were present in Albania long before the times of Ali Pasha of Tepelenë (1741-1822) who is generally held responsible for propagating the Bektashi faith in the Albanian-inhabited areas of the Balkans.

The presumably close relationship between Ali Pasha and the Bektashi order was apparently deliberately used as a means of propaganda, often having been exaggerated and constituting one of the many myths surrounding the Bektashis.

According to Clayer, in the 19th century the, various dervish orders in Albania had around 200 teqet. Besides the Bektashis, the Halvetis with their different subdivisions (Gülshe, Karabash, Hayati, Akbash), and in Ottoman times also Çelvetis, Sinanis, Bayramis, Mevlevis, Melamis, and Nakshbendis were present. The Bektashi teqet were mostly situated outside of the towns, an exception being the teqe of Kruja. Thus, the order generally had a rural character with most of the Bektashi dervishes having their roots in the local peasantry.

4. The unique Situation of Religion in Albania

In several instances, in Albania religion plays a unique role compared to the rest of Europe: not only that Albania was (before the independence of Bosnia-Hercegovina) the only European state with a Muslim majority, Albania was also known as the only country worldwide where atheism was declared a compulsory state doctrine in 1967.

But the resulting prosecution of all religious congregations and the oppression of religi-

78 Bartl, Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 100, 106; Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 35.
79 Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 390.
80 Cf. Jacob, Beiträge zur Kenntnis des Derwisch-Ordens der Bektaschi, 15-16; Kiel, A note on the date of the establishment of the Bektashi order in Albania, 270; Kissling, Zur Frage der Anfänge des Bektaschitums in Albanien, 104-105.
81 Refered to by the traveller Evliya Çelebi, cf. Kissling, Zur Frage der Anfänge des Bektaschitums in Albanien, 282; Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 36.
83 Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 36, personal communication 1999.
84 Ibid., 10-15.
85 Ibid., 20-21.
87 ‘La situation albanaise est en effet exceptionnelle en Europe: c’est le seul Etat dans la majorité de la population s’est converti à l’Islam’, Popovic, ‘La communauté musulmane d’Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 201.
88 Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 608 ff.
ous activities is not the only remarkable (and tragic) fact about religious life in Albania. Unlike any other nation in Southeast Europe, Albanians traditionally did not adhere to a single faith, and even Islam did not seem to be very deeply rooted until the 19th century:

'Albanien ist, wie bekannt, von den Türken niemals so tief durchkolonisiert worden, daß der rechtgläubige Islam sich als ausschließlich er Glaube hätte durchsetzen können ... der albanische Kryptochristianismus war noch tief bis in das 19. Jahrhundert hinein vorhan-
den.'

Generally, in southeastern Europe ethnicity is closely linked to the adherence to a specific religion: Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and Romanians are Orthodox, Slovenians, Croats and Hungarians are Roman Catholics, Bosnians, Pomaks, and Turks are Muslims.

Among Albanians, as an exception from this rule, four different confessions prevailed: Catholicism in the north, Orthodoxy in the south, Sunni Islam in the central and eastern parts of the Albanian inhabited areas, and Bektashism in the south. Due to missionary efforts by Western and Middle Eastern congregations alike, even nowadays loyalty to one specific religion in Albania is fluid and might be divided: it is, for example, not uncommon that a contemporary Albanian might declare him- or herself to be a 'Protestant Muslim' if he or she has converted to one of the several Protestant congregations being engaged in missionary work in the country. As Young points out, '... people in modern-day Albania attend religious ceremonies regardless of which faith they belong to, as a form of social gathering.'

Besides the somewhat diversive and fluid character of religion in Albania in general, all available sources indicate that traits of the autochthonous folk religion have been preserved in the Albanian-inhabited areas to a much greater extent than in other regions of Europe, thereby contesting the fixed adherence to one specific type of region. As examples I would like to refer to the feast of patron saints and ancestor worship to be found on the northern Albanian Dukagjin Plateau. Furthermore, there is general agreement about the fact that religion in Albania tends to be syncretistic: Many traits of Christianity survived among Muslim converts in form of the so called Crypto-

89 Kissling, Über die Anfänge des Bektashitums in Albanien, 285-286. Author's translation: As it is a well known fact, Albania has never been colonised by the Turks to such an extent that the orthodox Islam could have constituted the only religion of the country ... Albanian cryptochristianity did exist well until the 19th century.


91 Young, Religion and society in present-day Albania, 6.

92 E.g. Bartl, Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 106, Religi-
onsgemeinschaften und Kirchen; Çabej, Albanische Volkskunde, 333-387; Lakshman-Lepain, Reli-
gions between tradition and pluralism, The Bektashis, the Halvetis and the Baha'is; Prifti, The cur-
rent situation of religion in Albania; Vlora, Aus Berat und vom Tomor.

