

**Islam and the dervish orders of Albania.  
An introduction to their history,  
development and current situation.**

by  
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## **1. The spread of Islam in Albania**

Before the arrival of the Turks in the Balkan peninsula, the Albanians were all within the sphere of Christianity: Catholicism in the north and Orthodoxy in the south. The exact border between these two Christian faiths varied over the centuries in accordance with the political and military gains or losses of the heirs to the two halves of the Roman Empire. By the end of the fourteenth century, the third great religion of the Balkans had entered the ring, unfolding its banners on the eastern horizon. On 28 June 1389, the Moslem Turks defeated a coalition of Balkan forces under Serbian leadership at Kosovo Polje, the Plain of the Blackbirds, and established themselves as masters of the Balkans. By 1393 they had overrun Shkodra, although the Venetians were soon able to recover the city and its imposing citadel. The conquest of Albania continued into the early years of the fifteenth century. The mountain fortress of Kruja was taken in 1415 and the equally strategic towns of Vlora, Berat and Kanina in southern Albania fell in 1417. By 1431, the Turks had incorporated all of southern Albania into the Ottoman Empire and set up a ‘sanjak’ administration with its capital in Gjirokastra, captured in 1419. Mountainous northern Albania remained in the control of its autonomous tribal leaders, though now under the suzerain power of the Sultan.

The Turkish conquest did not meet without resistance on the part of the Albanians, notably under Scanderbeg (1405-1468), prince and now Albanian national hero. Scanderbeg successfully repulsed thirteen Ottoman incursions, including three major Ottoman sieges of the citadel of Kruja led by the Sultans themselves (Murad II in 1450, and Mehmet II in 1466 and 1467). He was widely admired in the Christian world for his resistance to the Turks and given the title ‘Atleta Christi’ by Pope Calixtus III (r. 1455-1458). Albanian resistance held out until after Scanderbeg’s death on 17 January 1468 at Lezha (Alessio), but in 1478 the fortress at Kruja was finally taken by Turkish troops. Shkodra capitulated in 1479 and Durrës fell at last in 1501. By the end of the sixteenth century the Ottoman Empire had reached its political zenith and Albania was now firmly encompassed within it. The coming four centuries of Ottoman colonization changed the face of the country radically. The new religion, Islam, had wedged itself between the Catholic north and the Orthodox south of Albania and, with time, was to become the dominant faith of the country.

During the first decades of Ottoman rule there were few Moslems among the Albanians themselves. In 1577, we know that northern and central Albania were still staunchly Catholic, but by the early decades of the seventeenth century, an estimated thirty to fifty percent of the population of northern Albania had converted to Islam. By 1634, most of Kosovo had already converted, too. Of the inhabitants of the town of Prizren at the time, for instance, there were 12,000 Moslems, 200 Catholics and 600 Orthodox. By the close of the seventeenth century, Moslems began to outnumber Christians pretty well throughout the country. Roman Catholicism and Greek and Serbian Orthodoxy had, after all, been the vehicles of foreign cultures in Albania, propelled by foreign languages. They were religions to which the Albanians, as opposed to their Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek neighbours, had only been superficially converted and with which

they could not so easily identify. The mass conversion of the Albanian population to Islam is all the more understandable in view of the heavy poll taxes (*haraç*) imposed on the *rayah*, Christian inhabitants of the Empire. In view of this, many Albanians preferred the best of both worlds and became so-called Crypto-Christians, - Catholic in the privacy of their homes, but Moslem in public. Characteristic of the Albanian attitude to matters of religion was the motto: "*Ku është shpata, është feja*" (Where the sword is, is religion). Pressure to convert to Islam increased during the Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth century, although the situation improved for the Orthodox community temporarily in 1774 with the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarci, according to which Russia became protectress of all Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. At the dawn of Albanian independence (1912) about two-thirds of the Albanian population were Moslem.

Up to 1929, the Moslem community was headed by the Grand Mufti of Tirana with a five-member Supreme Council of the Sheriat. Later, a General Council was established with the chief of the community and four grand muftis, representing Shkodra, Tirana, Korça and Gjirokastra. Organized Sunni Islam was somewhat weakened in the 1930s when King Zog (1895-1961) severed all official ties with Moslems outside the country. Nonetheless, according to Italian statistics from the year 1942, of the total population of Albania of 1,128,143, there were 779,417 (69%) Moslems including the Bektashi, 232,320 (21%) Orthodox and 116,259 (10%) Catholics. As such, one can estimate today that approximately 70% of Albanians in the Republic of Albania and about 80% of all Albanians in the Balkans are of Moslem background. The most devout of these Moslems are no doubt the Albanians of Western Macedonia (the region of Tetovo and Gostivar), where more elements of traditional culture have been preserved and maintained than in Albania itself.

There were 1,127 mosques, 1,306 imams and muftis and 17 Islamic primary schools in Albania itself at the end of the Second World War. From 1945 onwards, the Moslem community, divided as it was into four districts with a Grand Mufti for each, came increasingly under the control of the state, in particular by virtue of the law of 26 November 1949. This regulation required all the religious communities to instil in their members a feeling of loyalty towards the communist regime. The head of the Moslem community also had to be approved of by the government Council of Ministers. Some Moslem leaders, such as the Mufti of Shkodra and the Mufti of Durrës, Mustafa Efendi Varoshi, refused to co-operate with the communist leaders and were liquidated. Others were imprisoned. An estimated 1,050 of the mosques in Albania survived unscathed up to 1967, but then, in an unprecedented act of extremism, Islam and all other religions were simply banned by the communist authorities.

