

Gnosis and “Gnosticism” in Alevi and Bektāšī Syncretism – Disputed Origins and New Directions for Research

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Over the last few decades a series of publications in the field of Islamic studies have addressed the serious methodological and terminological issues arising from the relevance, usefulness and applicability of terms such as “heresy”, “heterodoxy”, “gnosis”, “Gnosticism” and “syncretism” in the study of pre-modern Islam, whether in traditional Muslim heresiology and heresiography or in modern scholarly discourse.¹ Nevertheless, this is

¹ On the methodology and terminology of defining and exploring Islamic “heresy” and “heterodoxy”, see, for example, B. Lewis, ‘Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam’, *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953), pp. 43-63; J. L. Kraemer, ‘Heresy versus the State in Medieval Islam’, in: S. R. Brunswick (ed.), *Studies in Judaica, Karaitica and Islamica Presented to Leon Nemoy on his Eightieth Birthday*, Ramat-Gan, 1982, pp. 167-180; A. Knysh, ‘“Orthodoxy” and “Heresy” in Medieval Islam: An Essay in Reassessment’, in: *Muslim World* 83 1 (1993), pp. 46-67; N. Calder, ‘The Limits of Islamic Orthodoxy’, in F. Daftary (ed.), *Intellectual Traditions in Islam*, London, 2000, pp. 66-86; M. Dressler, ‘Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict’, in: H. T. Karateke and M. Reinkowski (eds.): *Legitimizing the Order. The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, Leiden, 2005, pp.151-173; the various contributions to the special issues of *Die Welt des Islams: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 8 (3-4) (2008) and *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, December 2010, 37(3); on the notion of esoteric *gnosis* in Islamic traditions as well as themes and theological vocabulary which according to some scholars betray the direct or indirect textual and/or ideological impact of late antique Gnosticism (subject which continues to be under close debate), see, for example, L. Massignon, ‘Die Ursprünge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam’, *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1937, pp. 55-77; H. Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismāʿīliya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden, 1978, pp. 115-128; *idem*, *Die islamische Gnosis. Die extreme Schia und die ʿAlawiten*, Zürich and München, 1982; Henry Corbin, *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris, 1982; S. Wasserstrom, ‘The Moving Finger Writes: Mughīra b. Saʿīd’s Islamic Gnosis and the Myths of its Rejection’, *History of Religions* 25, 1985, pp. 1-29; M. A. Amir-Moezi, *Le Guide divin dans le shiʿisme originel. Aux sources de l’ésotérisme en islam*, Paris-Lagrassat, 1992; D. De Smet, *La quiétude de l’Intellect. Néoplatonisme et gnose ismaélienne dans l’oeuvre de Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (Xe-XIe s.)*, Louvain, 1995; *idem*, *La philosophie ismaélienne. Un ésotérisme chiite entre néoplatonisme et gnose*, Paris, 2012; T. Bayhom-Daou, ‘The Second-Century Šīʿite Ḡulāt Were They Really Gnostic?’, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 5, 2003-2004, pp. 13-61.

certainly an area which has received much less scholarly treatment than analogous areas of research in Christian and Jewish studies and thus needs a fresh, objective and cautious re-appraisal. Such reassessment and reappraisal could be, and has been, especially problematic and controversial in the case of the various Balkan and Anatolian non-conformist and Shi'ite-leaning and -influenced ethno-religious groups (which came to be described by the umbrella term *Kızılbaş* to be largely replaced latterly, while also remaining interchangeable with, "Alevi") and the *Bektāşīyya*, which after somewhat obscure beginnings in the early Ottoman era eventually came to be recognized and evolved as one of the Ottoman Sufi *ṭarīqat/orders*. This is due largely to the complex and ambiguous process of transformation, interaction and occasional collisions between traditional and ascribed Alevi and Bektāşī identities in Asia Minor and the Balkans since the late Ottoman period and the heritage of a whole spectrum of Sunni elite and popular negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding Alevism stemming from Ottoman-era Sunni discourses on the perceived doctrinal and cultic "deviances" of the *Kızılbaş* communities, which could be used to justify legal and discriminatory actions against these communities. The characteristic and continuing Alevi revivalism in Turkey and the Alevi diaspora since the late 1980s, with all its diverse and intriguing religious, cultural and social aspects, has inevitably also proved an influential factor in the above process vis-à-vis the unfolding of the Sunni-based unitarian *Türk-İslam sentezi* ("Turkish-Islamic Synthesis") project of the 1980s and the resultant expansion and electoral successes of political Sunni Islam in contemporary Turkey.

Most of the recent and continuing intense debates about (or within) Anatolian and West European diaspora Alevism have been focused on the question of the historical, inherited and reconstructed Alevi markers of identity(ies), inevitably retaining a major focus on the role of Shi'ism in its formation, but also drawing on the posited impact on Alevism of pre-and non-Islamic religious trends – ranging from pre-Islamic Turkic Central Asian beliefs and rituals to Eastern Christian (orthodox, heterodox or dualist) doctrinal and cultic traditions. "Gnosticism" and esotericism are often seen as essential and foundational ingredients in the eclectic complex of beliefs and practices routinely defined and explored as

the phenomenon of Alevi-Bektāšī syncretism.² As in the case of other Near Eastern syncretistic groups such as the Ahl-e Haqq, Alevi/Bektāšī syncretism can be approached as a conglomerate structure³ in which one needs to stratify its components and identify the earlier and core strata among the layers usually identified as ancient Anatolian, pre-Islamic Turkic/Central Asia shamanistic, Shi'ite- and Sufi-related, as well as Iranian (especially in Kurdish- and Zaza-speaking Alevi circles).⁴ Prioritizing or deemphasizing one or another of these layers as the original or most significant in recent and current academic and general discourse as well as controversies concerning Anatolian and Balkan Alevism and Bektāšīsm⁵