93 Çabej, Albanische Volkskunde, 349, 350.


95 'Crypto-Christianity' means shifting the original religion underground, describing a situation where the population overtly adheres to Islam, but still practises Christianity in secret, cf. Bartl, Kryptochristentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien. - Similar bi-religious settings are,
'In many places during Ottoman rule, people took two names: a Muslim one to avoid capitation tax and to be eligible to undertake government positions, an a Christian one to avoid having to serve in the Ottoman army (Skendi, 1980: 246-247). Skendi discusses 'Crypto-Christianity' whereby 'individuals or groups who, while publicly professing Islam, satisfied their conscience by proclaiming Christianity (Orthodox or Catholic) in private.'

Thus, it is little surprising that a typical feature of the 'religious landscape' in Albania seemed to have been the people called larame, literally 'the spotted ones' or 'the coloured ones', referring to the fact that many Albanians adhered to more than one confession at the same time.

Furthermore, it is usually assumed that Christianity was not deeply rooted among the population, which of course also facilitated conversion to Islam. There are numerous accounts of Christians and Muslims visiting the sacred sites of each other's congregation, and about the exchange of amulets. Among the followers of Islam as well as among the Christian Albanians, many autochthonous religious concepts persisted:

'... Das enge Nebeneinander von Christentum und Islam erzeugte hier [in Albanien] einen Synkretismus, der für die meisten erst in jüngerer Zeit islamisierten Länder charakteristisch ist; hinzu kommt noch der starke Einfluß der albanischen Derwischorden, insbesondere der Bektasiye [sic!], der auch seinerseits dazu beitrug, die religiösen Unterschiede im Volk verschwimmen zu lassen.'

Therefore it might be assumed that a common, folk religious substratum exists for all four religions in Albania, and that a typical Albanian form of religiousity developed. As Antonia Young points out, '... it is in fact remarkable that religious differences, the basis of so much antagonism and violence in all parts of the world, has not been a cause of conflict in Albania.'

Taking into account this general religious climate, the Bektashis deserve special attention because of the pantheistic and unorthodox character of their faith (which had already developed in their Asian regions of origin, see chapter 2). Acceptance of Bektashism in Albania was largely facilitated by the fact that Bektashi syncretism combined elements for example, to be found among the Pueblo Indians in present-day southwestern United States, labelled with the term compartamentalización which refers to the shift of the original religion in 'underground settings', in this case to be taken literally since the respective Native religion is practised in subteran chambers called kiva.

---

96 Cf. Young, Religion and society in present-day Albania, 7, with reference to Skendi, Balkan Cultural Studies, 236.
97 Bartl, Kryptochristentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien, 119.
98 Ibid., 21.
99 Bartl, Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 92.
100 Bartl, ibid., 9. Author's translation: The close relationship between Christianity and Islam created an syncretism [in Albania] which is typical for most of the countries which accepted Islam in recent times. Additionally, the strong influence of dervish orders, particularly the Bektasiye [sic!], contributed to a merger of religious distinctions among the average population.
101 Cf. Lakshman-Lepain, Religions between tradition and pluralism.
102 Young, Religion and society in present-day Albania, 5.
of Shi'a Islam and folk religion with Christian elements, for example belief in the Holy Trinity, confession of sins, and the sign of the cross. The many traits of Christianity that had been incorporated into Bektashism (as well as into the lores of other Sufi congregations) facilitated the conversion to Islam among the population in the Middle East and the Balkans, which previously had only been superficially Christianized.

According to Dauer, Kaleshi and Kissling, the major dervish orders like the Mevlevi and Bektashi contributed significantly to the shaping of popular Islamic beliefs and had strong connections to craftmen's guilds (ahiler). Concomitantly, the Bektashis practiced remarkable tolerance towards Christians and an overall liberal attitude, also applying to the intake of alcohol. Bartl claims:

‘Charakteristisch für den in Albanien verbreiteten Synkretismus waren auch die Erfolge sektiererischer Bewegungen der Derwischbünde, besonders des Derwischordens der Bektashi, der in seiner Lehre auch christliche Elemente aufgenommen hatte.’