The wilful destruction of Islamic culture in Albania became all the more severe during the late sixties and early seventies, when almost all the mosques in the country, including some which had just been restored and were of inestimable cultural value, were demolished or transformed for other use. A very few buildings were simply locked up and thus survived the cultural carnage in a more or less recognizable form, among which the Mirahor Mosque of Korça (1495), the Sultan Mosque (1492) and the Lead Mosque (1553-1554) of Berat, the Murad Mosque of Vlora (1537-1542), the Naziresha Mosque of Elbasan (pre-1599), the Lead Mosque of Shkodra (1773-1774) and Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana (1793-1794). Islam had ceased to exist in Albania, at least in public life.

The public practice of religion was first authorized again in December 1990 and the few remaining mosques, after twenty-four years of closure, began to reopen from January to mid-March 1991. It was also in this period that the first public celebration of Ramadan was held. The re-established Sunni Moslem community is now headed by Hafiz Sabri Koçi, who spent twenty-one years of his life in prison and hard labour. Islamic groups from abroad, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Egypt etc, have been active in reviving Islam in Albania and in

providing desperately needed humanitarian assistance to the impoverished country. Virtually all towns and villages with a Moslem population now have a mosque or a modest Islamic community centre.

## 2. The arrival and presence of the dervish orders

The mediaeval movement of Islamic mysticism, known as Sufism, gave rise to a number of dervish orders or *tarikat*, Arabic ‘paths,’ in the Shi’ite tradition. Many of these sects and sub-sects penetrated into Albania and Kosovo during the five centuries of Ottoman rule. Their centres or monasteries were known as *tekkes*, Alb. *teqe*. The two most important dervish orders to have found a home in Albania were the Bektashi and the Halveti. These were followed by the Rifa’i, the Sa’di, the Kadiri and to a lesser degree by the Tidjani. We also have some information on the presence on Albanian soil, most often in Kosovo, of the Djelveti, the Sinani, the Bayrami, the Mevlevi, the Melami, the Nakshbandi, the Badavi, the Jezevi, the Shahzeli and the Desuki. Each of the *tarikat* had its own particular origin, but the spiritual differences between them in Albania were often minimal, matters of detail and specific rites. As such, there was no open rivalry between the orders, in Albania at least, and members of one order were traditionally wont to visit the ceremonies of others. Most of the major dervish orders referred to above survived in Albania up to the Second World War. Their history has been superbly documented in recent years by the work of French scholars Alexandre Popovic, Nathalie Clayer and Gilles Veinstein.

With the arrival of the communists to power in 1944, the orders, the Bektashi at least, were initially given the status of an independent religious community and then gradually liquidated. The smaller orders had virtually disappeared by 1950, whereas the Bektashi survived, at least nominally, until 1967, when religion was banned in Albania entirely. Since the removal of the ban on religious activity in December 1990, the Bektashi have managed to return to life, and some of the other *tarikat* have begun to show signs of revival, too.

## 3. The Bektashi order

The Bektashi order is said to have been founded in Anatolia by Haji Bektash Veli (Turk. *Haci Bektas Veli*) who lived in the thirteenth century. With the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, it spread from central Anatolia notably to the Balkans, Greece, Crete and elsewhere, where the Bektashi served as missionaries of Islam and chaplains to the janissaries.

Little is known of the early history of the Bektashi in Albania though it can be assumed that they were well established by the late sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century. The Bektashi themselves trace their entry into Albania to the famous legendary figure Sari Salṭṭek. Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, who visited southern Albania in the summer of 1670, noted a Bektashi *tekke* in Kanina near Vlora, describing the site as follows:

*“There is also a tekke of Haji Bektash Veli here, which was also endowed by Sinan Pasha. This tekke is famous throughout Turkey, Arabia and Persia. Here one finds many devotees of the mystical sciences and the dervish life of poverty. Among them are handsome young boys. Visitors and pilgrims are fed copious meals from the kitchen and pantry of the tekke because all the surrounding mountains, vineyards and gardens belong to it. Near the tekke, the benefactor of the endowment, Ghazi Sinan Pasha, lies buried along with all his household and retainers in a mausoleum with a lofty dome - may God have mercy on their souls. In short, it is a rich and famous tekke, beyond my powers to describe”* (Seyahatname VIII, 361a).

The mausoleum referred to by Evliya, now since disappeared, was still subject of veneration during the visit of Austrian consul Johann Georg von Hahn (1811-1869) in the mid-nineteenth century. Hahn reports: "[The owners of the fortress] are descendants of the first Turkish conqueror of this region, the famous Sinan Pasha of Konya, whose grave can be seen in a small tekke at the base of the castle. People come here on pilgrimage from far off, as the Turks consider Sinan to be a saint." The Bektashi tekke of Kanina was conferred upon the Halveti order when the Porte ordered the closure of all Bektashi tekkes in 1826.

