

## **Understanding the Relations between Christians and Bektashis: Interconfessionalism and Supraconfessionalism<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aimed to investigate the relationship between the Christian population in Turkey as well as the Balkans and the members of the Bektashi Sufi order, from the end of the 19th century until present. Many Christians and Bektashis have actually put behind all the religious divisions and moved forward together so as to share sanctuaries (mausoleums, chapels, convents), rituals, and even legends and myths today. Furthermore, the particular relation between these two faiths has encouraged Christians to be initiated into Bektashism without any obligation to renounce their religion. This phenomenon is epitomized in some cases in Istanbul at the beginning of the twentieth century and even nowadays. Finally, this paper analyzed the doctrinal dimension upon which the particular openness of the Bektashis toward the Christians is based: It is inspired by a traditional way of thinking cultivated in Anatolian mysticism, which may be defined as interconfessionalism and supraconfessionalism.

The Bektashiyya Sufi order, although belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam, occupies a particular position both in this religion and the Turkish society. One of its characteristics is that it did not launch the traditional criticism toward Christianity by the Muslims. On the contrary, Bektashism has favored, to a varying degree and up to our days a quite unusual encountering and a fraternization between Christians and Muslims. One of the main aspects of Bektashism, originally an offshoot of ultra-Shi'ism, an antinomian current of Islam, was its ability in the course of history to absorb the ideas and practices of several Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic religions (i.e., Zoroastrianism, Animism, Nestorian Christianity, Manicheism, Shamanism), and later of Shi'ism. These ideas and practices were hybridized with Sunni Islam, and particularly with Sufism. In the 16th century, Bektashism reached its final stage of development with a set of beliefs and rituals that have been cultivated and practiced until today [Zarcone 2014].

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The flexible relationships between Bektashis and other religions in the Ottoman Empire, especially with the Christians, is the consequence of two philosophical and theological attitudes reflected in the management and the attendance of its sanctuaries — both convents and mausoleums of saints — through devotion and intercession rituals, and in the hagiographical literature.

The first attitude, which the author of this paper calls interconfessionalism, has lead Bektashis to fraternizing with other religions and recognizing that there is no religion above the others. The second attitude — much less frequent — which is called supraconfessionalism in this paper, encourages the Bektashis to overcome both their Sunni beliefs and the beliefs of all the religions (an attitude that could resemble the contemporary Western perennialism). At that level, in the eyes of some Bektashis, all the religions are not only seen as equal, but also regarded as limited and incomplete; they are all replaced by the belief in an absolute Truth (*Hak*) that is actually above Sunni and Shi'i Islam, and even Sufism.

These two attitudes are not reflected generally in the Bektashi hagiographies (written in 16th century) under the Ottoman Sunni influence, or in the Bektashi rituals (the oldest being composed around the end of the 18th century). They can be detected, however, in the repertoires of poetry, which are in fact the oldest examples of the Bektashi literature that was preserved in the oral tradition and has been systematically put down in writing recently. Poetry and singing poetry especially are essential elements of the Bektashi liturgy and are widely disseminated among the members of this Sufi order. There are some other atypical figures of Anatolian Sufism who also cultivated the interconfessionalism, the best known being Yunus Emre, a famous mystic of 13th and 14th century, contemporary of the first Bektashis.

At times, I go to the mosque and I worship  
At times, I go to church and as a priest, I set about reading the Gospel  
At times, just as Jesus, I raise the dead...<sup>2</sup>

However, it is the respect shown by the Bektashi toward the Four Sacred Books (*Dört Kitaplar*) of the Abrahamic tradition, in addition to the Quran, the Tevrat (Jewish Torah), the Zebur (Psaums of David),<sup>3</sup> and the İncil (Gospel), which inspires their interconfessional feeling and in some cases their supraconfessionalism. Thus, several Bektashi poems place on these Four Books the same level, considering that they reflect the plural manifestation of a unique Truth; consequently, those who have received the revelation from these holy scriptures are *de facto* reconciled with each other. As the Bektashi poet Mir'ati (d. 1868) wrote:

2 “*Bir dem varır mescitlere yüz sürer anda yerlere / Bir dem varır deyre girer İncil okur ruhban olur / Bir dem gelir İsa gibi, ölmüşleri diri kılar*” [Yunus Emre Divanı 1981: 130].