² The phenomenon of “Alevi/Bektāšī syncretism” has been explored in great detail in a series of studies of I. Mélikoff, most of which have assembled in her volumes of selected articles I. Mélikoff, *Sur les traces du soufisme turc: recherches sur l’Islam populaire en Anatolie*, Istanbul: Isis, 1992, and *eadem*, *Au banquet des quarante: exploration au coeur du bektachisme-alevisme*, Istanbul: Isis, 2001; see in particular I. Mélikoff, ‘L’Islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie: non-conformisme—syncrétisme—gnose’, *Turcica* 14 (1982), pp. 141–154; *eadem*. “Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi”, in A. Gallotta and U. Marazzi (eds.), *Studia Turcologica—Memoriae Alexii Bombaci dicata*, Naples, 1982, pp. 379–395, repr. in *eadem*, *Sur les traces du soufisme turc*, pp. 41-61; *eadem*, *Hadji Bektach : un mythe et ses avatars. Genèse et évolution du soufisme populaire en Turquie*, Leiden: Brill, 1998. Cf. A. Y. Ocak, *Bektasi menakibnamelerinde İslam öncesi inanç motifleri*, Istanbul, 1983; *idem*, ‘Un aperçu général sur l’hétérodoxie musulmane en Turquie: réflexions sur les origines et les caractéristiques du Kizilbachisme (Alévisme) dans la perspective de l’histoire’, in K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele and A. Otter-Beaujean (eds.), *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, Leiden, 1997, pp. 195-205. The methodological and theoretical aspects of the use of the term ‘syncretism’ in studies of Alevism and /Bektāšīsm have been discussed, for example, in C. Colpe, ‘The Phenomenon of Syncretism and the Impact of Islam’, in Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele and Otter-Beaujean, *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, 35-49, esp. 45-48, and R. Langer and U. Simon, ‘The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. Dealing with Divergence in Muslim Discourses and Islamic Studies’, *Die Welt des Islams: International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam* 48 (3-4) (2008) 273-288. On the impact of the influential works of Mehmet F. Köprülü (1890–1966) on the application of the terms “heterodoxy” and “syncretism” in the study of Alevism and Bektāšīsm, see M. Dressler, “How to Conceptualize Inner-Islamic Plurality/Difference: ‘Heterodoxy’ and ‘Syncretism’ in the Writings of Mehmet F. Köprülü (1890–1966)”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2010, 37(3), pp. 241-260.

³ In his influential early study of the Ahl-e Haqq , *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan* , V. Ivanow belief system defined and analyzed their belief system as “conglomerate-like” (with layers comprising ancient animism and a solar cult, popular Mazdaism, Christian sectarian teachings as well as Islamic Shi'ite layers – Ismaili and Safavid-related); see V. Ivanow, *The Truth-Worshippers of Kurdistan: Ahl-i haqq Texts*, Bombay, 1950, pp. 31-75.

⁴ The most methodical application of such stratification approach can be found in I. Mélikoff’s studies of Alevism and Bektāšīsm; see especially Mélikoff, ‘Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi’ and *eadem*, *Hadji Bektach*, chap. 4.

⁵ Melikoff’s stratification of the components of Alevi/Bektāšī syncretism, for instance, has attracted some criticism according to which her reconstruction of the antiquity and priority of the respective

reflects both the progress of research on the primary sources for Alevi/Bektāšī syncretism, but also to a certain extent the vicissitudes of the ongoing Alevi identity politics in Turkey and among the Alevi diasporas in Western Europe and North America.

An analysis of this characteristic plurality of discourses in the socio-political and religious planes and their contrasting visions of historical and modern Alevism (ranging from assertions that it epitomizes the authentic essence of Islam and/or Shi'ite Islam to counter-assertions that it embodies a Turkish secularizing and humanist version of Islam or an extra-Islamic faith altogether) remain outside the scope of this article. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the debates over the religious affinities of Alevism and Bektāšīsm have been also triggered by and are drawing on the hitherto unprecedented circulation and publication in the public sphere of Alevi doctrinal and devotional traditions, as well as a number of Bektāšī-related texts, some of which previously have not been accessible even to the Alevi laity. One of the outcomes of this process is a growing interest in world religions in Alevi and Bektāšī circles (especially among Alevi activist-intellectuals) which has also led to proposals and moves to formalize traditions and institutions of theological higher learning comparable to those already developed by Sunni and (Twelver and Sevener) Shi'ite religious and intellectual elites. Accordingly, Sunni-leaning and *tasawwuf*-based mystical and intellectual currents, seeking to normativize Alevism within the framework of the Ottoman/Turkish strand of the Sunni *ṭarīqats*⁶ have co-existed with attempts to re-orientate Alevism in the

strata is not sufficiently balanced and some layers of the “conglomerate” have been over-emphasized while other layers have been unduly deemphasized. See the reviews of Mélikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, respectively by H. Algar, in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (4) (2004), pp. 687-689, and M. van Bruinessen, in *Turcica* 31 (1999), pp. 549-553. While Melikoff has been criticized for attributing too much importance and primacy to the pre-Islamic Turkic layers in Alevism, on the corresponding prioritization of postulated pre-Islamic Iranian and Kurdish elements among Kurdish-speaking Alevi milieux, see K. Vorhoff, “Discourses on the Alevis in Contemporary Turkey”, in Kehl-Bodrogi *et al.*, *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, pp. 94-110, at 101-102, n.12.

⁶ On the Sunni-leaning trends in contemporary Alevism, see for example, R. Çamuroglu, “Alevi Revivalism in Turkey”, in T. Olsson, E. Özdalga and C. Raudvere, eds., *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, Istanbul, 1998, pp. 79-85, at 81-82; *idem*, “Some Notes on the Contemporary Process of Restructuring Alevilik in Turkey,” in Kehl-Bodrogi *et al.*, *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, pp. 25-33, at 28-29; T. Erman and E. Göker, “Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36/4 (2000), pp. 99–118, at 106.

direction of a legalist Twelver Shi'ite Islam (as officialised in post-1979 Iran), with an accompanying reform or even abolition of some Alevi cultic traditions.

At the same time, the Alevi socio-religious sphere has witnessed the growth of trends aiming to effect a scripturalization and standardization of Alevi doctrinal and ritual traditions. Such a process also entails (at least to a degree) the de-esotericisation of these traditions and transforms, moreover, the regulations of socio-religious life in Alevism and discontinues the monopoly of the oral transmission of doctrinal and cultic knowledge, which has been seen traditionally as the largely esoteric preserve of the hereditary *dede élite*.⁷ While this represents a process that has its analogies in comparable developments among other syncretistic religious groups in the Near East such as the Ahl-e Haqq, the related attempts to “modernize” Alevi/Bektāšī theology among a variety of Alevi milieux inevitably needed to address and conceptualize (for purposes of self-identity and self-awareness) the heterogeneous nature of Alevi belief and ritual system which, as already observed, is routinely described in scholarly literature as multi-layered syncretism.