Among other early Bektashi monasteries was the *tekke* in Tetovo (Macedonia), founded at the end of the sixteenth century. According to legend, Sersem Ali Dede, a vizier under Sultan Suleyman (1520-1566), saw Bâlim Sultân, second *pîr* of the Bektashi order, in a dream and abandoned his post as vizier to become a dervish in the village of Haci Bektaş, where the Bektashi movement arose. Before his death in 1569, he ordered that all his possession be sold and that the money go to purchasing land for a monastery in Tetovo. The monastery was constructed accordingly by one Harâbâtî (Harabti) Baba, after whom the *tekke* is named. This *tekke* was expanded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to include a whole complex of buildings and a beautiful garden, which still exist today as a hotel complex. From the early eighteenth century onwards, the *tekke* in Tetovo served as the mother house (*âsitâne*) for many other *tekkes* in Kosovo and Macedonia.

In 1780 followed the building of a Bektashi *tekke* in Gjirokastra under Asim Baba. This *tekke* laid the foundations for the Bektashi movement in Albania itself and was of particular significance in the late nineteenth century. The Albanians were especially receptive to certain features of Bektashism, namely its traditional tolerance and regard for different religions, and the related open-minded attitude to practices and belief. Indeed some see Christian and pre-Christian practices continuing under the liberal umbrella of Bektashism. Furthermore, Bektashis were receptive to local concerns and language, in contrast to Sunni Islam, which was linked to the Ottoman capital and the Arabic language. Much of southern Albania and Epirus converted to Bektashism initially, however, due to the influence of Ali Pasha Tepelena (1759-1822), the awesome Lion of Janina, who was himself a follower of the order. The order suffered a setback in Albania in 1826 when Sultan Mahmud II suppressed the janissary corp and ordered the closure of all Bektashi *tekkes* in the Ottoman Empire. The Bektashi were, nonetheless, prominent once again during the years of the Albanian nationalist movement (Alb. *Rilindja*) in the late nineteenth century and it is this link, no doubt, which gave rise their surprising popularity. Such was the level of conversion to Bektashism that it grew into a religious community of its own and became the fourth religion of Albania.

It is estimated that at the beginning of the twentieth century, 15% of the population of Albanian were Bektashi, equivalent to one-quarter of all Moslems in the country. Their monasteries served as centres for the nationalist movement, in particular for the underground propagation of Albanian-language books and education. Despite this, the order did not succeed in becoming the Albanian national religion, as many Bektashi intellectuals had hoped. One reason for this was their disproportionate concentration in the south of the country (70% of all Bektashi *tekkes* were to be found south of Berat and only 3% in the north). In addition, Bektashism suffered a major setback with the revolt of many Moslems demanding the country's return to the Ottoman Empire and, in particular, with the burning and looting of the Albanian *tekkes* by Greek extremists during the Balkan War and World War I. At that time, about 80% of the *tekkes* were damaged or destroyed completely, an immeasurable cultural loss from which this Islamic culture never really recovered. Nonetheless, during their first national congress, held in Prishta in Skrapar in January 1922, the Bektashi declared themselves autonomous of the Turkish Bektashi, and after the ban on all dervish orders in Turkey in the autumn of 1925, it was to

Tirana that the Turkish Bektashi transferred their world headquarters. In Albania they set up a recognized and independent religious community which existed there until 1967. It was divided into six districts: Kruja with its centre at the *tekke* of Fushë Kruja, Elbasan with its headquarters at the *tekke* of Krasta, Korça with its headquarters at the *tekke* of Melçan, Gjirokastra with its headquarters at the *tekke* of Asim Baba, Prishtë representing Berat and part of Përmet, and Vlora with its headquarters at the *tekke* of Frashër. In 1928, Albanian publicist Teki Selenica recorded the presence of sixty-five *babas*, meaning theoretically that there were at least sixty-five *tekkes* in Albania. There were also about a dozen Bektashi *tekkes* in Kosovo. By the mid-1940s there were an estimated 280 *babas* and dervishes in Albania, and in the 1960s we know there were still about fifty Bektashi *tekkes* in the country and about eighty dervishes, fifteen in Fushë Kruja alone. By 1993, however, after the collapse of the dictatorship, there were only five *babas* and one dervish left alive, and only six *tekkes* were left standing in any recognizable state.

The Bektashi community, like the other religious communities in Albania, was persecuted by the communist authorities from the start and many of its rulers soon found their deaths. Baba Murteza of Kruja died in 1946 after being tortured and thrown from a prison window. Baba Kamil Glava of Tepelena was executed in 1946 in Gjirokastra and writer Baba Ali Tomori and Baba Shefket Koshtani of Tepelena were executed the following year. American anthropologist Frances Trix has published a more or less complete list of Bektashi *babas* who suffered during the early years of communist rule (Trix 1995, p. 546-547).

In 1967 the Bektashi community was dissolved entirely when a communist government edict banned all religious activity in Albania. During the dictatorship there were only two Albanian *tekkes* which strove to carry on the tradition: one in Gjakova (Serbocr. Djakovica) in Kosovo under the direction of Baba Qazim, who died in the late 1980s, and the other in Taylor, near Detroit (Michigan USA), founded in 1954 and long under the direction of the eminent Baba Rexhebi (1901-1995) and now led by Baba Flamur.