5. The ‘Albanisation’ of the Tarikat

According to the majority of sources, the Bektashi faith gradually became more and more deeply rooted in Albania during the 19th century. One reason for this was the fact that the tarikat was spared suppression of the order had to face in the core areas of the Ottoman Empire (such as Anatolia) in the first quarter of the 19th century (1822-1826) so that the Albanian Bektashis were in a far better and more secure position than the adherents of the same faith in Turkey. Clayer speaks about ‘un solidication d'un bektachisme proprement albanais dans les confins occidentaux de l'Empire [ottomane]’, with elements of Albanian nationalism being integrated into Bekatashi lore, especially in the southern parts of the country where most of the Bektashi teqes were situated. Hasluck described the Bektashi influence on social and political life in Albania in the following way:

103 Cf. Clayer, L'Albanie, pays des derviches, 15-16, 31; Gashi/Steiner, Albanien, 101; Bartl, Die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung. 30, who writes: ‘... die religiösen Ideen der Derwische fanden bei der einheimischen Bevölkerung leichter Anklang als der orthodoxe Islam’. - Author's translation: The religious ideas of the dervishes found more ready acceptance among the native population than orthodox Islam.
104 Dauer, Kaleshi, Kissling, Pllana, Baba Kâzim, Oberhaupt der Bektâshi-Derwische in Djakovica, 8.
106 Cf. Gashi/Steiner, Albanien, 67.
107 Clayer, La Bektachiyya, xi; Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien, 687-688. Author's translation: A typical feature of the syncretism spread in Albania was the success of Islamic sects of dervish orders [in converting people to their faith], especially the dervish order of the Bektasiye, who had also incorporated Christian elements in their doctrines.
108 Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 108; Popovic/ Veinstein, Bektachtiyya, xi; Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien, 687-688.
109 Cf. Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung. 105.
110 Dauer, Kaleshi, Kissling, Pllana, Baba Kâzim, Oberhaupt der Bektâshi-Derwische in Djakovica, 12.
111 Clayer, La Bektachiyya, 470.
112 Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 31.
‘To an outsider it appears that the Albanian temperament has evolved a form of Bektash-ism in which the social organization rather than the religious-superstitious side is uppermost. Characteristic of the time at which Bektashism won its foothold in Albania - the era of the French Revolution - is the prominence given here, in theory at least, to certain liberal ideas, such as the Brotherhood of Man and the unimportance of the dogmas and formalities of religion as compared with conduct.\footnote{Hasluck, The non-conformist Muslims of Albania, 538.}

It is a generally held opinion that the order played a leading role in the movement of ‘national awakening’ (\textit{rilindja}) in Albania from 1878 onwards because leading members of the movement belonged to the Bektashis.\footnote{Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung: 108 ff., Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen 595; Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 15-16; 31; Frashëri, The History of Albania, 226-256.} Clayer claims that ‘... les Bektachis albanais étaient, avant tout, partisans de l’emancipation vis à vis la Turquie ...’.\footnote{Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 42.} Bartl, while referring to Naim Frashëri, even speaks of attempts to turn Bektashism into an all-encompassing national religion for all Albanians,\footnote{Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 589: ‘Ende des 19. Jh. gab es sogar Bestrebungen, die Bektasiye zu einer alle Albaner verbindenden Nationalreligion zu machen.’} attempts by Naim Frashëri to ‘albanise’ the Bektashis and the later Bektashis’ connections to the Young Turks are mentioned by Stadtmüller.\footnote{Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien, 687-688.}

A central role of the Bektashis within the famous Ligue of Prizren (1878-1881), being the crucial movement for Albanian independence, is usually acknowledged,\footnote{Cf. Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 41; Hall, Albania and the Albanians, 43: ‘Bektashi leaders played an important part in the Albanian national movement, mediating between other religious groups and providing a more outward-looking cultural receptacle for external influences (Hasluck, 1925; Birge, 1937; Jacques, 1938). Naim Frashëri who, towards the end of the nineteenth century, strove to establish a unified written language and glorify the Albanian past in a literature of its own, was a leading Bektashi.’} and it was Bektashis who organized the introduction of the Albanian language for education purposes (also to Christians) and founded patriotic clubs (for example \textit{Bashkimi} in Elbasan).\footnote{Cf. Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 42; Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung.} In the second half of the 19th century, Bektashi prayer texts were increasingly written in Albanian (the so-called \textit{fletorë e Bektashinit}).\footnote{Cf. Hasluck, The non-conformist Muslims of Albania, 552-553.} On the other hand, it is by no means certain that the majority of the Bektashi adherents played a major role in the national Albanian movement: This might be one of the several myths surrounding the Bektashis. It is well known from other sources that most of the Bektashi \textit{teqe} in Albania were founded at the turn of the 19th to the 20th centuries, when a renaissance of the order took place.\footnote{Cf. Faroqhi, The Bektashis, 22; cf. Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung, 9.} Whether or not there was significant Bektashi influence on the \textit{rilindja} movement, it becomes quite clear that a decisive national Albanian character of the order was further fostered in the course of the 20th century,
one reason being the general dismissal and abolition of dervish orders in the Turkish Republic in 1925/26.