3 In the eyes of the Muslim, the Psalms exist as a scripture in itself with the three other Books.

The Gospel, the David's Psalms, the Torah, the four books are the Truth (*Hak*),  
I found in the Quran the verse of wisdom (*ledün*) [which comes directly from God].<sup>4</sup>

## Interconfessionalism

### *Shared Sanctuaries and Fraternity*

The interconfessionalism advocated by the Bektashis shows that, in the course of the Ottoman history, the members of this lineage were able to fraternize with Christians, and they helped each other. What follows are some examples of this fraternisation as it appears around their sanctuaries in Anatolia and the Balkans, and in particular in the rituals performed there and the legends attached to these places. Our sources are the travelogues by European travellers, the Bektashi hagiographies, and some historical chronicles. In fact, the fraternity is shared because some rituals, symbols, and legends are shared by the two communities; it is the fact that Bektashis and Christians recognize each other through these beliefs and practices.

If we look at the major Bektashi hagiography dedicated to the legendary life of the eponym of the order, namely Hacı Bektaş Veli, written between 1481 and 1501, we learn that this holy figure was well respected by the Christians and that he gained several Christian disciples. One time, in the course of his journeys, Hacı Bektaş Veli was welcomed by the Christians of Sineson, a village in Cappadocia, today called Mustafapaşa. As a reward for their hospitality, the saint decided to make better everyday lives of the villagers:

The Holy Sovereign [Hacı Bektaş Veli], on his way to Ürgüp [in Cappadocia] went through a Christian village named Sineson. There the local used to make rye breads. A women holding such breads on his head laid it on the ground as soon as she saw the Holy Sovereign, and told him: 'Dervish take one of my breads, and, for the love of God, eat it! Don't sue us since here wheat is not growing'. The Holy Sovereign having listen to her said: 'Let abundance come towards you! Sow rye and harvest wheap, and with few dough may you get big breads'. [Since this time], even today, in this village the people sow rye but harvest wheap. They put few dough in the oven but get big breads. And if they sow wheap they get sye; but if they sow sye, it is wheap that they mow. For this reason, the Christians of this village go on pilgrimage every year to the tomb of the Holy Sovereign. They offered him sacrifices, make ex-votos and hold feasts [Uzun Firdusi 1958: 23].

The village of Sineson was still predominantly Christian up to the beginning of the 20th century. It is situated some 100 kilometers from the place where Hacı Bektaş set up his

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4 "İncil, Zebur, Tevrat dört kitap haktır / Ledünnü ayeti Kuran'dan aldım," [Nüzhet 1956: 37; 1930: 270].

convent (*tekke*) and where he was buried. According to the Ottoman archives, a nomad tribe living in this region that adopted Bektashi ideas was called “Bektashlu,” that is, the Bektashis. This tribe had good relations with the neighbouring Christian villages [Beldiceanu-Steinherr 1991: 21–79]. Further, it has been a documented fact that the tomb of Hacı Bektaş had been visited by Christian pilgrims until the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, these pilgrims identified Hacı Bektaş with the Christian Saint Charalambos. According to the French traveller Vital Cuinet who visited the sanctuary in 1891:

The *tekké* (convent) in the village of Hadji-Bektach is surrounded by wide gardens well watered. [...] The buildings of the *tekké* are not spacious though they are clean and well decorated. There are rooms around one of the courtyard which are dedicated to the numerous Muslim and Christian visitors who come every day to venerate the tomb of Hadji-Bektach-Véli, considered by the local Christians as similar to saint Haralambos. According to their beliefs, when entering the *turbé* [mausoleum], the Christian pilgrims make the sign of the cross while the Muslims go to the neighboring mosque to perform their *namas* [prayer]. Both are also well welcomed and fed; they are offered the *tchorba* [soup], the *pilaf* [plate of rice] and other national dishes, all free of charge [Cuinet 1891: 341].