On 27 January 1991, after almost a quarter of a century of silence in Albania, a provisional committee for the revival of the Bektashi community was founded in Tirana. Since that time, the new community, under Baba Reshat Bardhi (b. 1935), has been active in reviving Bektashi traditions there. The *tekke* and, at the same time, world headquarters in Tirana was reopened on 22 March 1991 on the occasion of Nevruz, and the sixth Bektashi national congress was held in July 1993. There are now six functioning Bektashi *tekkes* in Albania: Turan (Korça) under Baba Edmond Ibrahimi, Gjirokastra under Baba Haxhi, Elbasan under Baba Sadik Ibro (b. 1972), Fushë Kruja under the learned Baba Selim Kaliçani (b. 1922), Tomorica under Baba Shaban, and Martanesh under Baba Halil Curri. Others are in the process of establishment: Berat, Shëmbërdhenj (Librazhd), Bllaca and Vlora, where the mausoleum of Kusum Baba was reopened in April 1998 at an inspiring site overlooking the city. Outside of Albania proper, there are currently Bektashi *tekkes* in Gjakova under Baba Mimin and in Tetovo under Baba Tahiri.

The Bektashi religious order has a hierarchical structure as well as specific beliefs, rites and practices. The main categories in the hierarchy of this faith are the following. The *ashik*, Turkish *aşık* literally ‘lover,’ is the simple Bektashi believer or faithful who has not been initiated in any way. He is often an individual who has been drawn to a particular *baba* and has become devoted to him. The *muhib*, also meaning ‘one who loves, sympathizer,’ is a spiritual member of the Bektashi community, i.e. an individual who has received some initiation involving a ritual purification and a profession of faith, in the course of a ceremony held at a *tekke*. After a trial period, a *muhib* can become a *varf* ‘dervish.’ The dervish receives a white headdress called a *taj*, Alb. *taxh* from Turkish *tac*, as well as other garments, lives full-time at a *tekke*, and is in a sense the equivalent of a Christian monk. The *myxher*, from Turkish *miccerred* ‘person tried by experience,’ is the member of a special category of dervishes, that of the celibate

dervishes, who wear a ring in their right ear. There has been much controversy in the history of modern Bektashism about adherence to celibacy. The *baba*, Alb. *atë* ‘father,’ is a spiritual master, equivalent to a sheikh in other dervish orders. Each *tekke* is normally headed by a *baba*. The *gjysh*, literally ‘grandfather,’ and equivalent to Turkish *dede* or *halife*, is the superior of the *babas* and is responsible for all the *tekkes* in a certain region. The *gjysh* has passed through the final level of ceremony and wears his white *taj* with a green cloth band wrapped around it. Finally, the *kryegjysh* ‘head grandfather,’ known in Turkish as *dede baba*, is leader of the Bektashi order as a whole, chosen from among all the *gjysh*.

As in Sufism in general, emphasis in Bektashism is on inner meaning rather than the following of outer convention. Bektashi practices and rites are thus characterized, as mentioned above, by a certain degree of liberality. Sunni religious leaders have often been scandalized at the indifference which the Bektashi often seem to show towards some of the tenants of mainstream Islam. The Bektashi pray only twice a day and not obligatorily in the direction of Mecca, in contrast to Sunni Moslems who pray five times a day. Bektashi prayers do not necessarily involve prostration. As with other Moslem, most Bektashi refuse to eat pork, but they will also not touch turtles, dogs, snakes and, most abhorrent of all, hares. Some Bektashis drink alcohol and indeed in some Albanian *tekkes* they make their own *raki*. Their women participate on an equally footing with the men in ceremonies and gatherings, something which again scandalizes some mainstream Moslems and in the past led to wild speculation and rumours about the goings-on in Bektashi *tekkes*. The Bektashi are not expected to fast during Ramadan, but they do fast or at least abstain from drinking during *matem*, the first ten days of the month of Muharrem during which the suffering and death of Imam Husein is commemorated. Indeed during *matem*, they will drink only bitter yoghurt and lentil soup. After *matem* follows the feast of *ashura* during which a dish is eaten made of cracked wheat, dried fruit, crushed nuts and cinnamon all cooked together. *Nevruz*, the Persian new year and birthday of the Prophet Ali, is also commemorated by the Albanian Bektashi.

Bektashism has a long history which has absorbed influences from various sources. Among the earliest components of Bektashi doctrines and beliefs are Turkmen heterodoxy, the ascetic Kalenderi (Qalandari) movement of the 13th-14th centuries inspired by Persian and Indian mysticism, otherwordly Sufic Melametism (Malamatiyya), the Futuwwa order in the Middle East, and the gnostic and cabballistic doctrines of Persian hurufism. It subsequently evolved in close contact with Shi’ite and Alevite Islam and, in the Balkans at least, took on many Christian elements.

As to their pantheistic core beliefs, about which the Bektashi can be rather secretive, they believe in Allah, in Mohammed and in the Prophet Ali, to whom a special position is accorded. Indeed, Ali, his wife Fatima and their two sons Hasan and Husein are the central figures of Bektashi and Shi’ite beliefs. Many Bektashi homes have pictures of Ali, considered the manifestation of God on earth. He is invoked on a variety of occasions by believers with a “ya, Ali!” or “*Muhammed-Ali!*” The figures of Allah, Mohammed and Ali have come to constitute a sort of Bektashi trinity. The Bektashi, like other Shi’ites, revere the twelve imams, among whom Ali in particular of course, and consider themselves descendants of the sixth imam, Jafer Sadik. Naturally, they also revere Haji Bektash as founder of the order. As to ethics, the Bektashi adhere to the Turkish formula “*eline, diline, beline sahip ol* (Be master of your hands, your tongue and your loins)” used during initiation ceremonies. Essentially, this means not to steal, not to lie or talk idly, and not to commit adultery.

