



BEKTĀŠĪYA

BEKTĀŠĪYA, a syncretic and heterodox Sufi order, found principally in Anatolia and the Balkans, with offshoots in other regions, named after **Ḥājī Bektāš** and regarding him as its founding elder (*pīr*). Generally the order was known in Turkish as *ṭarīqat-e Bektāšīya*, but at a fairly late date the Bektāšīs began calling their order *ṭarīq-e nāzanīn* (the delicate path). This designation was probably invented as a kind of password among the Bektāšīs after Sultan Maḥmūd II's proscription of the order in 1826.

The evolution of the Bektāšīya and its rituals. The origins of the Bektāšī order date from the aftermath of the Bābāī rebellions—with which Ḥājī Bektāš was to some degree associated—in 7th/13th-century Anatolia. Ḥājī Bektāš gathered around him members of the numerous Sufi groups, mostly antinomian in orientation, that were widespread among the rural and nomadic population of Anatolia: the Rum Abdallarī, the Camiler (followers of Shaikh Aḥmad-e Nāmeqī of Jām (d. 536/1141) and, above all, Qalandarīs. Many features of early Bektāšī practice derive from Qalandarī influence, notably the *čahār żarb* (the shaving of the hair, the eyebrows, the moustache, and the beard) and a preference for celibacy (*mücerredlik*). In the lifetime of Ḥājī Bektāš, the shaving of the head, together with the donning of a special tall hat known as *alefī tāj* to the accompaniment of *takbīr*, constituted a ceremony of initiation (see Gölpınarlı, ed., pp. 16, 21, 28, 56, 61, 71-72). The Qalandarīs of Anatolia were gradually assimilated into the Bektāšīya: the two designations appear to have become interchangeable by the sixteenth century, and in the next century no separate mention of Qalandarīs is to be encountered.



Another early source of Bektāšī ritual was provided by the sodalities and guilds that were widespread in Anatolia under the general designation of *fotowwat* or *ahīlik*. It can be said, indeed, that the Bektāšī order was one of the main repositories of the traditions of *ahīlik* after it effectively died out in the 9th/15th century (see Taeschner, pp. 406-07). Examples of Bektāšī borrowings from *ahīlik* are the ceremony for initiating the *moḥebb*, a ceremony from which outsiders—known as *zāher*—were excluded; the annual renewal of the pledge of allegiance (*bay'at*) by the *moḥebb* on the tenth day of Ramažān; and the practice of seeking absolution for one's obligations (*helallık*) from fellow Bektāšīs. Likewise, the poems called *tarjamān* that are recited by the Bektāšīs in commemoration ceremonies for the dead, as well as on other ritual occasions such as crossing the threshold of the *tekka* (hospice), are often encountered in books pertaining to *ahīlik/fotowwat*.

Important changes in the nature of the Bektāšī order and its practices were effected by Balīm Sultan (d. 925/1519), known to Bektāšī tradition as *pīr-e t̄ānī* (the second elder). The genealogy of Balīm Sultan, born at Dimetoka in Rumelia to a Christian mother, is a confused matter, but almost all versions of it seek to link him to the miraculously begotten sons of Ḥājī Bektāš, Ḥabīb and Kežr Lāla, as a kind of reinforcement of his spiritual descent from the founding elder of the order. To Balīm Sultan are ascribed the first use of twelve candles and associated paraphernalia in various rituals and ceremonies; the introduction of the Palihenk, a large symbolic stone with twelve flutings worn around the neck; and, most importantly, the fixing of a hierarchy of ranks at the head of which stood that of the celibate dervish (*mücerred/mojarrad*). From the time of Balīm Sultan onward, the Bektāšīya consisted indeed of two mutually antagonistic branches; the Mücerred or Babagan branch, founded by Balīm Sultan and presided over by a celibate dervish chosen by an electoral college of his peers; and the Çelebî (Čalabī) or Sofiyan branch, led by other presumed descendants of Ḥabīb and Kežr Lāla. The Mücerred branch was generally dominant, and from the time of Sersem-ʿAlī Sultan (d. 977/1569-70), all Bektāšī *tekkas* were under the control of a supreme celibate elder resident at the central shrine (*pirevi*) in the hamlet of Hacibektaş near Kırşehir in central Anatolia.