A structure for the reception was set for both Muslims and Christians, and the sacred areas of the sanctuary, as we can see, welcome various rituals. This is a very unusual phenomenon, although not unique. The sharing capability of the sanctuary of Hacı Bektaş is confirmed in another text written by a Greek named Georg Tosunoğlu and published in an Ottoman yearbook (*salname*) for 1914 written in *karamanlı* (Turkish using the Greek scripture). In this text intended for Greek Christian readers, we read a description of the sanctuary with details about the welcoming of visitors. Regardless of religion, the visitor was given a small room and food (bread, soup, and rice) for three days.<sup>5</sup>

There are many other sanctuaries in Anatolia and the Balkans that are places of devotion shared by the two religions and hence opened to exchange and fraternization. One, situated at Kaliakra in Rumania, is dedicated to the Muslim saint Sarı Saltuk, known by Christians as Saint Nicholas. The most striking is the sanctuary of Akyazılı Baba at Varna, Bulgaria, the second most important sanctuary after that of Hacı Bektaş. There, Akyazılı Baba is identified with Saint Athanas (Atanas), and the place is well known for welcoming Christian pilgrims.<sup>6</sup> However a shared sanctuary was not always a place of encountering and fraternization between Muslims and Christians; on the contrary, it could also be a contested ground and a source of

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<sup>5</sup> This text is edited by [Kılıçarslan 2015].

<sup>6</sup> On this shrine see [Hasluck 1973: vol. 1, 90–93; Eyice 1967: 576].

conflicts. This was the case with the Akyazılı Baba shrine, a bone of contention between local Muslims and Christians during the Balkan Wars. When the Bulgarian army took the control of the shrine, the cross replaced the crescent at the top of the shrine's cupola. However, when the place was reconquered by Muslims, the cross was in turn replaced by the crescent. When I visited the sanctuary in 1988, in Communist Bulgaria, the place was almost totally abandoned, and few ex-votos only demonstrated that the local population was still venerating the saint. Nowadays, after the end of the Communist era, the place is again a shared religious sanctuary visited by Muslim and Christian visitors performing common rituals, especially against illness.<sup>7</sup> According to the anthropologist Yelis Erolova who investigates the place in 2011, "The change of the cult from mono- into bi-ritual during the second half of the 19th century should not be interpreted as 'renaming', but as development which unites two saints." [Erolova 2017: 78]

Another shrine in the village of Gökçe (formerly Mamasun) in Cappadocia is worth of interest. The shrine, which was discovered at the beginning of 19th century, is originally a paleochristian church half-cave dwelling completed by a grotto. The visitation to the site was shared very soon since dervishes were living there around 1860. The shrine has probably been turned at this time as a Bektashi convent and was known under the name of Erenler Tekkesi. The saint buried in the shrine is a martyr named Saint Mamas. From 19th century sources, it is known that he had the ability to raise the dead and cure mental illness. Muslims and Christians who were sick used to practice the incubation, that is to sleep in the grotto nearby the tomb of the saint. The days for the healing ceremonial were Friday for the Muslims and Sunday for the Christians. Nine icons were displayed in the shrine among which two were those of the Virgin, and Constantin and Helena. After 1925, following the expulsion of the Greek community from the village and of all the region, Saint Mamas became Muslim under the name of Sammas Baba or Pir Sambaz. According to the hagiography, this Muslim saint was a hermit who lived during the 8th century and assisted the famous Battal Ghazi when the later fought the Byzantines. Sammas Baba was depicted as teaching the Christian doctrine by day, and the Muslim doctrine by night — and there is no better example of interconfessionalism [Hasluck 1973: vol. 1, 43–44; de Tapia 2016: 584–596]. Then, during the last 15 years, due to Greek tourists, partly descendants of the Greek population who have lived once in this village, the veneration of the Christian saint was reactivated, as well as the practice of healing. Saint Mamas and Sammas Baba are henceforth both venerated, and the place is shared by the two religions.<sup>8</sup>

### *Shared Rituals*

In addition to the Christian shrine of Saint Mamas, there are other Christian sanctuaries that

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<sup>7</sup> <<http://dobrudzha.com/en/90.html>> (accessed in May 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Author's field work in 2015. See also [Peker 2015: 97–99, 208–209].