A major source of information on Albanian Bektashi beliefs comes from the work *Fletore e Bektashinjet*, Bucharest 1896 (Bektashi notebook), written by one of the best known writers in Albanian literature, Naim bey Frashëri (1846-1900). Frashëri, who was author of

religious, nationalist and didactic works with an exceptional impact on the Albanian national awakening in the late nineteenth century, had hoped that the liberal Bektashi beliefs to which he had been attached since his childhood in the village of Frashër would one day take hold as the new religion for all of Albania. Since they had their roots both in the Moslem Koran and in the Christian Bible, the Bektashi could promote unity among their religiously divided people. Naim Frashëri supported the confessional independence of the Albanian Bektashi movement from the central *pîr evi* in the village of Haci Bektaş Köy in Anatolia and proposed an Albanian *baba* or *dede* as its leader. He also introduced Albanian terms, which replaced the Turkish ones previously used by the Albanian Bektashi: Alb. *atë* ‘father’ for Turkish *baba*, and Alb. *gjysh* ‘grandfather’ for Turkish *dede*, to give his Bektashi religion a national character and unite all Albanians. The Notebook contains an introductory profession of Bektashi faith and ten spiritual poems which provide a rare view into the beliefs of the order. It begins as follows:

*The Bektashi believe in God the great and truthful, Mohammed Ali, Hadije, Fatima, Hasan and Husein. In the twelve imams who are: Ali, Hasan, Husein, Zein-al-Abidin, Mohammed Bakir, Jafer Sadik, Musa Kazim, Ali Riza, Mohammed Teki, Ali Neki, Hasan Askeri, Mohammed Mehdi. They all have Ali as their father and Fatima as their mother. They also believe in all the blessed of the past and of the future. For they believe in goodness and worship it. And just as they believe in and love them, so do they believe in Moses, Mary and Jesus and their disciples. As a founder they have Jafer Sadik and as their superior Haji Bektash Veli who is of the same family. All these have said: "Do good and abstain from evil." The Bektashi hold faith to these words. Truth and righteousness, intelligence and wisdom and all goodness reign on this road. The faith of the Bektashi is a wide road illuminated by wisdom, brotherhood, friendship, love, humanity and all goodness. On the one side of it are the flowers of knowledge, on the other side are those of truth. Without knowledge and truth and without brotherhood, no man can become a true Bektashi. For the Bektashi, the universe is God himself.*

Despite such pantheism and universality, Naim Frashëri’s Bektashi beliefs have a decidedly nationalist flavour:

*"The Bektashi are brothers and one soul, not only among one another but to all mankind. They love other Moslems and Christians as their own soul and behave kindly and gently with all mankind. But most of all they love their motherland and their fellow countrymen, for this is the best of all things... May they strive day and night for that nation which calls them father and which swears by them. May they work together with the foremost citizens and with the elders for the salvation of Albania and the Albanians, for knowledge and culture for the nation and its fatherland, for their own language and for all progress and well-being."*

#### 4. The Halveti order

The Halveti movement arose among Turkish, Kurdish and Iranian sufis some time after the fourteenth century, founded according to legend by Ömer Halveti of Tabriz (d. 1397). The order spread rapidly from the Caucasus to Egypt and Anatolia and from there into the Balkans. In Albania, the Halveti order was second only to the Bektashi. It is estimated to have had several thousand adepts at the beginning of the twentieth century, centred in about twenty sites throughout the country. The Halveti themselves, who were prone to asceticism and retreats, gave rise to a number of sub-groupings, many of which were present in Albania: the Symbiyli, the Gylçeni, the Karabashi, the Hayati and the Akbashi, the latter two being exclusively Balkan.

The oldest Albanian Halveti *tekke* is that of Sheikh Hashim in Janina (now northern Greece), which was founded in 1390 by Ghazi Evrenos under the authorization of Sultan