Important currents in the increasingly urbanized and secularized Alevi revivalism have focused on and reiterated what they see as a traditional Alevi anti-establishment, non-conformist and oppositional ethos fostered in centuries-long struggles against the oppression and persecution of political and religious elites. Such positions can simultaneously de-emphasize the religious, spiritual and esoteric dimension of Alevism and Bektāšism, preferring to clothe Alevi and Bektāšī world-views and identities in popular Marxist or liberation theology-like terms. Other trends in post-1980s Alevi self-definition

⁷ On this process, see, for example, Çamuroglu, “Alevi Revivalism”, pp. 82-83; *idem*, “Some Notes”, 30-31; F. Bilici, “The Function of Alevi-Bektāšī Theology in Modern Turkey”, in Olsson *et al.*, *Alevi Identity*, pp. 51-63, esp. pp. 57-59; K. Vorhoff, “Academic and Journalistic Publications on the Alevi and Bektāšī of Turkey,” in Olsson *et al.*, *Alevi Identity*, pp. 23-50, at 34-38; T. Olsson, “Epilogue: The Scripturalization of Ali-Oriented Religions”, in Olsson *et al.*, *Alevi Identity*, pp. 199-209; A. Otter-Beaujean, “Schriftliche Überlieferung versus mündliche Tradition - zum Stellenwert der Buyruk-Handschriften im Alevitum”, in Kehl-Bodrogi *et al.*, *Syncretistic Religious Communities*, pp. 212-226, at 224-226 Şehriban Şahin, “The Rise of Alevism as a Public Religion,” *Current Sociology*, 53:3 (2005), pp. 465-485, D. Shankland, “The *Buyruk* in Alevi village life: Thoughts from the field on rival sources of religious inspiration,” in G. Veinstein, ed., *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seldjoukide et ottoman (XIVe-. XVIIIe siècle)*. Actes du Colloque du Collège de France, octobre 2001, Paris & Dudley, 2005, pp. 311-324; E. Massicard, *L’Autre Turquie. Le mouvement aléviste et ses territoires*, Paris, 2005, pp. 150-160; M. Dressler, “Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 76:2 (2008), pp. 280-311, at 286-288, 304-305

have cultivated instead the view of Alevism as a mystical (*tasawwuf*-influenced and -oriented) and (to a degree) heterogeneous version of Islam which, while retaining some pre-Islamic Anatolian and Turkic traditions, has also experienced the formative impact of certain Shiite notions, especially in the early Safavid period.⁸ Among other things, such a reconstruction of Alevism would entail the potential that the theological and intellectual cultivation of its *tasawwuf*-inspired principles and ethos (shared with Sunni *ṭarīqats* such as the Mevlevi order) could contribute to the harmonization of Sunni-Alevi socio-religious polarities and tensions in Turkey, and ultimately even build a kind of “Sufi bridge” between Sunnism and Alevism.⁹

At least some of these of these changing and contrasting self-definitions, as well as external approaches to Alevism and Bektāṣīsm, have occurred under the impact of certain shifts in socio-cultural and religio-political stances in Alevi milieux vis-à-vis Sunni Islam, Shi'ite Islam, other “heterodox” Near Eastern sectarian minorities and indeed secular modernity. In particular the important area of internal and external attitudes to and reconstructions of the perceived “heretical” and Gnostic elements in Alevism and Bektāṣīsm has been transformed by the growth of evidence-based and -oriented research on relevant primary source material and work in previously inaccessible private archival collections, especially over the last few decades.

Thus a growing number of pertinent (direct and indirect) manuscript sources have been made available through general and critical publications and translations of (as well as commentaries on) such principal sources as the *Menakīb-nāmes* and *Vilāyet-nāmes* of Alevi and Bektāṣī sacred personages; the manuscripts of the two versions of the Alevi doctrinal-catechistic book, the *Buyruk*, the *Maqālat*; the “sayings” attributed to the eponymous founder of the Bektāṣī order, Hacı Bektaş Veli (c. 1300 ?); and so on. Ground-breaking research has been accomplished and published (from art-historical, architectural and anthropological perspectives) on some of the most significant Alevi and Bektāṣī religious and cultic sites and complexes, *tekkes*, *zaviyes*, *türbes*, etc. in Anatolia and the Balkans (including

⁸ On this current and its sub-trends, see Bilici, “The Function of Alevi-Bektāṣī Theology,” pp. 54-55; Vorhoff, “Academic and Journalistic Publications,” pp. 37-38; Erman and Göker, “Alevi Politics in Contemporary Turkey,” pp. 111-112; Massicard, *L'Autre Turquie*, pp. 157-158, 190-92, 249-254; Dressler, “Religio-Secular Metamorphoses,” pp. 291-94.

⁹ Çamuroğlu, “Alevi Revivalism in Turkey”, p. 82; *idem*, “Some Notes”, p. 29.

publications and analysis of inscriptions, funerary stele and iconography studied at such sites).

In addition, expanding interdisciplinary fieldwork among Balkan and Anatolian Alevi groups (drawing on the methodologies of the ethnography of rural communities) has led to some major advances in the study of the oral transmission of knowledge in such Alevi settings, from cosmological teachings to sacred histories of the sacrosanct *dede* patrilineages and related accounts of Sufi *silsilas*. The various advances in this particular area of the study of Alevism and Bektāšism have raised some major methodological and research problems (pertinent also in the case of other “heterodox” minorities in the Near and Middle East) such as the interrelations between doctrinal and cultic secrecy, on one hand, and orality on the other, or between the written and unwritten transmission/maintenance of traditions perceived as esoteric. The consequent and ongoing reappraisal of the dynamics of the relationship between what has been previously seen as the predominantly oral Alevi and largely written Bektāšī cultures has a number of major implications for the study of the extant notions of esotericism and salvific knowledge/*gnosis* in these two interrelated systems of belief and religious authority.

Recent and ongoing research on the religious history of late Seljuk and early Ottoman period in Asia Minor has shed new light on and contributed to the understanding of the historical provenance of these notions in early *Kızılbaşism* and Bektāšism. It is still the case that the history of pro-Safavid Anatolian *Kızılbaş* groups during and following the Ottoman-Safavid conflicts of the sixteenth century, the cycles and course of their persecution by the Ottoman authorities and the deportation of some of these communities to the Balkans in the same century still abounds in a number of substantial gaps and uncertainties. These uncertainties extend also to the exact nature of early *Kızılbaş* relations with the Bektāšī order and networks, the development of this relationship into the Ottoman era and the extent and roots of Shi'ite elements in early *Kızılbaş* and Bektāšī beliefs and rites, as well as the question of whether they predate the expansion of Safavid proselytism and religio-political propaganda in Anatolia. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the religious climate of the early Ottoman empire (before the Sunnization of Ottoman ruling establishments and concurrent Shi'itization of the Anatolian *Kızılbaş* communities in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century) was characterized by fluidity and diversity and Shi'ite-Sunni

religious and spiritual borders were often porous rather than fixed.¹⁰ During this period the principal currents of Anatolian Sufism (Sufi groups had been migrating and expanding into Anatolia from the beginning of the twelfth century) were variously either in their formative stages or in the transitional phases leading (with varying socio-religious dynamics) towards their eventual institutionalization and growth in the following centuries.¹¹

The investigation of the diverse evidence for the early history of the Bektāšī order (historiography, polemics, hagiography and early shrine complexes), its interrelations with antinomian dervish groups (Kālanders, Abdāls of Rûm, Ḥayderîs, Cāmîs and Şems-i Tebrîzîs) and their integration into the Bektāšī network in the sixteenth century,¹² its association with the Janissary corps, its links and organizational parallels to the Ottoman craft guilds, the (*akhis*), and its role in the expanding Ottoman dominions from Anatolia into Europe and the Near East have been lately undergoing steady progress. Among the important outcomes of this advance in research is a major reassessment of the posited impact of the Central Asian Yasawī order and its founder Aḥmad Yasawī on early *Kızılbaşism* and Bektāšism.¹³ Until recently considered to be primary and seminal, this Yasawī impact has been now

¹⁰ Cf. C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1995, p. 76, *passim*; D. Terzioğlu, "Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization", in C. Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World*, New York, 2011, pp. 86-100.