The ranks in the hierarchy established to Balīm Sultan were the following: *ʿāšeq*, *moḥebb*, *darvīš*, *bābā*, *kalīfa*, and—standing somewhat outside the series—*mojarrad*. The *ʿāšeq* was the aspirant to entry into the order; once accepted, he was termed a *moḥebb*. If he then gained advancement to the rank



of *darvīš*, he would be told to let his beard grow, be given the Bektāšī *tāj* to wear, and be assigned one of several menial tasks in the *tekka*. The oldest Bektāšī *tekkas* often had land attached to them, so that working the land was also among the tasks performed by the *darvīš*. The *bābā* was the Bektāšī equivalent of the shaikh, responsible, that is, for the welfare of all the residents of the *tekka*. The rank of *bābā* was awarded by a *kalīfa* to a *darvīš* selected by him or, occasionally, to a *moḥebb*. Although the chief function of the *bābā* was to train *darvīšes* and *moḥebbs* for further advancement, he could not himself promote them to the rank of *bābā*, this being the prerogative of the *kalīfa*. In dress the *bābā* was distinguished by a white cloth (green in the case of *sayyeds*) wrapped around the base of his *tāj*.

The *kalīfas*—who wrapped black cloth around the base of their *tāj*—were originally four in number. The most important one resided at the *pirevi*, exercising a general supervisory function over all *tekkas*. The other three had their seats at the *tekkas* in Karbalā' (*tekka* of 'Abd-al-Mo'men Bābā), Dimetoka (*tekka* of Sayyed 'Alī Sultan), and Cairo (*tekka* of Kaygusuz Abdal). Later the *bābās* at the convent near the martyrs' cemetery at Rumeli Hisar in Istanbul and the Şah Kulu Sultan *tekka* at Göztepe were also given the rank of *kalīfa*.

The celibate Bektāšīs were those who after reaching the rank of *darvīš* vowed never to marry but instead to devote the rest of their lives to the service of the Bektāšī order. They were initiated into this rank at one of the four *tekkas* that were the seats of *kalīfas* and wore an earring known as *menguş* in their right earlobes as a mark of their state.

It was soon after the passing of Balīm Sultan that the Bektāšīya—in both its branches—came to adopt the tenets of the extremist Shi'ites of Anatolia, known as Qezelbāš and loyal to the Safavids, who believed in the divinity of 'Alī. Throughout the sixteenth century, the Ottomans found it necessary to suppress a whole series of Qezelbāš uprisings, and as they did so the Bektāšī order came to function as a refuge for the Qezelbāš. To an extent, this was encouraged by the Ottomans themselves, for the Bektāšī order, particularly after the establishment of a centralized leadership, furnished a useful mechanism for the control and supervision of dissident and potentially rebellious elements. One indication of this is that from about 1610 onward, the choice of supreme elder had to be ratified by the Ottoman government.

As a result of interpenetration with the Qezelbāš, numerous elements of Shi'ite provenance entered Bektāšī usage, making it quite distinct from other Turkish



Sufi orders. Before the aspirant to membership in the order was admitted to the ceremonial chamber (*meydān*), he would be required to make his ablutions according to the regulations of Twelver Shi'ism. The *bābā* presiding over his initiation would inform him that as a member of the *gorūh-e nājīa* (the sect promised deliverance from hellfire) his sect was thenceforth the Ja'farī sect (i.e., Twelver Shi'ism); his elder (*pīr*) was ḤājīBektāš Walī; his preceptor (*moršed*) was Moḥammad; and his guide (*rahbar*) was 'Alī. Initiation into the Bektāšī order thus included a formal profession of faith in Twelver Shi'ism.