Bayezid I (r. 1389-1403). This *tekke* continued to function up to 1943. There was also a Halveti *tekke* founded in Vlora in 1490 by Imrahor Ilyas Bey, horse master of Sultan Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512). The Halveti order spread through southern Albania in the first half of the sixteenth century. Of significance were the *tekke* of Ohrid (1600) and the *tekke* of Tirana, said to have been founded in 1605 by Sheikh Ali Pazari (1581-1615), who was originally from Serres in northern Greece and later settled in Shkodra. Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi, who visited Albania in the summer of 1670, noted the presence of the Halveti in Gjirokastra "Around the courtyard (of the *Tekke* Mosque) are the cells of a Halveti *tekke* and on one side are the graves of many saints and notables" (*Seyahatname*, VIII, 354b). In Berat he visited the two-storey Halveti *tekke* of Sheikh Hasan in the courtyard of the Sultan Mosque (*Xhamia e Mbretit*). In Vlora he mentions the Halveti *tekke* of Yakub Efendi "with hundreds of devout dervishes, barefooted and bareheaded, with patched woollen cloaks." In Elbasan, Evliya Çelebi also visited the Halveti *tekke* of Sinan Pasha inside the mighty fortress, noting that it had numerous dervishes and endowments and was unmatched anywhere else. With time, Vlora, Berat and Delvina became Halveti centres in themselves and in the eighteenth century, the order spread from Albania to Kosovo and Macedonia. Halveti *tekkes* were founded in Ohrid in 1667 and in Prizren in 1699-1700, the latter by Osman Baba of Serres. From there, the movement extended westwards back into Albania proper. Frederick William Hasluck (1878-1920) refers to Halveti pilgrimage sites in Nanga in Luma (Kukës), where Sheikh Hasan was the object of veneration, and in Vrepska (Ersekë). Of the many other Halveti *tekkes* known to have existed in Albania, mention may be made of those in: Fshat (Kukës), Surroj (Kukës), Mat, Peshkopia, Shkodra, Tirana (the *tekke* of Sheikh Suleyman dating from ca. 1705), Elbasan (three *tekkes* from the late seventeenth century, of which two still existed before the First World War), Berat (the above-mentioned *tekke* of Sheikh Hasan at the Sultan Mosque, the present building of which was constructed by Kurd Ahmed Pasha in 1785, and the *tekke* of Sheikh Musa Efendi at Kara Kasim), Bilisht (two or three *tekkes* dependent on Ohrid), Progër (Devoll), Shëngjergj between Bilisht and Pogradec, Korça (a *tekke* founded at the end of the fifteenth century), Leskovik (a *tekke* founded in 1796-1797, but which burnt down in the early years of the twentieth century), Përmet, Tepelena, Luzat (Tepelena), Mezhgoran (Tepelena), Ramica (Vlora), Vinokash (Përmet), Tosk-Martalloz (Tepelena), Maricaj (Tepelena), Gjirokastra, Delvina and Saranda. The two latter *tekkes* were destroyed in the 1950s.

The Halveti order was re-established in Albania in 1990 and is presently led by Sheikh Muamer Pazari (b. 1929) of Tirana, where a *tekke* was opened in 1992. In 1998 there were a total of 42 Halveti *tekkes* in Albania, most of which in the south, but also in Tropoja, Burrel and Peshkopia.

There were twenty-five Halveti *tekkes* in Kosovo and Macedonia in 1938-1939 and about ten in the early 1980s, among which in Prizren, Gjakova (two *tekkes*) and Rahovec (Serbochr. Orahovac). Indeed, in Kosovo, the Halveti order was the most widespread of all dervish orders and was divided into a number of subgroupings: Hayati, Karabashi, and Djerrahi.

## 5. The Rifa'i order

The Rifa'i, or Rufa'i order first evolved in Iraq towards the end of the twelfth century following the teachings of the jurist Sheikh Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Rifâ'i (1106-1182). The movement then spread to Syria, Egypt and Turkey and gave rise to a number of sub-orders, among which the Badavi, the Desuki and the Shahzeli. The Rifa'i, often referred to as the 'howling dervishes,' are known in the Balkans for their rather violent practices of ritual

mortification, including the piercing of lips and cheeks with needles, the eating of glass and the burning of skin. Such ceremonies are still carried out in Prizren. Little is known of how and when the Rifa'i spread to the Balkans and of their early history in Albania. Many of their centres, among which were Peqin (with a *tekke* founded by a certain Baba Hasan in 1701 [1113 AH]), Tirana, Shkodra and Gjirokastra, were abandoned or taken over by the Bektashi by the early years of the twentieth century. Despite stagnation elsewhere, a Rifa'i centre was founded and flourished in Gjakova in Kosovo at the end of the nineteenth century, giving rise to a second wave of Rifa'i *tekkes* throughout Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. We know of the presence of second-wave Rifa'i centres in: Shkodra, where the holy Mehmet Efendi was venerated in a *tekke* at the foot of the citadel and where a new Rifa'i community was formed in the 1930s, Tropoja, Tirana, Petrela with a *tekke* dating from before 1907, Gjirokastra, and Berat where the *tekke* of Sheikh Riza, also known simply as *Teqeja e Rufaive* (Rifa'i *Tekke*), founded after 1785, was situated to the west of the Murad Çelepia quarter. In the early 1980s, there were still Rifa'i *tekkes* in Skopje, Gjakova, Prizren, Rahovec, Peja and Mitrovica. The Rifa'i community was re-established in Albania in the late 1990s under Sheikh Xhemal Reka of Tirana where a *tekke* was opened in 1998. The Rifa'i in Tirana hold a *zikr* every Thursday evening and have a modest publication entitled *Dashuria e Ehli-Bejtit*.

## 6. The Sa'di order

Albanian publicist Eqrem bey Vlora (1885-1964) called the Sa'di order the fourth most important dervish order in Albania, after the Bektashi, the Halveti and the Rifa'i. This order was founded in the fourteenth century by Sadreddin Djibawi of Djiba near Damascus, originally as a branch of the Rifa'i order. From there it spread to the Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, Irak, Turkey and the Balkans (Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania). Although little is known as yet of its history and development in Albania, it is apparent that the Sa'di reached southern Albania in the early seventeenth century and northern Albania in the early eighteenth century. We know that there was a Sa'di *tekke* in Gjakova in 1600. They were present in the country at any rate both during the Ottoman period and thereafter. The Albanian Sa'di were quite close to the Bektashi, both in their rites and customs and in their legendry. It was Sa'di dervishes who looked after the mausoleum of Demir Han in Tepelena and the tomb of Bektashi saint Sari Salteil on the top of Mount Pashtrik near Gjakova. Ali Pasha Tepelena, who founded a Sa'di *tekke* near the Edirne Gate in Istanbul in 1777-1778, also appears to have been connected to this order somehow. Ottoman archives mention a Sa'di *Tekke* of Ali Pasha Tepelena as well as a Sa'di *Tekke* of Ibrahim Pasha, both of which seem to have survived in Tepelena, the presence of two Sa'di *tekkes* being documented there in the nineteenth century. Aside from Tepelena, there are also references to the presence of the Sa'di order in Leskovik, Gjirokastra, Elbasan, Tropoja and Peza. In the 1980s, there were still about ten Sa'di *tekkes* in Kosovo.