¹¹ See the wide-ranging reappraisal of the extant evidence in A. Karamustafa, "Kālanders, Abdāls, Ḥayderîs: The Formation of the Bektāšīye in the Sixteenth Century", in H. Inalcik and C. Kafadar (eds.), *Süleyman the Second and his Time*, Istanbul, 1993, pp. 121-129; *idem*, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550*, Salt Lake City, 1994 (repr. Oxford, 2006); *idem*, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism", in A. Y. Ocak, *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernisms*, Ankara, 2005, pp. 67-95.

¹² Karamustafa, "Kālanders, Abdāls, Ḥayderîs"; *idem*, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism".

¹³ For an early and influential formulation of the nature and extent of this posited impact, see M. F. Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatı'nda İlk Mutasavvıflar*, İstanbul, 1919 (transl. into English, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, trans. and ed. G. Leiser, R. Dankoff, London and New York, 2006); *idem*, "Anadolu'da İslamiyet: Türk İstilasından sonar Anadolu Tarih-i Dinisine bir Nazar ve bu Tarihin Menbaları", *Darülfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 2, 1922, pp. 281, 311, 385-420, 457-486 (transl. into English: *Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion*, trans. ed. and intr. by G. Leiser, Salt Lake City, 1993); Köprülü's views regarding such crucial Yasawī impact on Bektāšism have been developed and elaborated, among others, by I. Melikoff – for a synthesis of her reconstruction of this impact, see Melikoff, *Hadji Bektach*, ch. 1, pp. 5-25.

deemphasized in favour of the increasingly evidenced historical links and affinities of the early *Kızılbaş* and Bektāšī networks with the previously under-researched Sufi Wafā'ī order,¹⁴ whose homeland was in Iraq but enjoyed widespread expansion in Anatolia before its apparent absorption into the Bektāšī order.

Apart from shedding new light on the early formative periods of *Kızılbaşism* and Bektāšīsm, historical research on their fortunes in the classical Ottoman era has broken promising new ground in important areas such as the post-sixteenth century patterns of *modus vivendi* reached between the various Anatolian and Balkan *Kızılbaş* groups and the Ottoman central and local authorities and the possible role of the Bektāšī order in these processes.¹⁵ Other major research questions, related primarily to the doctrinal sphere, but of particular significance for tracking down and identifying the provenance of Shi'ite components in Alevi and Belktashi beliefs and rites (and the notions of esotericism and salvific *gnosis* discernible in them) have also benefited from novel meticulous work on manuscript sources, whether known previously or newly made available. Such work on primary sources has made some major contributions to the understanding and contextualization of the Safavid-related material in Alevi private archives and *Buyruk* manuscripts¹⁶, the impact of *futuwwa/fütüvvet/jawānmardī* traditions on a range of *Kızılbaş* doctrinal, mythological and ritual-related ideas and narratives (such as the direct links

¹⁴ For earlier research on the links between the Yasawī order and antinomian dervish groups in Anatolia, see A. A. Gölpınları, *Yunus Emre ve Tasavvuf*, Istanbul, 1961 (rev. ed. Istanbul, 1992), pp. 17-50 *passim*; for the results and conclusions of current research, see A. Karamustafa, "Early Sufism in Eastern Anatolia", in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, London and New York, 1993, pp. 175-198; *idem*, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism", esp. 89-90; A. Karakaya-Stump, "The Wafā'iyya, the Bektāšīyye and Genealogies of 'Heterodox' Islam in Anatolia: Rethinking the Köprülü Paradigm." *Turcica* (44) 2012-2013, pp. 279-300; *eadem*, *Vefailik, Bektaşilik, Kızılbaşlık: Alevi Kaynaklarını, Tarihini ve Tarihyazımını Yeniden Düşünmek*, Istanbul, 2015.

¹⁵ S. Faroqhi, *Der Bektaschi-Orden in Anatolien: (vom späten fünfzehnten Jahrhundert bis 1826)*, Vienna, 1981; *eadem*, "Conflict, Accommodation and Long-Term Survival. The Bektāšī Order and the Ottoman State (Sixteenth-seventeenth centuries)", in Popovic and Veinstein, *Bektachiyya*, pp. 167-181.

¹⁶ A. Karakaya-Stump, "Documents and Buyruk Manuscripts in the Private Archives of Alevi Dede Families: An Overview." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37, no. 3 (Dec. 2010), pp. 273-286.

between the ritual initiatory material in the *fütüvvet nâmas* and the Buyruk manuscripts),¹⁷ the simultaneous construction or renovation of Bektâşî shrine complexes and the creation of hagiography and legendary narratives related to them (and the hidden meanings and messages encoded in the architecture of these shrines),¹⁸ and the intertextual links between Ottoman dynastic historiography and Bektâşî hagiography.¹⁹ At the same time research has continued to shed fresh light on the impact of Hurufism and its branches and related trends on Bektâşîism and *Kızılbaşism*, a problematic which has received some examination of in the past but still has much to offer, especially in the investigation of the roots of esoteric speculations and imagery in Bektâşî contexts (admittedly largely elitist), ranging from scriptural hermeneutics to mystical poetry, as well as some of the central themes in Bektâşî pictorial art.²⁰

¹⁷ R. Yıldırım, "Inventing a Sufi Tradition: The Use of the Futuwwa Ritual Gathering as a Model for the Qızılbaş Djem", in J. Curry and E. S. Ohlander (eds.), *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200-1800*, New York, 2011, pp. 164-82.

¹⁸ Z. Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire. The Politics of Bektâşî Shrines in the Classical Age*, Farnham and Burlington, 2012; *eadem*, "Two Shrines joined in one network: Seyyid Gazi and Hacı Bektaş", in D. Shankland, ed., *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, Istanbul, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 171-191.

¹⁹ See, for example, Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography*, pp. 51-79.