have welcomed Muslims, especially Bektashis or Alevis. For example, in Konitsa, in the Epira district of Greece, local Muslims used to visit the Christian churches for the offering of candles and oil, and even of candelabrum. It is the fact that Christian and Bektashis shared common interest for the veneration of light and the use of candles during liturgy and rituals [Mavrommatis 2005: 526–527]. Without doubt, this particularity has contributed to bring the two communities closer. In fact, candles as other lights are far to be only sacred objects that are placed near the grave of a saint. First and foremost, they are the central elements of complex rituals in both Christian and Bektashi liturgy; let us mention the Christian liturgy of Light (*Lucernarium*) for Easter and the ritual called “awakening the candles” (*çerağ uyandırma*) in Bektashism–Alevism [Vincent 2004: 31, 37; Harman 2018]. Because of this ritual, since 16th century, the Bektashis were depicted by their opponents as “worshipper of light,” *ışıkçı*, or *ışık taifesi*, that is, Movement of the Light [Refik 1932].

In addition, in some shrines, the rituals of devotion and intercession of Muslims and Christians are performed side-by-side (the sign of cross for example), although they are also shared. Such is the case of the offering of candles for instance, common to the two religions although it is interpreted in different ways. Nowadays, in the Bektashi sanctuary of Akyazılı Baba at Varna, we can distinguish three kinds of shared rituals: (1) the prayers recited at the tomb for the intercession of the saint; (2) the washing of the grave with water; (3) the fixation of pieces of cloth (*ex-votos*) on the trees around.<sup>9</sup>

In the shrines shared by both communities, some rituals cannot be shared and are performed side-by-side. This situation is observable nowadays in the Bektashi tekke of Durbali in Thessalia, Northern Greece, one of the major places of this order in the region before its decline during the 1980s. This tekke is a place well-known for welcoming Christians and also for charitable actions toward the poor local population regardless of their religion. Today, although there are few Muslims in the region, the place is a neutral, shared sanctuary, housing sacred objects belonging to both religions (icons, lantern, mural writings in Arabic, etc.) [Mavrommatis 2005: 529].

In addition, some Christians who became Bektashis (without abandoning Christianity) drew the attention to other doctrinal and ritual analogies to explain how Christianity and Bektashism could be brought closer. One of them, in 1892–1893, pinpoints to the Bektashi veneration for the trilogy “Allah–Muhammad–Ali,” which according to him corresponds to the Christian Trinity. He mentions also the three knots of the sacred belt, used during the Bektashi reception of a new dervish. The staff hold by the Bektashi shaykh has three knots also interpreted as the symbols of the Trinity; it is said that outwardly (*zahirde*), the knots symbolise respectively Allah, Muhammad, and Ali, but inwardly (*batunde*), they symbolize the Father, the Son, and the Soul (i.e., the Holy Spirit). Another analogy concerns the 12 Shi’ imams venerated

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9 <<http://dobrudzha.com/en/90.html>> (accessed in May 2015).

in Bektashism who are identified with the 12 apostles, and the martyr of Husayn, son of Ali, identified with Jesus Christ [“Bir Bektaşî babasının hâtıratı” 1926: 12–13; Salcı 1939d].

Finally, we might wonder whether Bektashism and Christianity, through their rituals shared or performed side by side, considering the analogies existing between them, have developed a “compromise on sacramental issues” (*compromis en matière sacramentaire*), to quote the expression of Michel Tardieu, a specialist of syncretism in Antiquity [Tardieu 1991: 14].

### *Shared Legends*

There are several legends commonly held among Bektashis that reflect their relations with Christians; some of these were sometimes adopted by the Christians themselves and then shared by the two religions. One of them regards the origin of the major symbolic and sacred object in Bektashism, that is, the *teslim taşı* (stone of the surrender). This little and flat stone made usually from onyx or carnelian/agate has 12 sides, in reference to the 12 imams. Its color is yellow, white, or beige, with red or brown-veins and stains. This stone is usually worn by Bektashi shaykh and used as a decorative symbol everywhere in their convent.<sup>10</sup>