After the independence of Albania in 1912/13, ties with the *pir evi*, the Bektashis’ order centre in Haciçebaštaköy, Cappadocia, and the order's hierarchy in Turkey were slowly cut.122 Together with the loss of the Turkish Balkan provinces, all these reasons contributed to the fact that the Bektashis’ ‘... center of gravity changed’ towards a number of successor states of the Ottoman Empire.123 Already before, the ‘“divorce’ entre Bektachis turcs et Bektachis albanais’had taken place.124 The babas of most of the tekkes, even of the Bektashis' main centre (*pir evi*) in Hacibektaštaköy in Cappadocia, had been Albanians. The same applied to the tekkes in Crete and Lykia (Turkey) as well as in Egypt.125 Regarding all these facts, it is hardly surprising that the Albanian Bektashis in 1927 took steps to establish the order's world centre (*Kryegjyshat*) in Tirana,126 though it took until 1945 before they could organise independently within the Albanian state. The order's head Salih Niyazi Dede moved from Ankara to Tirana in 1930. It is estimated that between 1912 and 1945, approximately 15 to 20 % of the Albanian population were Bektashis.127

Between 1921 and 1950 the Albanian Bektashis organised five congresses ‘to accomplish the change of an Ottoman dervish order towards a religious congregation of the new Albanian Nation’:128 The Bektashi statute of 1924 defining the order as ‘une communauté indépendante au sein de la religion musulmane’129 was not approved by the Albanian government and the Sunni community, and it lasted until 1945 before the Bektashis were officially recognised as an independent religious congregation. In 1924/25, the Bektashis sided with Christian Albanians in a revolt against King Zogu, but after-

122 Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 46.
123 Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kizilbas, 7; cf. Dauer/Kaleshi/Kissling/Planna, Baba Kâzim, Oberhaupt der Bektâshi-Derwische in Djakovica, 9: ‘Das Erlöschen des Sultanats und das Verbot (1925) der Derwisch-orden in der Türkei verschoben Wirkungsfeld und -möglichkeiten in einzelne Nachfolgestaaten des Osmanenreiches.’ - Author’s translation: The end of the sultanat and the ban on the dervish orders (1925) shifted the field and the opportunities of influence to the divers successor states of the Ottoman Empire.
124 Clayer, La Bektachiyya, 470.
125 Ibid., cf. Bartl, die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung: 105; Hasluck, The non-conformist Muslims of Albania, 535. The same author, ibid., 515-516, claimed that Mehmet Ali from Egypt, being of Albanian origin, had himself been a Bektashi, and that Bektashism was spread in Egypt by Albanian mercenaries, the late Baba of Kaygusuz Tekke in Cairo also being an Albanian.
126 Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 594; Clayer, La Bektachiyya, 27. Concerning the exact foundation date and place of the Kryegjyshat in Albania, there are considerable contradictions in the available sources: Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 123, claims that the Bektashi *Kryegjyshat* was moved between 1931 and 1945 within Albania to Tirana, whereas other authors (e.g. Gashi/Steiner, Albanien, 267) speak about the foundation of the order's world centre in Tirana as early as 1927, shortly after the prosecution of all Sufi *tarikats* in the Turkish Republic; cf. Young, Religion and society in present-day Albania, 9.
127 Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 594-595; Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes; Clayer, Bektachisme et nationalisme albanais, 298; cf. Lakshman-Lepain, The Bektashis, the Halvetis and the Baha’is, 19-20: ‘Until 1967 they accounted for 25% of the Muslims in the country, or 17% of the total Albanian population.’
128 Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 595; authors translation.
129 Ibid.; Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches.

78
wards gained great political influence during his reign. During the order's restructuring, in 1929 and 1945 a new hierarchy was introduced, using Albanian instead of Turkish names for the different ranks of the tarikat. Since May 1945, there is the ranks of *ashik* (non-initiated sympathiser of the tarikat), *muhib* (member of the order), and among the clerics: *giysh* (formerly *dede*), *prind* (*baba*), and *halife*. Until 1937, the *Kryegjysh* (*head baba*, leader of the order) had to be approved by the Albanian King.