This profession did not, however, entail obedience to Shi'ite legal ordinances. Bektāšīs believed that formal worship was incumbent only on outsiders (*zahirler*) and that the *šarī'a* was not directed to individuals, having rather the cosmic function of maintaining order in the universe. In accordance with the slogan, *eli tek, dili pek, beli berk* “the hand restrained, the tongue held back, the loins bound,” Bektāšīs held that the ablution made at the time of initiation remained valid for a lifetime so long as one refrained from stealing, betraying the secrets of the order, and transgressing sexual prohibitions.

The principal devotional ceremony of the Bektāšī order, since its assimilation of extremist Shi'ite beliefs, has been the '*ayn-e jam*' (the essence of union), often abbreviated to *jam*'. The manner and frequency of its performance vary widely from one setting to another—rural or urban, Balkan or Anatolian—but underlying it in every instance is the mythical story of the *kirklar meclisi* (The assembly of forty). According to the story, the Prophet Moḥammad, in the course of his ascension, became aware of a gathering in the house of his daughter Fāṭema (miraculously transported on high); a group of forty, presided over by 'Alī and including the other eleven imams, was holding a meeting. The Prophet was refused admittance until he identified himself as “the poor one” (*faqīr*). 'Alī then distributed wine to all present, and drinking of this wine, the Prophet fell into a state of intoxication in which he perceived the divine reality manifested in 'Alī. The '*ayn-e jam*' is intended to be a reenactment of this gathering: the dance that is performed mirrors the intoxicated dance of the Forty; twelve among the participants correspond to the twelve imams; and the arak or wine that is drunk is a reminder of the wine distributed by 'Alī. Outsiders were always excluded from the '*ayn-e jam*'; this circumstance, together with the fact that alcohol was consumed and women participated freely in the ceremony, dancing together with men, gave rise to persistent accusations of debauchery.

The most important season in the Bektāšī calendar was the first ten days of



Moḥarram during which a fast was observed in mourning for Imam Ḥosayn. The fast, known as *ṣiām-e Fāṭema* (the fast of Fāṭema), entailed abstinence from meat slaughtered, milk drawn, and butter churned during those ten days. Members drank no water during their fast, and the particularly devout among them carried a piece of rock salt known as *Balīm tuzu* (Balīm's salt) which they would lick whenever they were thirsty. Throughout the period, they would recite the *Ḥadiqat al-so'adā'* of Fożūlī (d. 963/1556) to the accompaniment of ritualized weeping. On the last day of mourning, a threnody would be recited at dawn; the special dish known as *aşure* (a kind of sweet soup made with grains, nuts, and dried fruit) was ceremonially eaten and the normal life of the *tekka* resumed.

Because of their Shi'ite affiliations, Bektāšīs also gave importance to Nowrüz (Iranian New Year's Day), regarding it as the birthday of 'Alī.

It is worth remarking that in some of the collections known as *arkān-nāma* which describe the ceremonies of the Bektāšīya and list the prayers to be recited, the beliefs and devotional duties of Twelver Shi'ism are also set forth, under the respective headings of *oşul-e dīn* and *forū'e dīn* (principles and branches of religion). An example of this kind of handbook is *Bektaşī İlmihali* compiled by Necib Asım (d. 1935) and published at Istanbul in 1343/1925. The existence of this and similar works suggests that a *şarī'at*-oriented minority once existed among the Bektāšīs.