²⁰ On the impact of Hurufism on Bektâşîism and *Kızılbaşism*, the spread of Hurufi ideas in the Anatolia and the Balkans and the activities of Hurufi missionaries in these areas, see E. G. Browne, "Further Notes on the Literature of the Hurufis and Their Connection with the Bektâşî Order of Dervishes", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Jul., 1907), pp. 533-581; J. K. Birge, *The Bektâşî Order of Dervishes*, London 1937, (repr. 1994), pp. 58-62, 148-61; A. Gölpınları, "Bektaşîlik-Hurufîlik ve Fazl Allahin öldürülmesine düşürülen üç tarih", *Şarkiyat mecmuasıh* 5, 1964, pp. 15-22; A. Schimmel, "Calligraphy and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey", in R. Lifchez, ed., *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, Berkeley, 1992, pp. 243-251, at 246-47; I. Mélikoff, "Fazlullah d'Astarabad et l'essor du Hurufisme en Azerbaydjan, en Anatolie et en Roumelie", in J.-L. Bacque-Grammont and R. Dor, eds., *Mélanges offerts à Louis Bazin par ses disciples, collègues et amis*, Paris, 1992, pp. 219-25; M. Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans: Vie du cheikh Bedreddin, le "Hallâj des Turcs", 1358/59-1416*, Istanbul, 1995, pp. 96-99, 108-112 (with discussion of the impact of Hurufism on the movement of Shaykh Badr al-Din see note 45 below); F. De Jong, "The Iconography of Bektâşîism. A survey of themes and symbolism in clerical costume, liturgical objects and pictorial art", *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 4, 1989, pp. 9, 10, 12 (with a discussion of Hurufi influences on Bektâşî iconography); A. Gökalp, *Têtes rouges et bouches noires. Une confrérie tribale de l'Ouest anatolien*, Paris, 1980, pp. 180-84; H. Algar, "The Hurufi Influence on Bektâşîism," in A. Popovic and G. Veinstein, eds., *Bektachiyya, Etudes sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, Istanbul, 1995, pp. 39-53; H. Norris, "The Hurufî Legacy of Fağlullâh of Astarâbad", in L. Lewisohn (ed.), *The Heritage of*

All these advances in research have made it possible to put the study and reappraisal of themes and ideas in Alevism and Bektāšism which are sometimes described in earlier and more recent scholarly and general publications as developing distinct notions of *gnosis* or actually reflecting “Gnostic” traditions, on a more solid and broader base. One prominent trend in this approach is represented by arguments and theories that Alevi and Bektāšī belief and ritual systems comprised strata which are seen respectively as influenced by or having their roots in ancient Gnosticism (usually reconstructed as Manichaeism) and/or medieval Gnostic (or neo-Gnostic) traditions stemming from the impact of the Eastern Christian dualist heresies which existed in Balkan and Anatolian areas where during the Ottoman era *Kızılbaş* groups and Bektāšī dervishes occasionally settled and developed their networks.

In contrast with current research, early publications on Alevism Bektāšism had a much more limited access to relevant internal and external historical and doctrinal sources. On the other hand, Western reports on *Kızılbaş* and Bektāšī communities and their beliefs and rites written before the end of the Ottoman empire (by historians, anthropologists, diplomats, travellers or missionaries) did draw on visits to and exploration of their cultic sites and complexes, many of which suffered gravely or were destroyed during the period of Ottoman disintegration and post-Ottoman national state formation. Such early accounts also could draw on records of oral traditions and ritual performances which since may have largely disappeared, but need also to be treated critically and cautiously due to the various Orientalist, theological and missionary attitudes and agendas.

In the post-Ottoman Balkans and Kemalist Turkey early studies of and reports on Alevism and Bektāšism predictably reflected with varying intensity the concerns and preoccupations of the unfolding rival nation-building programmes and processes. Inevitably, given the ethno-confessional and religio-political tensions and transformations of the period, the contemporary theories of and approaches to the beliefs and history of Alevism and Bektāšism were largely formed on the basis of the emerging national historiographies and their grand interpretative schemas regarding the interrelations between Christianity and Islam in the Ottoman era. The progress of and reasons for the Islamicisation processes in

Sufism, vol. 2, *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism (1150-1500)*, Oxford, 1999, pp. 87-99, at 95-98; S. Bashir, *Fazlallah Astarabadi and the Hurufis*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 115-122;

Anatolia and the Balkans in the Ottoman period and the ethnic, cultural and linguistic affinities of the non-Turkish Islamic communities and enclaves in these regions were to play a major and enduring role in these different and often competing historiographic schemas.

One of most influential (and repeatedly exploited in ethno-confessional, ideological and religious-political contexts) of these nineteenth-century historiographic schemas was that sectarian communities in the Balkans and Anatolia, which had hitherto adhered to the two main currents of medieval Eastern Christian dualism, Bogomilism and Paulicianism,²¹ embraced Islam en masse in the early Ottoman era. This model of conversion (applied also to related and unrelated nonconformist and dissident groups or individuals) rested on the conjecture that Christian dualist heretical or heterodox communities in Anatolia and the Balkans converted quickly and in extensive numbers to Islam as a consequence of their prolonged conflicts with secular and ecclesiastical establishments in Byzantium and the Byzantine commonwealth in the pre-Ottoman era and the periodic suppression which they suffered at the hands of these authorities.

It was originally applied to the Islamicisation processes in early Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina which had witnessed intense religio-political conflicts between adherents of the local Bosnian Church (generally known as 'Patareni' and 'Krstjani') and the Roman Catholic Church just before the Ottoman conquest.²² The ensuing suppression of the Bosnian Church represented the last phase of sporadic tensions and occasional military collisions over heresy in medieval Bosnia which, according to this popular nineteenth-century historiographic model, led to the collaboration of the Bosnian Patarenes with the Ottoman conquerors and

²¹ On the origins, historical trajectories and teachings of the Christian dualist movements and trends in the medieval Eastern Christian world, see the anthology of translated primary sources in J. Hamilton and B. Hamilton, eds., Y. Stoyanov, assist. ed., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c.650-c.1450*, Manchester and New York, 1998.

²² The Bosnian church had evolved as schismatic both from Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy and the exact nature and development of its relationship with Christian dualist movements in the Western Balkans and Western Europe have attracted a protracted debate, especially in the last few decades. Starting from the medieval period, the "Manichaean" label continued to be applied to the medieval Bosnian Church in a variety of general and polemical contexts in Europe, its enduring impact being readily discernible in early historical research on pre-Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina – see Y. Stoyanov, "Between Heresiology and Political Theology: the Rise of the Paradigm of the Heretical Bosnian Church and the Paradoxes of its Medieval and Modern Developments", in G. Filoramo (ed.), *Political Theologies of the Monotheistic Religions. Representation of the Divine and Dynamics of Power*, Brescia, 2005, pp. 161-180.

their large-scale conversion to Islam.²³ As by that time Bosnia had been routinely and frequently described by Catholic polemicists, chroniclers, travellers and observers as a stronghold of “Manichaeism” (i.e. dualist) heretics (from which they spread their heresy or where they could find safe haven), this model in effect forged a narrative of a substantial “Manichaeism” (i.e. Christian dualist) influx into early Ottoman Islam in the western Balkans.