According to one legend, of which there are several versions, Hacı Bektaş was poisoned by a man who has given him hospitality; but the saint spat blood immediately, which hardened into a stone — the *teslim taşı* [“Bektaşilik” n.d.: 37]. Another version of this legend tells that the man who poisoned Hacı Bektaş was a Turk, that is, a Muslim, and it was from a Christian that the saint obtained an emetic that caused him to spit blood: “his spittle mixed with his blood hardened into the red-veined variety of the local agate,” a stone found near the village of Hacıbektaş where the centre of the Bektashi order was established [Hasluck 1973: vol. 1, 288; Noyan 1995: 244]. The third version says that Hacı Bektaş visited a village named Ermeni, where he was given the hospitality by peasants, probably Christian Armenians, who offered him a meal of curdled milk and honey. The saint then spat out a mouthful of the food, which at once hardened into stone, and he told the peasants that the descendants of their descendants will never suffer from hunger [Degrand 1901: 230]. These legends show that the Anatolian Christians were very respectful of the eponym of Bektashism and that in turn, the saint blessed them and made wonders. This legend that was without any doubt originally Bektashi appears interchangeable, and this aspect favors the concept of interconfessionalism.

There is another interchangeable legend, not only between Muslims and Christians, but also between Muslim and Jews, and even between Muslim and Hindus in India. This legend, possibly Tibetan in origin, is widespread in the whole of Muslim Asia. It is also found in the Hagiography of Hacı Bektaş (*Vilâyetnâme*) and of other Bektashi saints. In the *Vilâyetnâme*, Hacı Bektaş was riding a rock he has animated and fought another saint, actually a rival, who was riding a lion (or a tiger) with a venomous serpent in his hand used as a whip [Uzun

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10 About this stone see [Zarcone 2017].

Firdusi 1958: 49–50]. What makes the superiority of Hacı Bektaş comes from the fact that riding an inanimate thing (rock or wall) and making it moving is considered more prestigious than taming a lion and a venomous snake. However, in many cases, some hagiographies do not mention the saint riding a wall but riding the lion with the serpent in his hand [Van Bruinessen 1991; Danık 2004].

This legend is well known by Christians as shown in the Ottoman yearbook (1914) mentioned above. The writer of this text, Georg Tosunoğlu, said that after visiting the sanctuary of Hacı Bektaş, he reached a neighbouring pilgrimage place supposed to be the place where Hacı Bektaş welcomed another saint riding a lion with a snake in his hands. In this version, probably oral, the other saint is Mevlâna Celâlüddin Rûmî, the eponym of the order of whirling dervishes (in the *Vilâyetname* it is Seyyid Mahmud Hayrani)! [Kılıçarslan 2015: 21] At the same period, this legend was told by Cappadocian Greeks to the Byzantinist R. M. Dawkins in a quite different way. The difference is that saint Charalambos was opposed to Muhammad. It is clear that the legend is led astray to the advantage of the Christians over Muslims.<sup>11</sup>

The legend was not adopted by Anatolian Christians only, but also by Jews in Algeria. The famous saint Rabbi Ephraïm al-Naqava who came from Spain to Tlemcen in the 14th century riding a lion with a snake in his hand, was buried in this city, and his sanctuary had welcomed both Christians and Jews pilgrims up to the middle of the 20th century [Van Gennep 1914: 44–45, 52; Slyomovics 1993]. The legend is interchangeable also in India to the benefit of the Hindus: A Hindu magician was sitting on a wall, while the Muslim was riding a tiger with the snake in his hands [Digby 1994: 127–128].

Sharing this legend among Bektashis and Christians brought them closer in spite of some rivalries. Its adoption by Christians demonstrates how intimate they were with the written and oral culture of this Sufi order.

### **Supraconfessionalism**

As mentioned before, supraconfessionalism is a philosophical attitude that encourages transcending of religions in order to reach their core, but without abandoning one's own particular faith. This unusual attitude might provide a key for the understanding of the double religious affiliation of Christians who became Bektashis in the early 20th century. This double affiliation, however, does not imply a conversion to Islam, as we will see further in text. Additionally, such a choice is quite different from interconfessionnalism since the religious confessions, far to be brought side-by-side, are left behind.