Another feature setting Bektāšīs apart from the members of other Sufi orders in Turkey has been their assimilation of the doctrines of Horufism, the movement founded by [Fażl-Allāh Astarābādī](#) (d. 796/1394). These became part of the basic creed of the Bektāšīya, particularly from the 16th century onward. The *Jāvīdān-nāma* of Fażl-Allāh was translated into Turkish by a Bektāšī (see Gölpınarlı, 1973, pp. 96, 119-24, 143-47). According to Eşhāq Efendi's *Kāşef-al-asrār wa dāfe' al-aşrār* (Istanbul, 1270/1873, p. 30), 'Alī al-A'lā (d. 822/1419), a principal successor of Fażl-Allāh, came to Anatolia after the death of his master and, residing for a time at the shrine of Ḥājī Bektāş, inculcated the principles of Horufism in the Bektāšīs. This account is not decisive, and it is possible that other Ḥorūfīs, notably the poet Nasīmī (d. 807/1404) who traveled widely in Anatolia, also contributed directly or indirectly to the assimilation of Horufism by the Bektāšīs.

The Bektāšīs in Ottoman history. It has already been pointed out that the Bektāšī order was, in a sense, a mediator between the Ottoman state and its



Qezelbāš subjects. This did not prevent certain Bektāšīs from themselves leading or participating in rebellions, notably those associated with Qalandar Čalabī (Çelebî), brother of Balım Sultan, in the early sixteenth century, and Şahkulu during the reign of Bāyazīd II. More important, however, was the association with the state provided by the Bektāšī affiliations of the Janissary corps. Certain accounts, probably apocryphal, even associate the Bektāšīs with its foundation and ascribe the origin of its distinctive headgear (known as *börk*) to a Bektāšī participating in the Ottoman conquest of Bursa (Aşıkpaşazade, pp. 205-06). What is certain is that Hājī Bektāš was regarded as the patron (*pīr*) of the Janissary corps, which was sometimes designated as *oĵāq-e Bektāšīān* (the hearth of the Bektāšīs) with its chief commander (*āġā*) known as *Āġā-ye Bektāšīān*. This link with the Janissaries, for long the indispensable military elite of the Ottomans, was an important factor in the ability of the Bektāšīs to survive as a markedly heterodox element in a Sunni environment. The spread of the Bektāšī order in the Balkans may also have been due in large part to the Janissaries, who established the order in the regions they conquered.

It was, however, their association with the Janissaries that earned the Bektāšīs formal proscription in 1826 when Sultan Maḥmūd II, weary of the eternal Janissary rebellions, abolished the Janissary corps. Several Bektāšīs were executed, and many more were banished to areas where the strong influence of the Sunni *‘olamā’* might be counted on to isolate and neutralize them. Newly erected *tekkas* were destroyed, and older ones were turned over to shaikhs of the Naqşbandī order on account of the shared link of both orders with the Yasawīya (real in the case of the Naqşbandīya, largely fictive in the case of the Bektāšīya). (See, on all of these measures, As‘ad Efendi, pp. 199-223.) Sometimes friction occurred between the Bektāšīs and the Naqşbandī shaikhs appointed to their *tekkas*, but on the whole mutual tolerance prevailed. It is said even that some Naqşbandīs changed their affiliations and became Bektāšī (Mélihoff, 1983, p. 166). In general, the Bektāšī order was able to reassert its existence from about the middle of the nineteenth century. Bektāšīs regained control of some of their *tekkas* and much of their literature was printed. The reign of Sultan ‘Abd-al-Ḥamīd (1876-1908) occasioned a hiatus in this revival, and Bektāšīs were active in the Masonic lodges and the Young Turk movement that helped encompass his overthrow.

In 1925, the Bektāšī order was officially dissolved in Turkey, together with all other Sufi orders. Although this did not spell an end to the devotional activity



of the Bektāšīs—which indeed continues down to the present—the official leadership of the order was now transferred to Albania, chief stronghold of the Bektāšīya in the Balkans.