During the Second World War and the Civil War in Albania, members of the Bektashi order sided both with the Communist guerilla (for example the partisan group of *Baba Faja Martaneshi*) as well as with the nationalist *Balli Kombëtar*. Apparently, there was no Communist majority within the adherents of Bektashism, though adherents of the Bektashis also participated in the celebration of the Communist forces victory, as Kadaré indicates:


The statute of 1945 showed clear opposition against Communist leadership, with internal strife within the community escalating in March of 1947 when the *Babas* (*prindët*) Faja Martaneshi und Fejzo Dervishi (who were loyal towards the Communist regime) were shot and killed by Kryegjysh Abaz Hilmi after they had demanded more democracy within the *tarikat* and accused the *kryegjysh* of being a reactionary. After this incident, Abaz Hilmi committed suicide, and repression against non-loyal members of the order started. The *tarikat* was totally government-controlled and Ahmed Myftar Dede, being a loyal follower of Communist doctrines, was appointed Kryegjysh, staying in office until 1958. The Bektashis in Egypt and Turkey (constituting a clandestine movement) declared their independence from the Albanian *Kryegjyshat* (world centre)

---

130 Hasluck, The non-conformist Muslims of Albania, 388; Busch-Zantner, Die Sektte der Bektashi in Albanien, 245; cf. Hall, Albania and the Albanians, 44: ‘In an inter-war period dominated by the Muslim Zog, the Bektashi Order, expelled from Turkey, became an important national influence.’


132 Kadaré, Albanischer Frühling, 153. Author's translation: Besides news from all over the world, local notes like the following were to be read: ‘Last night, the religious sect of the Bektashi conducted a religious ceremony with a Rufa‘iya session in the presence of the head of state, Enver Hoxha’. The German translator added the note: ‘ritual of a sect, during which dervishes are falling into trance’. There is a somewhat obscure notion concerning a Rufa‘i (=Rifa‘i) session in connection with a Bektashi ceremony.

133 A different version was presented to me by *Baba “Mondi”* from the Tirana-based *Kryegjyshat* (personal communication, August 2 000): According to him, *Baba Faja Martaneshi* was killed because he had violated the rules of the Bektashi order by marrying and having a son. This version is questioned by the sociologist Vasfi Baruti in Tirana who told me (personal communication, August 2000) that *Baba Faja Martaneshi* died under very suspicious circumstances, with Enver Hoxhi himself being suspected to have ordered his assassination.
and elected Ahmed Sirri Baba in Cairo as head of the order in 1949. In Detroit, a Bektashi teqe was founded by Rexhebi Baba in 1954, issuing the journal Zëri i Bek-tashizmës ('the voice of Bektashism'). According to the statutes of the Albanian Bektashis of 1950, the order could also serve as an umbrella organisation for other Sufi communities in the country, such as the Halveti and Rrufai (Rifa'i). After 1967, when the general prosecution of all religious activities in Albania set in, little is known about the fate of the Bektashis in the country and further developments effecting the order (tarikat).

6. Remarks on the Present State of Research regarding the Albanian Bektashis

Due to the political isolation of Albania during recent decades (from 1945 until 1990), research by Western scholars was considerably hindered. Therefore, many of the available ethnographic sources on Albania deal with archaic features of the Albanian society, especially concerning customary law (the famous kanun), tribal and family organisation, and the ethnogenesis of Albanians. Thus, these studies tend to be orientated towards the folklorist paradigm of Reliktforschung - means searching for the remainders of ancient times - and are concomitantly very much historically orientated. Concerning studies that were published before World War II, there is a definite tendency towards an idealization of Albanians, especially the northern mountaineers, depicting tribal life and customs in Albania in a heroic and glorious light, idealizing patriarchal society and manly features, such as bravery and honour:


134 Cf. Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 595-597; or in 1947, according to Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 123.
135 Ibid.; Popovic, La communauté musulmane d’Albanie dans la période post-ottomane, 203.
136 Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 598.
137 This includes also the question of the Illyrian heritage of the present-day Albanians, the extent and the results of the hellenisation, or romanisation, respectively, of presentday Albanian territories, or the relationship between Albanians and Aromanians (Vlachs).
This attitude also applies to the studies concerning Islam in Albania, and - not surprisingly - studies on the Albanian Bektashis are mostly historically orientated. Clayer gives a short account on recent developments, touching upon the 6th Congress of the Albanian Bektashis in Tirana and mentioning growing opposition among the remaining Bektashis in Macedonia, Kosova as well as immigrant Bektashi communities in western Europe and overseas against Kryegjysh Reshat Bardhi in Tirana.