This historiographic narrative of a conjectured transition from Christian dualism in Islam in Bosnia-Herzegovina was to be applied also to other Balkan and Anatolian areas where Christian dualist communities were known to have been active in the Middle Ages. Building conjecture upon conjecture, this model then could be applied to virtually all or to at least most of the Slavophone Muslim communities in the Balkans who thus could be categorized as descendants of the late medieval Christian dualist groups alleged to have embraced Islam in the early Ottoman period.²⁴ Furthermore, in order to justify such Christian dualist-Muslim rapprochement claims for affinities between two respective religiosities were sometimes put forward, emphasizing shared stances like the rejection of the veneration of the cross, icons, ecclesiastical hierarchy and liturgical rites as well as the sacraments of baptism and marriage.²⁵ But these remained theoretical presuppositions, as no serious direct or circumstantial evidence was actually sought or presented to verify the construct of a mass Islamization of Eastern Christian heretical communities or the

²³ For characteristic nineteenth-century articulations of this model, see A. Evans, *Through Bosnia and Herzegovina on Foot during the Insurrection, August and September 1875: with an Historical Review of Bosnia, and a Glimpse at the Croats, Slavonians, and the Ancient Republic of Ragusa*, London, 1876, p. lv; J. von Asboth, *Bosnien und die Herzegowina. Reisebilder und Studien*, Vienna, 1888, pp. 86-87; H. C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, New York, 1888, vol. 2, pp. 307-313; J. I. von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*, Munich, 1890 (repr. Darmstadt, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 126-127, 242-250.

²⁴ See, for example, K. Irechek, *Istoriia na bŭlgarite*, tr. by N. A. Rainov i Z. Boiadzhiev, Tŭrnovo, 1886 (2nd ed., Sofia, 1929), pp. 271, 289; A. Teodorov-Balan, “Bŭlgarskite katolitsi v Svishtovsko i tiahnata cherkovna borba”, *Letopis na bŭlgarskoto knizhovno druzhestvo*, 2, 1902, pp. 101-211, esp. pp. 123ff. more recently, S. Skendi, “Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area under the Ottomans”, in S. Skendi, *Balkan Cultural Studies*, Boulder, Colo. & New York, 1980, pp. 233-257 (first published in *Slavic Review*, 26, 1967, pp. 227-46), at 240.

²⁵ See, for example, Asboth, *Bosnien und die Herzegowina*, p. 87; for assertions that Muslim “simplicity” might have had some kind of appeal to Christian dualists, see S. Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee. A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, Cambridge, 1946, p. 114; Skendi, “Crypto-Christianity”, p. 240.

introduction or survival of “Manichean”/Eastern Christian dualist traditions in Ottoman Islam. Indeed subsequent research and continuous reassessment of the growing amount of relevant primary sources on the processes of Islamicisation in the Balkans and Anatolia have conclusively demonstrated that such sweeping claims and reconstructions of wholesale Eastern Christian dualists’ conversion to Islam are entirely groundless and betray patent ideological and religio-political attitudes and agendas.²⁶

In the late Ottoman and early post-Ottoman periods the history and religious observances of Alevi and Bektāṣī communities were particularly liable to be integrated and exploited in the above models and narratives of the conjectured massive conversion of Christian dualist groups to Islam. A series of nineteenth-and early twentieth-century missionaries’ and travellers’ reports on and accounts of encounters with Alevism/*Kızılbaşism* and Bektāṣism referred to or emphasized elements in their beliefs and rituals which to European observers appeared related to or derived from Christianity²⁷ Focusing on what they tended to identify as Christian layers in Alevi and Bektāṣī teachings and practices, these missionary narratives and descriptions in effect question, reduce or minimize their belonging to or affiliation with Islam in general, at least partially to legitimize their proselytizing goals and campaigns among them.²⁸

²⁶ In the case of Balkan Paulicianism in the early Ottoman era, for instance, evidence-based research has demonstrated that far from converting swiftly and en masse to Islam, during the first two centuries under Ottoman rule these communities actually stabilized and in places even may have grown in numbers. During the the periodic Habsburg-Ottoman conflicts of the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century Balkan Paulician groups were forced into complicated and multi-faceted religious and political processes and pressures vis-à-vis Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam which do not allow for one-dimensional and simplistic explanation and reconstructions. See the summaries of evidence in M. Iovkov, *Pavlikiani i pavlikianski selishta v bŭlgarskite zemi XV-XVIII v. Sofia, 1991*, pp. 66-102; Y. Stoyanov, “The Interchange between Religious Heterodoxies in the Balkans and Caucasus - the Case of the Paulicians”, in I. Biliarsky, O. Cristea and A. Oroveanu (eds.), *The Balkans and Caucasus: Parallel Processes on the Opposite Sides of the Black Sea*, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 106-116, esp. 112-113.

²⁷ See the select bibliography of such early missionaries’ and travelers’ reports in Y. Stoyanov, “On Some Parallels Between Anatolian and Balkan Islamic Heterodox Traditions and the Problem of their Co-Existence and Interchange with Popular Christianity”, in G. Veinstein (ed.), *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l’Orient seljoukide et ottoman des XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles*, Paris, 2005, pp. 75-119, at 94-95.

²⁸ See the recent analyses of such missionary agendas in H.-L. Kieser, “Muslim Heterodoxy and Protestant Utopia. The Interactions between Alevi and Missionaries”, *Die Welt des Islams*, 2001, n. s., 41:1, pp. 89-111; A. Karakaya-Stump, “The Emergence of the Kizilbas in Western Thought: Missionary Accounts and their Aftermath”, in D. Shankland (ed.), *Archaeology, Anthropology and*

The emphasis on such perceived or constructed Christian elements and strata in Alevism and Bektāšism inevitably led them to be represented as a topic in the historiographic, religious and general discourses in the Christian-majority post-Ottoman states where various arguments, schemas and suspect evidence started to be circulated that Alevi and Bektāšī communities actually were descendants of Christian groups (orthodox or heterodox), forcibly Islamicized in the Ottoman era. Such a complex of arguments and reconstructions were at the core of the indigenization approach to Alevi and Bektāšī identities (which was and remains periodically prominent in South-Eastern Europe) which aimed to root their origins and core beliefs in local Christian (or even pre-Christian) folk cultures and environments, ignoring or downplaying intentionally or through lack of concern their religious and historical affiliations with their co-religionists in Asia Minor as well as other Islamic syncretistic and non-conformist currents in the Near East.²⁹

Hence early articulations of the thesis of Christian-Islamic heterodox continuity opted to blend elements of the indigenization approach (seeking to derive Alevi and Bektāšī beliefs and ritual practices from local Christian and pre-Christian traditions) with arguments for their continuity with pre-Ottoman Christian heretical and heterodox communities, later forcibly or voluntarily converted to Islam.³⁰ More recent reiterations of the thesis present otherwise interesting and newly made available material but employ simplistic and outdated methodologies to fit it into a general preconceived model proposing a Christian dualist (Bogomil) origin for Alevism. Thus the proposed arguments for and reconstructions of a Bogomil/Christian dualist formative impact on Alevism in spheres such as organizational hierarchy, socio-political stances, angelology, diabolology, visionary

Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920, vol. 1, Istanbul, 2004, pp. 328-353.