Some Armenian and Greek Christians in Istanbul in the last years of the Ottoman Empire

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<sup>11</sup> R.M. Dawkins, "A modern Greek festival," *Emmanuel College Magazine* (Cambridge), 18 (1908): 18 sq., quoted by [Hasluck 1973: vol. I, 84 and vol. II, 289].



embodied this double affiliation. Some were regular visitors of one of the most prestigious Bektashi tekke of the Ottoman capital in the Çamlıca district. At this time, this tekke, directed by Şeyh Ali Nutki Efendi (d. 1936), a great figure of the order, was a high place of culture, art, literature, and Sufi music, and it attracted the brightest of the city. Some among these Greek and Armenian Bektashis were also the authors of poems written in the literary style followed by Bektashis (*nefes*). These poems indicate their interest for this Sufi order and indirectly why, as Christians, they were initiated into Bektashism. The folklorist Vahid Lütü Salcı (1883–1950), himself a Bektashi, knew personally some of the poets he depicted as “Turkified Christian Bektashis,” meaning that they perfectly mastered the Turkish language and were impregnated with Ottoman and especially Bektashi culture.

The question of the double affiliation of Christian-Bektashism and of the welcoming of Christian in this Sufi order was a divisive issue in the Bektashi milieu in early 20th century Istanbul. In general, Ali Nutki Baba refused to initiate Christians to Bektashism if they did not want to convert to Islam. However, he told Salcı that some Bektashi shaykhs in Istanbul used to do it, as for instance Tekirdağlı Cemali Baba (d. 1940 in Albania).

Salcı witnessed unusual things in a meeting at the tekke of Ali Nutki Baba at Çamlıca. Once, he noticed an Armenian priest wearing his religious robe among the visitors entering the tekke. But, when in the ceremonial hall, he was unable to see the priest. Looking carefully at the people who were attending the initiation ceremony (*ayin-i cem*), he finally recognized the priest and was stunned to discovered the man dressed in the Bektashi style, wearing the 12-segment hat of the order (*hüseyni tac*), the *teslim taş* around his neck, the *kanberiyе* belt on his loins with the little bag (*cilbent*) holding the calligraphy “O Ali,” and the symbol of the two-pointed sword (*zülfiکار*) [Salcı 1939a]. Indeed, although a priest, this man was also a Bektashi baba.

In 1909, in the same Çamlıca tekke, Salcı met another Christian Bektashi. Named Papa Yero Raif, he was a Greek priest based in the Yeni Mahalle district at Üsküdar. The Greek priest was also dressed as a Bektashi baba, wearing the hat and holding the *teslim taş* and the *cilbent*. Salcı asked him whether it was not incompatible to be both a Christian priest and a Bektashi baba. In reply, Papa Yero Raif quoted a well-known phrase of the famous Sarı Saltuk, a luminary of Sufism in 13th century: “The illustrious Bektashi Sarı Saltuk wasn’t in the same time a blind priest called Saint Nicolas? Name is a pearl, my son! Look at the heart, the heart.”<sup>12</sup>

It is indeed true that in the 13th century, in the Balkans and in Anatolia, Sarı Saltuk was a dual figure, venerated both as a Muslim saint and Saint Nicolas by the Christians. Moreover, there are seven shrines named after him. However, the *şeyhülislâm* Ebussuud Efendi, who was

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12 “Sarı Saltuk diye tanıdığımız Bektaşî ulularından olan zat, Nikola isminde bir köz Papaz değil miydi? İsim bir boncuktur, oğlum. Gönüle bak, gönüle,” [Salcı 1939b].

the first authority of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, gave a *fetva* in 1538 answering a question about the sanctity of Sarı Saltuk; he answered that the latter was a “Christian monk down to skin and bones because of his ascetic discipline (*riyazat ile kadid olmuş bir keşişdir*).” [Okıç 1952; Zarcone 1992: 2–3] However, according to the Turkish epic literature, Sarı Saltuk was a hero of the Islamization of the north-western Thrace. Today, this saint is still well-known in Anatolia and in the Balkans, and one of his tombs is the centre of one of the most important pilgrimage places in Albania [Kołczyńska 2013].<sup>13</sup>