Other Bektashi-related publications either cover the tarikat in its Turkish region of origin or in other areas of the Balkans. As Vorhoff writes,
Alevi-Bektashi studies were until recently largely the domain of Orientalists. They concentrated on the history of the Bektashi order (tarikat), which goes back to the 13th century, and the Babaî and Kizilbas (lit. 'Readhead') movements. 144

Though Bektashis, Alevis, Kizilbaş, Tahtacis, Alawites and other Ali-oriented groups in the Islamic world in recent years have found considerable attention in matters of ethnography, sociology, and their contemporary political implications, 145 there is no study relating to the contemporary Albanian Bektashis. Still, Natalie Clayer is right in her claim that studies on the Bektashis ‘... restent rares et insuffisant’. 146

This is very surprising in regard of the fact that there is a general renaissance of religion in Albania after 1990: Gashi & Steiner speak of a renaissance in form of a peaceful co-existence of the four religious groups of Catholics, Albanian-Orthodox, Sunnites, and Bektashis 147 after the ban on all religious activities in Albania had been lifted on May 5th, 1990 Bektashi ceremonies are broadcasted in TV, teqes which had been destroyed or abandoned in Communist times are renovated and reconstructed – for example the teqe beneath ‘Skanderbeg’s castle’ in Kruja, allegedly situated at the site of the footprints of Sari Saltik, the so-called Bektashi missionary in the Balkans. 148

One description of contemporary developments among the Albanian Bektashis I would like to quote here in length: 149

‘The Kryegjyshat or World Centre of the Bektashi community claims continuity with the juridical person that emerged in 1921 during their First Congress, when the order took the name of Komuniteti Bektashi (Bektashi Community). According to the editor of the Urte sia magazine, Kujtim Ahmataj, the name was adopted in order to 'distinguish ourselves from the Sunnis.' He declares that 'today the Bektashis have been recognized as a community and as an association', to which the lawyer Vjollca Mecaj adds the nuance that 'If the Bektashis are not registered as an association, there is no act to recognize the legiti-

144 Vorhoff, Academic and jounalistic publications on the Alevi and Bektashi of Turkey, 24.
146 Clayer, L’Albanie, pays des derviches, 1.
147 Gashi/Steiner, Albanien, 72, original quote: “Wiedergeburt ... in Form der traditionell friedlichen Koeexistenz der vier Religionsgruppen ... Katholiken, Albanisch-Orthodoxe, Sunniten, Bektashis ...”; cf. Bartl, Religionsgemeinschaften und Kirchen, 587.
148 Also written Sary Saltyk, Sari Salltuk, or Sari Saltuk, according to Turkic or Albanian affiliation of the respective source. Accounts of the person and the life of Sari Saltik are given in Bartl, Die Albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigsbewegung, Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes, 51-53, Hasluck, The non-conformist Muslims of Albania, 397, Christianity and Islam und the Sultans, 429-439; and Popovic, La communauté musulmane d’Albanie dans la période post-ottomane. A reference to the teqe beneath Kruja can be found in Babinger, Bei den Derwischen von Kruja, 165: ‘Bei einer kleinen Kapelle, Dschurmeti Schejntit, das ist ’Fußspur des Heiligen (nämlich Saltyk Dede), genannt, machten wir nochmals Halt ...’. - Author's translation: We stopped again at a small chapel called Jurmeti Sheyntit [English transcription], that means 'footprint of the saint', referring to Saltyk Dede). - Zarcone, Nouvelles perspectives dans les recherches sur les kizilbas-Alévis et les bektachis de la Dobroudja, de Deli Orman et de la Thrace orientale, 3, 4, stresses the importance of Sari Saltuk for the Islamization and partly Turkisation (in past times, perhaps refering to the Gagauz people?) of Dobruja and claims that dervishes had been present in this region from the 13th century onwards; cf. Barkan, Istiklal devirlerin kolonizatör Türk dervişleri ve zâviyeler, 2.
149 Lakshman-Lepain, The Bektashis, the Halvetis and the Baha’is.
mate existence of their religion. Bearing in mind the real estate which they own, the Bek-
tashis have no interest in being registered as an association.'

Consequently, the Bektashis have an ambiguous status which places them somewhere in
the middle between the three official religions and the other religious minorities. Similar

to the Sunnis, the Orthodox and the Catholic religions, the state recognizes their existence
de facto, which spares them the necessity of registering, but they have no right to have
their own representative in the State Secretariat of religions and all their activities and all
their activities placed under the supervision of the Sunni community. Their spiritual
leader (Kryegysh) Haxhi Dede Reshat Bardhi participates in all state ceremonies, and re-
cently the Nevruz holiday on March 22 was declared to be an official holiday, because it

coincides with the Day of Democracy. According to Mr Kujtim Ahmataj, the Bektashis
have partially succeeded in reclaiming their lands and their 'tekkes' from the state, and
they appear to be confident about the future. The process is nevertheless delayed and no-
obody can identify the exact nature of the obstacles. Incidentally, Mr. Ahmataj claims that
he has no problem gaining access to mass media. There is regular coverage of their cere-
monies on TV.'