## 7. The Tidjani order

The Tidjani order was founded in the eighteenth century by Ahmad al-Tijâni (1782-1815) of Tlemcen in Algeria. It spread initially through north Africa and from there to sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt, the Sudan, the Middle East and Turkey. We do not know when the Tidjani order, Alb. *Tixhani*, arrived in Albania, or what exactly their doctrines and customs were. They do not seem to have had any *tekkes* in the country. The little Tidjani movement is associated primarily

with the town of Shkodra, where the order was led by one Sheikh Haxhi Shaban Efendi. He was succeeded in 1910 by Sheikh Qazim Hoxha (b. 1895), also called Qazim Efendi, who was professor at the *medrese* in Tirana, founder of the *Drita Hyjnore* (Divine Light) organization and, in 1942, vice-president of the ‘Council of Albanian Ulemas.’

## 8. Minor dervish orders among the Albanians

There were a number of minor *tarikat* present, at least sporadically, among the Albanians, to which reference can must also be made, at least in passing. Their influence was of course much less profound than that of the above-mentioned orders.

The **Sinani order** was originally a branch of the Halveti order and was founded by Ibrahim Ümmi Sinan (d. ca. 1551-1552 [958 AH]). It spread from Istanbul, where there were three Sinani *tekkes*, to the Balkans (Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania). In Albania, their presence is attested in Shkodra during the Ottoman occupation and in Çorogjaf (Berat). There were also Sinani *tekkes* in Skopje and Tetovo. Alexandre Popovic visited two Sinani *tekkes* in Prizren in the early 1980s, of which one was still functioning. The **Mevlevi order**, known popularly as the Whirling Dervishes, took its name from its founder, the great Persian mystic poet Jalâl al-dîn Rûmî (1207-1273), called Mevlana ‘our master.’ Its centre was in Konya in central Anatolia where Mevlevi traditions are still strong. The Mevlevi were popular with the Seljuk aristocrats and, as such, they spread quickly throughout the Ottoman Empire, both to the Middle East and later into the Balkans. Despite the popularity of their *sema*, mystical dance, and other rites, the Mevlevi were not widespread in Albania itself. There is evidence of one Mevlevi *tekke* in Elbasan, but the last clear mention of the order in Albania was in 1907. Publicist Teki Selenica also refers to them briefly in his survey of the orders in the late 1920. Outside of Albania proper, there were Mevlevi *tekkes* in Skopje and Peja before the Second World War. The **Melami order**, which according to Italian writer Enrico Insabato was secretive, is unusual because it arose comparatively late and because it evolved in the Balkans. It grew in Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania in the second half of the nineteenth century under the influence of the noted Egyptian sheikh Muhammed Nûr al-Arabî (d. 1887), known as Arap Hoxha, who had settled in Skopje. Information on the Melami in Albania itself is scarce and the order does not seem to have been widespread there. Haxhi Qamili of Sharra, southwest of Tirana, leader of a pro-Ottoman peasant revolt in Albania in 1914-1915, is said to have been the sheikh of a Melami *tekke*, though we do not know of which one. The movement was much more prolific in Macedonia and Kosovo. In the early 1980s, there were still four or five Melami *tekkes* in Kosovo, among which in Prizren and Rahovec. Among prominent adepts of the Melami order were Albanian scholar and writer Hilmi Abdyl Maliqi (1856-1928) of Rahovec and Albanian mystic poet Haxhi Ymer Lutfi Paçarizi (1871-1929) from Prizren. The **Naqshbandi order**, Alb. *Nakshbandi*, was founded no doubt by Muhammed Bahâ’ al-dîn al-Naqshabandi (d. 1389 [791 AH]) of Bukhara. It spread among the Turks of Central Asia in the fourteenth century and continued from there to India on the one hand and to Syria and Turkey on the other. The order first appeared in the Balkans under one Mullah Abdullah Ilahi (d. 1490-1491). Though not widespread in Albania itself, it had a *tekke* in Prizren and others in the mountains along the Albanian border. In 1916, we know of Naqshbandi *tekkes* in Macedonia in Tetovo, Dibra (Debar), Ohrid and Struga. In Kosovo in the early 1980s, there was still one Naqshbandi *tekke* in Gjakova. The Naqshbandi were exceptionally prominent in Bosnia and Herzegovina and came to constitute the principal dervish order there. Missionaries of the **Ahmadi order** were active in Albania before the Second World War. From 1936 to ca. 1939, they published a periodical called *Drita* ‘The light,’ which was a