²⁹ See the analysis of this indigenization approach in Y. Stoyanov, "Contested Post-Ottoman Alevi and Bektāšī Identities in the Balkans and their Shi'ite Component", in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Shi'i Islam and Identity: Religion, Politics and Change in the Global Muslim Community*, London, 2012, pp. 171-219, at 183-185.

³⁰ Analysis in Y. Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations of Theories for a Formative Christian Heterodox Impact on Alevism", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37(3), 2010, pp. 261-272, at 266-67.

mysticism and eschatology are either anachronistic or historically flawed and generally untenable.³¹

Early and more recent attempts to identify and define medieval Christian dualist/Bogomil/Paulician layers (with all their parallels to and echoes of late antique Gnosticism) in Alevism and Bektāşism have been thus prejudiced by largely serving ideological and ethno-confessional agendas and employing dubious methodologies and strategies which have included the falsification of primary source material.³² This is, of course, highly regrettable, since the study of Alevi and Bektāşī interrelations with normative and heterodox Christianity in the Balkans and Anatolia is directly related to the ongoing investigation of the different patterns and manifestations of Christian-Islamic interchange and syncretism in the Ottoman era pioneered by the early observers and explorers of the religious and cultural life of the late Ottoman empire. The collection and preliminary analysis of much valuable material reflecting the multifaceted interchange and syncretism of popular Islamic and Christian beliefs and ritual practices in the Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia by Frederick William Hasluck(1878-1920)³³ has been followed by a series of studies and publications of further evidence of these syncretistic phenomena or re-assessing Hasluck's earlier assembled material and conclusions.³⁴

The diverse multi-language and multi-provenanced evidence of these syncretistic phenomena is still being assembled and requires a careful and balanced analysis, as it is of direct and significant relevance to some of the characteristic earlier and continuing claims for a Christian impact on Bektāşī and Alevi belief and ritual systems. Arguments for such Christian influences³⁵ have ranged from the Bektāşī reception ritual and hierarchies to the

³¹ Analysis and critique in Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations", pp. 268-272.

³² See the analysis of such falsifications of original textual evidence in H. Aksu, H. Harmancı and Ünsal Öztürk, *Alevi Tarih Yazmında Skandal*, Istanbul, 2010 and Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations", pp. 271-272.

³³ F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, 2 vols., Oxford, 1929.

³⁴ See, for example, D. Shankland (ed.), *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia: the Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878-1920*, 3 vols., Istanbul, 2004, 2013.

³⁵ For an overview of the arguments and proposed examples of Christian influences on Bektāşism and *Kızılbaşlık*, see Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels", pp. 94-99

distinctive Alevi/ Bektāšī “trinity” of Allah, Mohammed and Ali and the characteristic exaltation of Ali in Alevism (as in some other related heterodox traditions) which according to some, effectively transfigures him into a “Christ-like” figure.³⁶ Significantly, virtually all the arguments for Christian elements in Alevi and Bektāšī teachings and observances relate to normative and popular but not heretical dualist Christianity, with its rejection of the Eucharistic theology and sacrament of the established church and Docetic Christology. Hence the question whether such Ottoman-era religio-cultural developments towards interchange and syncretism in the areas of belief and ritual occurred also in the spheres of Christian and Islamic heterodoxy continues very much to be an open and debatable question, making it as yet impossible to verify with any certainty the presence and persistence of medieval Christian dualist elements in Alevism and Bektāšīsm

Apart from this erratic quest for medieval Gnostic/Christian dualist defining core strata in Alevism and Bektāšīsm, in a number of cases arguments have been advanced for the existence of a possible archaic Gnostic Manichaean layer in Alevi/*Kızılbaş* teachings and practices. Such a hypothetical layer is usually theorized as traceable to the exposure of Central Asian Turkic groups to Manichaeism during the spread of Manichaeism in early medieval Central Asia and China.³⁷ Parallels thus have been suggested between the paradigmatic Manichaean prescription of the ‘Three Seals’ (the seals of mouth, hands and breast) and the Alevi/ Bektāšī triple rule: ‘*eline, diline, beline sahib olmak*’, (‘to be master of one’s hand, tongue and one’s loins’) and its other variants, attested both in Anatolia and the Balkans.³⁸ Further analogies between Manichaeism and Alevism have been sought in the use

³⁶ M. E. Grenard, “Une secte religieuse d’Asie Mineure: les Kyzyl-Bâchs”, *Journal Asiatique*, ser. 10, 3 (1904), pp. 511-22; M. Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: the ghulat sects*, New York, 1988, pp. 40-42; I. Mélikoff, ‘L’Islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie’, *Turkica* 14 (1982), pp. 142-154, at 151-153.

³⁷ After the Khagan of one of these Central Asian Turkic groups, the Uighurs, converted to Manichaeism in 762/763. In the second Uighur empire, founded in the Tarim Basin, Manichaeism continued to enjoy the patronage of the Uighur court and along with the Manichaean temples, the Manichaean monasteries established evolved into important centres of learning and missionary activities, as demonstrated by the various extant texts and fragments of Central Asian Middle Iranian and Turkic Manichaean literature on which see N. Sims-Williams, *et al.* (eds.), *Dictionary of Manichaean Texts*, vol. 3. *Texts from Central Asia and China*. Turnhout, 2004-2006.

³⁸ See C. Elsas, ‘Religionsfreiheit für die türkisch-manichäisch-(pseudo)muslimischen Aleviten’, in H. Preissler and H. Seiwert (eds.), *Gnosisforschung und religionsgeschichte. Festschrift für Kurt Rudolph zum 65 Geburtstag*, Marburg, 1994, pp. 80-94, at pp. 85; Mélikoff, “Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi”, pp. 56-57; *eadem*, *Hadji Bektach*, pp. 163, 181; *eadem*, “Hasluck's Study of the Bektāšīs and its Contemporary Significance”, in Shankland, *Archaeology, Anthropology*

of the notion and symbolism of light (especially in the sphere of prophetology), religious hierarchy and the practice of confession.³⁹ However, the proposed analogies between the Manichaean and Alevi (or Bektāṣī) religious hierarchy appear very inconclusive (with the differences certainly more pronounced than the alleged similarities) and comparable dissimilarities apply to the suggested parallels in the use of the symbolism and semantics of light in the cosmologies and prophetologies of the two religious systems.