This means there is ample evidence for the renewed presence of Bektashi adherents in
Albania at the end of the 20th century, with their rituals, their everyday lives, their socio-

economic, political, and religious situation being insufficiently documented. In this
paper I made an attempt to summarise the present state of research on the Albanian
Bektashis, thereby offering access also to little known sources in German language, to
facilitate further, most desirable research.

7. Questions and Suggestions for further Research

As – for example - the findings and conclusions of a conference on Myths in Albania in 1999
indicate, many supposedly well established facts concerning Albanian history
have to be severely contested and questioned, resulting from the isolated position of the
country in recent decades and the deliberate use of myths for political purposes and the
Communist regime. This also means that many historical incidents like the origin of the
Bektashis in Albania, the time and circumstances of the introduction of the tarikat to

Albania, and the order's role in the rilindja movement remain questions for further re-
search.

Areas of further research arise from the need for ethnographic and sociological investi-
gation of the Albanian Bektashis. Thus, I would like to draw the reader's attention to
three different sets of question which I regard as being crucial for further research:

150 The full title of the conference which was organised by Mrs. Schwandner-Sievers and took place at
the London University's School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in June 1999 was
The Role of Myths in Albania in History and Development.
(1) The relationship between the different religions present in Albania and their development in face of an of a substratum of folk religion

The highly syncretistic character of the Bektashi faith in general leads to the question in which way the different religions which have been introduced to Albania in the course of history (two different versions of Christianity: Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and at least two different forms of Islam: Sunni, Shi'a derived Bektashism, and numerous other Sufi tarikat) did influence each other, and where combined and mixed with, and integrated different aspects of a pre-Christian folk religion. The persistance of many traits of folk religion is a notable feature of everyday life in Albania: Large puppets are erected on rooftops as protection against the evil eye, monetary demands by Gypsies (Roma) made for fear of black magic, and of spells being put on people who are reluctant to pay for their services, the word mashallah is frequently used in colloquial language, refering to all measures of protection against evil charms and sorcery.

Bektashism with its genuine synchrestic and heterodox appearance, having combined various Muslim, pre-Islamic Turkic, Christian (Nestorian), and may be even Buddhist elements already in the Asiatic regions of its origin, is naturally susceptible of further synchretistic tendencies in Albania and other regions of the Balkans.

This basic situation leads to the question of religious syncretism in the interface of Islam and Christianity as well as to the question of the maintainance of an autochthonous religious substratum and its assertion when being confronted with forms of the official religion: How could typical Albanian forms of Islam emerge? Which religious substratum was incorporated into the rituals and ceremonies of the Bektashi tarikat which deviate greatly from the ceremonies and rules propagated by official Sunni and Shi'a Islam alike? - Further, the question of religious 'heretics' comes up: How does a Muslim 'sect' like the Bektashis interact with the Islamic Orthodoxy?

(2) The question of survival of a multi-faceted religious "landscape" in the face of state repression and changing values due to profound social changes.

To what extent could elements of Islam, and especially organisational structures of the Bektashis, survive in Albania during the last fifty years? How did Islam deal with Communism? Actually, there is many indications pointing to the fact that neither the religious organisation nor a thorough knowledge of Bektashi doctrins survived the times

151 Cf. Mélikoff, Bektashi/Kizilbas, 1; Vorhoff, Academic and journalistic publications on the Alevi and Bektashi in Turkey, 188.
152 Cf. Birge, The Bektashi Order of Dervishes; Esin, Thèmes et symboles communes entre le Bouddhisme tantrique et la tradition des Bektachis ottoman; Faraqui, The Bektashis; Frembgen, Derwische, gelebter Sufismus; Haas, Die Bektaşî; Kissling, Das islamische Derwischwesen, die islamischen Derwischorden; Müller, kulturhistorische Studien zur Genese pseudo-islamischer Sektengebilde in Vorderasien; Ocak, Bektâşi menâkıbnamelerinde Islam öncesi inanç motifleri; Popovic, La communauté musulmane d’Albanie dans la période post-ottomane; Schimmel, Mystische Dimensionen des Islam, Sufismus und Volksfrömmigkeit.
of Communist rule but the extent of the practice of Bektashism in Albania has not yet been asserted.