monthly supplement of the periodical *The light* of Lahore. In October 1939, two Albanian students studying at the al-Azhar University of Cairo were expelled for membership in the Ahmadi order. The **Bayrami order** was founded in Ankara by Haji Bayram Veli (d. 1429). The presence of the order in Albania can be inferred by the existence of a 'Haji Bayram Mosque' in Shkodra. Little else is known about the movement. The **Djelveti order** is one of the three branches which evolved out of the Bayrami order. It was founded by Sheikh Uftâde (1494-1580) and spread under his successor, Mahmûd Hudâ'i (1543-1628). Orientalist Franz Babinger (1891-1967) claims to have noticed the ruins of a Djelveti *tekke* in Berat during his visit there in 1928-1929. Finally, the **Shahzeli order**, Alb. *Shazeli*, also known as Shadhili, derives its name from Abû l-Hasan 'Ali al-Shâdhili (1196-1258), a holy man from Morocco. The order spread from north Africa to Egypt. Though not recorded in Albania itself, there is, or at least was one Shahzeli *tekke* in Gjakova.

## 9. Current situation

With regard to the current situation of Islam and the dervish orders among the Albanians, as the twentieth century draws to a close, one can note the following elements. Religious freedom has been guaranteed and maintained in Albania since the end of the communist dictatorship and the abrogation in December 1990 of the law banning the public practice of religion. As such, religious communities, Moslem, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Baha'i and others, have been free to act and have established or re-established their institutions and structures in the country. Islam exists in Albania once again not only as an individual faith but also in the form of an organized religious community. Religious groups from the Arab world, Turkey and Iran, though slower to arrive than the Christian missionaries, have done the bulk of the work in re-establishing this faith in Albania. As mentioned above, most towns and villages in Albania now once again have mosques or Islamic community centres, financed for the most part by Islamic organizations in the Middle East. In early December 1992, Albania joined the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a move which was widely criticized in the country at the time, even among Moslems. The Albanians were reticent to jeopardize their country's Western orientation and new ties with the rest of Europe for the sake of religious tradition. Nonetheless, Albania is a predominantly Islamic country, if only nominally, and will remain so in the future. There is therefore no rational reason for the Albanians not to seek the best of both worlds, i.e. to strengthen their much needed ties with the West but also to foster their Islamic traditions.

The opening of Albania also resulted in the return of Bektashism and, to a lesser extent, of other dervish orders which had once played a role in the country's religious and cultural life. The Halveti, with a total of 42 Halveti *tekkes*, have also made their presence felt, in particular in the south of the country, and the Rifa'i have recently opened a new centre in Tirana, where a *zikr* is held twice a week. With little financial support from abroad, it has, however, been much more difficult for the Bektashi and the other orders to re-establish themselves than it has for mainstream Islam. In addition to this, after a break of thirty years, there are very few dervishes left over to carry on the tradition and, indeed, very few Albanians who know or remember anything of the spiritual directions of the *tarikats*.

Despite the new freedoms, there would still seem to be more interest in the revival of Islam among foreign missionaries and groups than there is among the Albanians themselves. As opposed to their Greek and Serbian neighbours, the Albanians have never had a 'national' religion, with which they could identify as a people. For the last century and a half, national, i.e. ethnic identity has predominated conspicuously over religious identity and this situation is

unlikely to change in the coming years, given that Albania is a small and struggling nation surrounded by hostile neighbours. Organized religion still only plays a very marginal role in public life in Albania. The Albanians have indeed on occasion been described as tenacious pagans who can only be superficially converted and, after a fifty-year break in religious traditions, there is some justification to this view. Many a missionary and preacher has been driven to despair with them, especially over the last few years. Religious fervour is extremely rare and religious extremism is still virtually unknown.

Despite the often expressed concerns of Western publicists, fundamentalism is not a problem among the Albanians nor is it likely to arise in Albania in any form. Isolated acts of religious extremism, such as pig heads thrown into the courtyards of mosques, the knocking down of Catholic tombstones or the damaging of Orthodox frescoes have been just that, isolated acts. The sad incident in Voskopoja near Korça on 11 August 1996 was typical. Three Albanian adolescents, aged 16-18, all of them educated by Islamic extremists from abroad, broke into the beautiful Orthodox Church of St. Michael's (1722-1725) while on their holidays at a summer camp there. The boys took knives to the eighteenth-century frescos and, in true centuries-old Balkan tradition, scarred the faces and scratched out the eyes of twenty-three serene Orthodox saints. This act of cultural barbarism shocked and dismayed the Albanian public, Christians and Moslems alike, and caused a minor wave of irritation between the religious communities. Such acts have, however, remained isolated instances and do not represent any particular trend. Confrontation in Albania is more at the political and regional level than at the confessional.

Even in Kosovo and Western Macedonia, where Islam is once again under a virulent attack from the Orthodox Serbs and Macedonians, as it was farther north during the Bosnian War, Islamic fundamentalism is unlikely to gain any hold. The struggle for freedom and independence in Kosovo is primarily a political and ethnic struggle. Religion does not play a significant role, as far as the Kosovo Albanian Moslems are concerned.

Despite the current lack of open religious fervour among the Albanians, Islam has contributed substantially in making the Albanians what they are today. It is now an inherent feature of Albania's national culture and ought to be treated and respected as such. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Albanian nation finds itself in a state of profound turmoil, indeed of anarchy: economically, politically and culturally. Only time will tell whether mainstream Islam and the Sufi *tarikat* can once again contribute to giving the Albanian people a sense of identity.

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