The Bektāšī order outside Turkey. The Bektāšīya arrived in Albania probably as early as the fifteenth century and it became well-established there by the early 1700s. Precise figures are unavailable, but it is certain that Bektāšīs were numerous enough in Albania to count not simply as one Sufi order among others but as a separate religious community, quite distinct from the Sunni Muslims. After the official demise of the Bektāšīya in Turkey, the Albanian community formed the largest organized group of Bektāšīs to be found anywhere. With the advent of the communist government in Albania, a series of restrictions were placed on their activity, culminating in the official prohibition of the Bektāšīya—together with all other religions—in 1967.

Elsewhere in the Balkans, in Thrace, Kosovo, and Macedonia, the Bektāšīya continues to survive, although it is to be presumed that it has been all but eradicated in Bulgaria as a result of the official measures taken against all Muslim groups in 1985.

The Bektāšīya also used to exist in Egypt. In the 16th century Awliā' Čalabī (Evlīya Çelebî) reported the existence of three Bektāšī *tekkas* in Cairo (*Sīḥat-nāma* X, pp. 246ff.). By the beginning of the 19th century, only one of them—that at Qaṣr al-'Aynī—was still functioning (de Jong, 1978, p. 26). All Bektāšī activity in Egypt seems to have ceased in the 1950s; it had involved only Turks and Albanians and never attracted the local population.

Finally, mention may be made of a still functioning Bektāšī *tekka* in Michigan, where a group of Albanian immigrants continues to venerate Ḥājī Bektāš, their remote spiritual ancestor from Khorasan.

The Bektāšīya and Iran. When the Bektāšī order began absorbing extremist Shi'ite tendencies in the sixteenth century, it necessarily acquired also certain links with the Safavid dynasty. Bektāšīs revered the name of Shah Esmā'īl; enthusiastically took his poetry, written under the penname of Kaṭā'ī, as well as a spurious collection of his sermons (*buyruk*), into their corpus of liturgical texts; and even addressed certain prayers to him in the course of the 'ayn-e jam'. A number of Safavid rulers, continuing their propaganda among the heterodox population of Anatolia, reciprocated by proclaiming their loyalty to Ḥājī Bektāš, as for example in a letter sent in 1548 by Shah Ṭahmāsb to his



agents in Tokat (communication of A. Tietze).

It is possible that Bektāšī hospices existed in western Iran, at least in the early Safavid period (Nasr, p. 279). In general, however, the influence of the Bektāšīya on the religious life of Iran was strictly marginal. At a point that cannot be determined, the Ahl-e Ḥaqq of the Gūrān region evidently became aware of Ḥājī Bektāš, since they came to regard him as one of the manifestations of Sultan Ṣoḥāk (fl. 8th/14th century), the semilegendary founder of their sect (Mokri, p. 73, n. 52). Moḥammad Bīg, regarded by one branch of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq as the sixth incarnation of the godhead, is also considered to be identical with Ḥājī Bektāš (communication of M. van Bruinessen). Similarities between the terminology of the Ahl-e Ḥaqq and that of the Bektāšīs—such as the designation of the ritual assembly as *jam'* and of the four stages of religion as *šarī'at*, *ṭarīqat*, *ma'refat*, and *ḥaqīqat* (Minorsky, pp. 308-09)—also point to probable contacts between the two groups.

We may also note that Shah Ne'mat-Allāh Walī (d. 834/1431) eponym of the Ne'matallāhīya, the principal Sufī order of Shi'ite Iran, spent some time at the Kaygusuz Abdal *tekka* in Cairo; F. Köprülü regards Bektāšī influence on Shah Ne'mat-Allāh as having been decisive for his shift of allegiance to Shi'ism and as furnishing the origin of the distinctive headgear of the Ne'matallāhīs (Köprülü, 1922, pp. 470, 486). When the great Ne'matallāhī traveler Ḥājī Zayn-al-'Ābedīn Šīrvānī visited the central shrine of the Bektāšīs in the early nineteenth century, he found himself in a congenial atmosphere, although he deplored the Bektāšīs' neglect of ritual prayer (Šīrvānī, pp. 152-53).

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