(3) The maintainance of independent Albanian forms of religiosity in the face of growing antagonistic influences from the East and West.

What kind of position do members of the Bektashis take in the Albanian society of the third millennium, which is deeply antagonistic, crisis-striven, and has to find an own identity? In present-day Albania, it is quite obvious that a number of Middle Eastern countries are involved in religious as well as economic activities. This is indicated by Turkish Albanian joint ventures, the Arab Albanian Bank (cf. Hall 1994:xxv), and hotels constructed by entrepreneurs from the Arabian Emirates. Thus, it becomes quite obvious that a number of countries of the Middle East (especially Iran and the Gulf states) try to gain influence in Albania as being traditionally a predominantly Muslim country.

In this way, the country is launched into a sphere of tensions between East and West, between a stronger orientation towards western Europe (which seems to be favored by most politicians and intellectuals) or a stronger dependency on the oil-rich countries of the Muslim world. There is strong evidence for attempts by the Iranian government and leading clerics of the Islamic Republic to influence Bektashism in Albania by sending Bektashi adherents to the Holy City of Qom for religious training. Concerning Alevi in Turkey and elsewhere, the impact of foreign influences on this religion has been investigated in a number of studies in recent years, but no such study has yet been carried out concerning the Albanian Bektashis.

Concerning the contradictory forces of Western and Eastern influence that effect contemporary Albania, it has to be added that it has always been the country's position to be torn between East and West since the early Middle Ages, starting with the division of the Roman Empire: from the 6th century onwards, Albania was caught in the middle between the sphere of the western Roman Empire and Byzantium. This immediate position also found its expression in the religious division between Catholicism (in the north of the Albanian-inhabited territories) and Orthodoxy (in the south). From the 15th century onwards, the influence of the Ottoman Empire further enlarged foreign domination and put the country in a marginal position between occidental Christianity and oriental Islam. As a reaction to centuries of foreign dominance and antagonistic outside influences, an astonishing inertness and preservation of archaic features characterises cul-

154 Cf. Lakshman-Lepain in this volume.
155 Lakshman-Lepain, personal communication, cf. also in this volume.
156 E.g. Cornell, On Bektashism in Bosnia; Olsson et al., Alevi Identities; Rittersberger-Tilic, Development and reformulation of a returnee identity as Alevi.
tural as well as religious life. Christianity as well as Islam did not manage to subdue elements of the autochthonous religion completely. Taking into account this background, especially Bektashism as a religion that incorporated so many archaic traits and developed an independent Albanian character might serve as a paradigmatic example for these forces of inertness and resistance, and therefore deserves special attention.

References


Atalay, Bestim, Bektashilik ve Edebiyati, Istanbul 1924.


Bartl, Peter, Die albanischen Muslime zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung (1878-1912), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1968 (Albanische Forschungen 8).


157 Cf. Bartl, Kryptochristentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien; Çabej, Albanische Volkskunde; Stadtmüller, Der Derwischorden der Bektaschi in Albanien 1971; Lakshman-Le- pain, Religions between tradition and pluralism, The Bektashis, the Halvetis and the Baha'is.
Busch-Zantner, Richard, Die Sekte der Bektaschi in Albanien, in: Dr. A. Petermanns Mitteilungen 78 (1932), 245.


Hahn, Johann G., Albanesische Studien, Jena: Hof- und Staatsdruckerei Wien 1854 (3 vol.).


Hasluck, Frederick W., Christianity and Islam under the Sultans, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2 vol. 1929 (ed. by Margaret Hasluck).


Köprülü, Mehmet F., Türk Edebiyat'ında Ilk Matasavvifler. Ankara 1918 [Istanbul 1966].


Köprülü, Mehmet F., The Seljuks of Anatolia. Their History and Culture according to local Muslim Sources, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1992.

Köprülü, Mehmet F., Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion (Prolegomena), Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press 1993.


Nüzhet, Sadettin, Bektaşi sarrlı, İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası 1939.
Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar, Bektaşi menakibnamelerinde İslam öncesi inanç motifleri, İstanbul: Endereń Kitabevi 1983.
Schneeweß, Edmund, Grundriß des Volksglaubens und Volksbrauchs bei den Serbo-kroatien, Celje 1935.


Vlora, Ekrem Bey, Aus Berat und vom Tomor, Sarajevo: D.A. Kajon 1911.


Young, Antonia, Religion and society in present-day Albania, in: Journal of Contemporary Religion 1 (1999), 5-16.