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САРЪ САЛТЪК И БАЛКАНСКАТА
АЛЕВИЙСКО-БЕКТАШИЙСКА КУЛТУРА

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SARİ SALTİK AND THE ALEVI,
BEKTASHICULTURE IN THE BALKANS

Alevi and Bektashi culture has been organized in Balkan region like it spreaded in Anatolia. Sarı Saltık is the leader of this announcement in XIII.th century in Balkan. Sarı Saltık is one of the most important dervishes who spreaded Hacı Bektash Veli idea in East Europe. The fact that there have been many dervish tombs in Balkans and Anatolia for Sarı Saltık is the sign of his social power in the XIIIth century. The idea of Hacı Bektash Veli which spreaded with Sarı Saltuk in Balkans was symbolized by Seyid Ali Sultan Otman Baba, Akyazılı sultan, Demir Baba and Gül Baba.

There has been an Alevi settlement with the name of Sarı Saltık. Sarı Saltık settlement is in the center of Tunceli(hozat) and has many believers in Tunceli, Erzincan, Sivas, Gümüşhane and Çorum. With biographic studies about Sarı Saltık lots of information will be obtained about Alevi Culture. The researches on Sarı Saltuk will enable many data about historical progress of Alevi Bektashi Culture.

Key words: Alevism, Bektashism, Yesevism, dervish, dervish tombs, Sarı Saltık, Hacı Bektash Veli, Anatolia, Balkans

Alevism and Bektashism have two fundamental sources. These sources are Turkish culture, history and the religion of Islam. Turks have accepted the religion of Islam and acquired the Muslim identity in large groups from the tenth century. Turks' acquisition process of Islam which developed around the Transoxiana enabled them to develop their own peculiar interpretation of Islam and Muslim identity. Turks' interpretation of Islam has been developed on the basis of the thousand-year old Turkish cultural elements and the Islamic components. The charismatic-historical representative of this authenticity containing mystic images is Hodja Ahmed Yesevi. Ahmed Yesevi developed a doctrine known as Yesevism. He tried to deliver a basic and pure thinking system to the nomadic Turkish communities. Yesevi's thinking was defined as the source of various faith-based and social organisations in the history of the Turkish philosophy in the next periods. Alevism and Bektashism can be regarded as among the philosophical movements which perceive Hodja Ahmed Yesevi and Yesevism as a prototype of the philosophical and faith-based principles. Alevism and Bektashism were organised in Anatolia by “Khorasan saints” who described themselves as the successors of Yesevi.

Hadji (pilgrim) Bektash Veli, who completed his education and moved from Khorasan to Anatolia in the thirteenth century, became the theorist of Anatolian Alevism and of Bektashism which was institutionalised by Balim Sultan in the sixteenth century. Hadji Bektash Veli connects the roots of his thinking to Hodja Ahmed Yesevi. In his *Velayetname* (saintly account) called also with his name, both of the historical personalities are demonstrated as contemporary with each other and it is stated that Hadji Bektash Veli was furnished with sacred consignments by Hodja Ahmed Yesevi and was sent to Anatolia having been entrusted with a task.

Hadji Bektash Veli came to Sulucakarahoyuk (contemporary Hadjibektash district in Nevsehir) and settled in an *oba* (nomadic group) of Chepni branch where he established his *dergah* (dervish lodge) and tried to spread his philosophy by teaching students adhered to his thinking.

Regarded with a sociological analysis, it is understood that also Hadji Bektash Veli perceives the nomadic Turkmen groups as the main human force in his thinking.

Hundreds of Turkish saints adhered to Hadji Bektash Veli's thinking participated actively in the Turkisation process in the different parts of Anatolia. They delivered Hadji Bektash Veli's philosophy to the Turkmen people in the *odjaks* (societies) and *tekkes* (dervish lodges) which they established. Meanwhile they demonstrated an attribute of social-religious leader managing also the settlement of the Turkish groups.

Hadji Bektash Veli's thinking was delivered to the social units of the Oguz branches like *oymak* (tribe), *ashiret* (clan) and *oba* (nomadic group) by the Turkmen *dedes* (senior dervishes) and *babas* (elder dervishes) in the thirteenth century, and the representatives of the thinking arrived also at the geography of the Balkans in the same century. The development of the tradition in the Balkans comes into being parallel to its promotion in Anatolia.

Many of the Turkmen dervishes foremost Sari Saltuk became the representatives of the thinking in the south-eastern Europe. The important representative of the doctrine in the Balkans in the thirteenth century is Sari Saltuk. After Sari Saltuk, the dervishes who lived by the late fourteenth century and the early fifteenth century such as Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) (red-madman), Odman Baba, Akyazili Sultan, Demir Baba, Ali Koc Baba, and Gul Baba Sarı made the thinking develop in the region. During the historical perspective, the Alevi and Bektashi taught- and faith-based systems took root in contemporary Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Romania. Many *dede odjaks* of the Alevi faith were established and developed their centres in the Balkans. Hundreds of Bektashi *tekkes* were established and became effective in the social, faith-based, and cultural life of the Balkans. Currently, the *dede odjaks* of the Alevi faith and the Bektashi *tekkes* still survive in the Balkans and maintain their functions within the life. In the geography of the Balkans, there are some places such as *turbe* (tomb), *yatir* (tomb), etc. regarded as sacred by the Alevi and Bektashi people. These faith centres are elements of the Turkish culture and of the religion of Islam which have emerged and developed throughout the centuries in the Balkans. Therefore, the elements of Alevi and Bektashi culture in the Balkans are historical, traditional, authentic and original parts of the Turkish culture and of the Alevi and Bektashi systems.

Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) whose *tekke* and *turbe* are located in Dimoteka, Greece is one of the charismatic people of the Alevi and Bektashi traditions. Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) who is also called “*gazi-eren*” (warrior-saint) and “*alp-eren*” (hero-saint) acted as a public leader in the Rumelia (the Turkish Thrace) at the time of Yildirim Bayezid. The myth of “forty saints” having been passed down orally by the Alevi and Bektashi people during the centuries demonstrates the vigour of the cult of Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) within the doctrine. Seyyid Ali Sultan is not only important for the Alevism and Bektashism in the Rumelia, but also for the Alevism and Bektashism in Anatolia. *Dede* and *talip* (disciple) communities affiliated with the *odjak* of Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) are living in tens of settlements in Anatolia mainly in the provinces of Malatya, Corum, Ankara, Eskisehir, and Kutahya. In these places, there are niche *turbes* which are attributed to Seyyid Ali Sultan. Also a large Alevi and Bektashi community affiliated with the *odjak* of Seyyid Ali Sultan is settled in the Thrace region of Turkey. The *odjak* of Seyyid Ali Sultan (*Kizildeli*) is important in regard with the ritual culture and faith-*dede odjak* profile that it comprises.

Odman Baba is another important historical figure referred to alongside the thinking of Hadji Bektash Veli in the Balkans. Odman Baba lived in the fifteenth century. Territories of contemporary Bulgaria were the main activity area of Odman Baba who conducted activities mainly in the Balkans as well as in Anatolia throughout his life. The *Velayetname* of Odman Baba contains the journeys which he went on with his dervishes, and the social, cultural and faith-based developments which he influenced. Odman Baba was an active Turkmen dervish to such an extent that he went to Istanbul and met the Ottoman ruler of the time, Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. Odman Baba’s contemporary, Shudjaaddin Veli was also in touch with other important *dedes* and *babas* like Koyun Baba.

According to oral culture, Odman Baba is the companion of Shudjaaddin Veli who has *turbe* and *tekke* in Arslanbeyli village of the Seyitgazi district in Eskisehir. This oral information was passed down during the meetings with the adherents of Shudjaaddin Veli and the followers of Odman Baba. Shudjaaddin Veli is referred to as “*Shefkullu Bey*” in the *Velayetname* of Odman Baba.

The adherents of Shudjaaddin Veli and Odman Baba announced that they acknowledged the *dedes* of Shudjaaddin Veli’s *odjak* as the “*murshid odjak*” (guide society) for the followers of Odman Baba who were adhered to Odman Baba *tekke*, since Odman Baba had no descendant. In the present time, the communities adhered to Odman Baba’s *odjak* are headed by faith leaders called *baba* (elder dervish) whose faith practices such as entrustment of tasks, acknowledgement, and interview are conducted by the *dedes* of Shudjaaddin Veli’s *odjak*. Today in many settlements in the territories of Bulgaria and within the borders of Turkey, there are Alevi communities adhered to Odman Baba’s *surek* (drove). The cult of Odman Baba was maintained by his successors Akyazili Sultan and Demir Baba. Also Akyazili Sultan and Demir Baba are important representatives of the Alevi and Bektashi history in the Balkans. The epics on Akyazili Sultan and Demir Baba are still passed down orally among Alevis and Bektashis in the region. The adherents of Sheikh Bedrettin and of Ali Koc Baba *odjak* centred in Bulgaria are other

important communities in Alevi and Bektashi tradition of the Balkans. Today the adherents of Sheikh Bedrettin and of Ali Koc Baba are settled in the certain parts of Bulgaria and in the different regions of Turkey.

Both communities contain important elements of Alevi and Bektashi culture and faith. It is possible to acquire new scientific materials on Alevism by conducting researches on these groups. Alevi and Bektashi traditions in the Balkans are also important for Turkish language and literature. Important poets were grown within the geography of the Balkans owing to the thinking of Alevism and Bektashism which has a reach literature. Many Alevi and Bektashi poets like Yemini, Virani, Kazak Abdal, Yeshil Abdal produced works which were regarded as important by the doctrine.

Sari Saltuk is the historical-charismatic person whose life and the narratives about him in Alevism and Bektashism in the Balkans identify with the history of the doctrine in the region. Sari Saltuk is one of the important personalities in the history of Alevism, Bektashism.