This paper suggests that supraconfessionnalism might explain why several Christians were initiated into Bektashism, although they were still considering themselves Christians. Although Bektashism clearly got a Muslim identity, this is the gnostic and antinomian aspect of this Sufi Order that has attracted these non-Muslims. As shown above by the Bektashi poet Mirati, the science of *ladun* (*‘ilm al-ladûnî*) mastered by the Sufis comes directly from God, as it was experienced by the prophet Khidr (Quran 18:65). As the source of all the revelations, such a pure knowledge of God is considered superior to the four books of the Abrahamic religions. Then, whereas interconfessionnalism constitutes a bridge between the revealed religions regarded as similar and parallel paths to God and the Truth, supraconfessionnalism sees the religions to be of negligible importance, especially for the Sufi who possesses the pure knowledge of God (*ladun*). Such an approach is clearly reflected in two verses of Yunus Emre who argues that the four Abrahamic revelations are comprehended in the Being that is God and his manifestation:

The Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms of David and the Quran,  
What is revealed in these books, we found it in the Being (*vücut*).<sup>14</sup>

A similar attitude is present in some poems written by Christian Bektashis in the early 20th century. For example, the Greek Yorgi Saliki or Zafiridis writes:

Pious! Don't deprive us of the Beauty  
We are happy whatever the place where we see it,  
You, read the Gospel within four walls,  
While we'll learn the Gospel of the Heart.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> On Sarı Saltuk see [Ocak 2002].

<sup>14</sup> “*Tevrât ile İncil’i Furkan ile Zebur’u  
Bunlardaki beyanı cümle vücutta bulduk*” [Yunus Emre Divanı 1981: 194].

<sup>15</sup> “*Güzellikten bizi menetme sofî  
Biz güzeli nerde görsek severiz  
Dört duvar içinde sen İncil oku  
Gönül incilini biz ezberleriz,*” quoted by [Salcı 1939c].

Yorgi Saliki who is opposing here the “Gospel of the Heart” to the “Gospel read within four walls,” that is, read inside a church, confirms that the Book of his mystical faith is an inner knowledge. Then, he declares that he became Bektashi although he never renounced Christianity [Salcı 1939d]. In such a position, he is *de facto* closer to the Bektashis.

Another Greek, Manol Hitabi, also a member of the Bektashi order, wrote poetry that reflected supraconfessionnalism perfectly. He realized that the sacred books of the Abrahamic tradition did not help him in his spiritual path, and if he joined Bektashism, which is a Muslim movement, this is not to join Islam, but to follow a way that leads far above this religion and the others. We understand, and this is also the opinion of Vahit Lütü Salcı, that Manol Hitabi never converted to Islam, although he was no more firmly a Christian. In one poem, he writes the following as a response to a priest who tried to make him more respectful to the Orthodox Church:

I read what you call Thorah  
I read what you call Gospel  
I read what you call Quran:  
But all three are empty books.<sup>16</sup>

In this extreme case, we can use a metaphor used by the Sufis and the Bektashis that Manol Hitabi has gone beyond the external dimension of the religion and broke the shell of the walnut, reaching the walnut and further the oil of this fruit, which is like the essence of all spiritualities.

## Conclusion

The sharing of sacred places, rituals, and legends by Christians and Muslims, especially Bektashis, can be explained, first, as seen above, by the identification of their respective holy figures (e.g., Hacı Bektaş/Saint Charalambos, Akyazılı Baba/Saint Athanas, Sammas Baba/Saint Mamas) and, second, by the analogies existing between some elements of their faith and rituals. This interconfessionnal behavior brought Bektashis and Christians closer and favored exchanges and fraternization. Bektashis shrines had welcomed Christians who feel comfortable when visiting these places, and in northern Greece for example, some Bektashi shrines even today have separate parts dedicated to each religion. Thus, Christians and Bektashis express their religious beliefs side-by-side, and all find common features in the

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<sup>16</sup> “*Tevrat dedin okudum  
İncil dedin okudum  
Kür'an dedin okudum  
Hepsi de boşmuş meğer;*” quoted by [Salcı 1939e].

other. Supraconfessionnalism also brings closer some Christians and Bektashis, but in a quite different way. Both were not interested in the external dimension of their religion, but by its inner centre only. This behavior is well known among the Bektashis who emphasize the inward (*bâtin*) upon the outward (*zâhir*).

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