Sari Saltuk is acknowledged as the contemporary with Hadji Bektash Veli in the *Velayetname* of Hadji Bektash Veli. According to the *Velayetname*, Hadji Bektash Veli taught Sari Saltuk who was essentially shepherd, and entrusted a task to him and sent to Rumelia. Sari Saltuk went to Sinop and then through Blacksea to Georgia accompanied by Ulu Abdal and Kichi Abdal who were charged to assist him by Hadji Bektash Veli. He acted as a warrior-saint there. After that, Sari Saltuk went to Kaligra and continued his activities there. Throughout his life, he represented the tradition in the Balkans. Sari Saltuk who had superior attributes is introduced as a person who helped people and fought against the malignity. Attributing such preternatural powers to Turkmen saints is something seen often in the Turkish epic culture. The elements of *Hizir* (immortal prophet) cult, wooden sword, and call to Islam which are dealt with in the passages on Sari Saltuk in the *Velayetname* of Hadji Bektash Veli are prevalent in Alevi and Bektashi traditions.

Saltukname which is written by Ebul-Hayr-i Rumi and deals with the Sari Saltuk's life combined with the epics and legends is the most important source about Sari Saltuk. Also in *Saltukname*, Sari Saltuk is described as a saint contemporary with and intellectually related to Hadji Bektash Veli. In the work, Sari Saltuk is also connected with people, alongside Hadji Bektash Veli, regarded as important in Alevi and Bektashi traditions like Tapduk Emre, Yunus, Seyyid Mahmud Hayrani, and Karacaahmet Sultan. In some epics of the *Saltukname*, it is also mentioned that Sari Saltuk met Mevlana, Ahi Evren, and Nasreddin Hodja. These people whose names are mentioned together with Sari Saltuk are important representatives of the Anatolian Turkish culture and history.

The *Saltukname* draws a profile of Sari Saltuk in a manner similar to that of the *Velayetname* of Hadji Bektash Veli. Sari Saltuk is introduced with an identity of "saint" in line with the Turkish mystic tradition. Also the process of information about the Turkish saints in Alevi and Bektashi texts has a parallel feature. The ancestry, life, thinking, environment, and works of the historical personality as well as people related to him were idealised thereby trying to attribute some preternatural aspects to him. Prayer, skill of transforming things into different shapes, fighting against superior and evil powers like dragons, myth of dream, being descendant of ahl-i beyt and twelve imams in regard

with ancestry and thinking, the cult of Hızir-Ilyas are instruments of expression which are used in portraying the biography of Sari Saltuk in the *Saltukname*. When compared to the *Battalname* and the *Danishmendname*, the *Saltukname* has similar characteristics in regard with the context and methodology.

Another source which contains information about Sari Saltuk is the *Seyahatname* (journey account) of Evliya Chelebi. In his *Seyahatname*, Evliya Chelebi dealt with Sari Saltuk and the oral tales about him to a large extent. In the parts of the work about Sari Saltuk, the *turbes* and *tekkes* which were attributed to Sari Saltuk and visited by the writer in the Balkans are portrayed.

Evliya Chelebi introduces the “*Tekke of Kelgra Sultan*”, which is referred to as belonging to Sari Saltuk and known as the *tekke* of Kaligra Sultan in many sources. He states that Kelgra Sultan was Sari Saltuk, and that Sari Saltuk came to Anatolia together with Hadji Bektash Veli. He reports that Hadji Bektash Veli gave wooden sword, *sedjade* (a rug used in worship), drum, and flag to Sari Saltuk and sent him with a task to the Rumelia. With the words of the *Seyahatname*, Sari Saltuk went to the Russian, Polish, and Czech territories and Debrecen, and conducted activities as a saint there just as described in the epics in the *Saltukname* and the *Velayetname* of Hadji Bektash Veli. Sari Saltuk is also mentioned in the part of the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Chelebi, which contains information about Babadag. It reports that the name of Babadag originates from the grave of Sari Saltuk there, and provides detailed information about the *tekke* and *turbe* of Sari Saltuk in Babadag. Evliya Chelebi states that the original name of Sari Saltuk is His Holiness Sari Saltuk Mohammed Buhari and makes some explanations about the life of Sari Saltuk.

Some studies report that Sari Saltuk passed from Anatolia to Rumelia as a colonising dervish together with 12.000 Turkmen families in 1263, and made these Turkmen communities settle in the regions of Crimea and Debrecen. The influence of Sari Saltuk in the Turkish culture and history is to such degree that it is reflected in the works of Yunus Emre who is one of the most important representatives of the Turkish mystic thinking in the thirteenth century. Yunus Emre refers to Tapduk Emre, Barak Baba, and Sari Saltuk as the representatives of the thinking which he adheres.

The cult of Sari Saltuk has also a characteristic of faith-*dede odjak*. The *odjak* of Sari Saltuk centred in Hozat (Tunceli) is one of the important dynamics of Anatolian Alevism. There are *dede* and *talip* communities with *odjaks* living in the different regions of Anatolia, foremost Tunceli. The cult and the *odjak* of Sari Saltuk have a priority in clarifying the historical, ideal, and faith-based sources of Alevi and Bektashi traditions. Just as the scientific research to be conducted on this historical personality and the faith-*dede odjak* of his name will provide new materials and divergences, so it will lay out the differences and similarities of Alevi and Bektashi thinking in Anatolia and the Balkans.