The hypothesis that the Alevi/Bektāṣī “Triple Rule” reflects its Gnostic/Manichaean counterpart, on the other hand, certainly needs to integrate much more textual evidence from Central Asian Turkic Manichaean works which are increasingly available but which have not been consulted to support such direct affiliation. Without such direct textual support from Central Asian Turkic sources, the proposed Manichaean-Alevi/ Bektāṣī “Triple Rule” connection remains another theoretical and presently unprovable construct. Further comparative and textually-based examination of Central Asian Turkic Manichaean manuscripts and corresponding Alevi and Bektāṣī primary source material (in areas such as religious terminology and phraseology) is certainly worth pursuing, but as yet it has not been attempted in any coherent or systematic fashion.

Finally, one of the approaches to the characteristic cosmogonic tradition attested in a number of Alevi versions as the Alevi principal creation story views it as reminiscent of Manichaeism.⁴⁰ But while it certainly exhibits some dualist tendencies, it does not have any direct genetic relation to Manichaean or Gnostic traditions. Its provenance and particularities can be best understood in the context of certain specific and inter-related Eurasian cosmogonic traditions (some of which betray variously developed movements towards dualism) and, apart from its relations with Ahl-e Haqq and Yezidi cosmogonic

and Heritage, pp. 297-308, at pp. 302; *eadem*, “Le gnosticisme chez les Bektachis/Alévis et les interférences avec d'autres mouvements gnostiques”, in Veinstein, *Sycrétismes et heresies*, pp. 65-75; at p. 67.

³⁹ See Elsas, ‘Religionsfreiheit’, pp. 83-85; Mélikoff, ‘Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi’, 57; *eadem*, *Hadji Bektach*, pp. 20-21, 163; *eadem*, ‘Hasluck’s Study’, pp. 302-305; *idem*, ‘Le gnosticisme chez les Bektachis/Alévis’, pp. 65-68. Cf. the cautious analysis of potential Manichaean- Alevi/Bektāṣī interaction in A. Haas, *Die Bektaṣi: Riten und Mysterien eines islamischen Ordens*, Berlin, 1988, pp. 147-150.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Mélikoff, ‘Hasluck’s Study’, p. 303; *eadem*, ‘Le gnosticisme chez les Bektachis/Alévis’, p. 67.

scenarios,⁴¹ its potential links with earlier *ghulāt* cosmogonic lore require further comparative investigation.

The fact that otherwise steadily advancing research on Alevism and Bektāšism has failed as yet to uncover any authentic and verifiable elements or strata inherited or borrowed from ancient Gnostic/Manichaeic or medieval Gnostic/Christian dualist traditions should not, of course, compromise or prejudice the study of the traces of the possible interaction of Alevism/Bektāšism with Christian heterodoxies in Ottoman-era Anatolia and the Balkans. Certain Alevi anthropogonic myths (recorded during field-work in the Balkans) may show traces of interaction with popular Christian anthropogonic stories, shaped under the impact of Christian dualist teachings.⁴² Such new material (stemming from newly-discovered written sources or recorded oral narratives of beliefs and rituals) could provide a more solid base for research on the interaction of Ottoman-era heterodox and popular forms of Christianity and Islam. The areas which are most likely to be rewarding concern certain analogies and potential contact between the cosmogonies, anthropogonies and satanologies of popular and heterodox Christianity and Islam in the Ottoman-era Balkans and Anatolia.⁴³

Furthermore, links between the persistence of Christian heterodoxies and dualist heresy in the pre-Ottoman western Balkans and the Hamzevite movement and agitation of the Mālamī Shaykh Hamza⁴⁴ of early Ottoman Bosnia-Herzegovina are also possible but as

⁴¹ On the place of this particular Alevi cosmogonic narrative in the context of these Eurasian cosmogonic traditions and the analogous cosmogonic lore among the Ahl- Haqq and the Yezidis, see Y. Stoyanov, "Islamic and Christian Heterodox Cosmogonies from the Ottoman period - Parallels and Contrasts", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 64/1 (2001), pp. 19-34.

⁴² Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels", pp. 116-118; Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations", pp. 269-271.

⁴³ Stoyanov, "Islamic and Christian Heterodox Cosmogonies"; Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels", pp. 101-118; Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations", pp. 269-270.

⁴⁴ On Shaykh Hamza, his movement and place in the history of *Malāmātiyya*, see T. OKIÇ, "Quelques documents inédits concernant les Hamzawites", in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Congress of Orientalists held in Istanbul September 15 to 27nd 1951*, vol. 2, Istanbul, 1957, pp. 279-286; Colin Imber, "Malāmātiyya", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 6, Leiden: Brill, 1991, pp. 227-28; H. T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World*, London, 1993, pp. 116-19; D. Čehajić, *Derviški redovi u jugoslovenskim zemljama sa posevnim osvrtom na Bosnu i Hercegovinu*, Sarajevo, 1986, pp. 185-208; H. Algar, "The Hamzeviyye: A deviant movement in Bosnian Sufism", *Islamic Studies*, 36:2 (Islambad 1997), pp. 243-261; S. Ilic, "Hamzeviiskaia i

yet remain unproven – the insufficiently explored extant evidence certainly merits a close analysis in this context. Still more potentially informative data may emerge from further study of the various records of the formation, spread and rebellious campaigns of the early Ottoman-era trans-confessional and universalistic religio-political movement of Shaykh Badr al-Dîn (d. 1417/1420) and its geography⁴⁵ in some areas of antecedent Christian heterodox activities and intermittent anti-clerical agitation. However, such research is still seriously hindered by the very insufficient work on the diverse extant manuscripts belonging to or relevant to Hurufism and the movements of Shaykh Hamza and Shaykh Badr al-Dîn. Of these manuscripts only a few have been properly studied and published (or are approaching publication stage) but a substantial number of them remain little-explored and have not been brought properly into the study of early Ottoman religious and political history. The potential of the study of such manuscripts to open new vistas for the exploration of the religious sub-currents of the early Ottoman era (and generally of the Near East during this period) is demonstrated, for example, by the rich insights provided by the recent in-depth analysis of the Christian texts (among other sources) used in the opus magnum of Hurufism's founder, Fażl-Allāh Astarābādi, the *Jāvidān-nāmah*.⁴⁶

The lack of identifiable and core extra-Islamic (ancient or medieval Gnostic) layers in Alevism and Bektāşism raises the question of the applicability of the terms *gnosis* and Gnosticism in their case. Alevi and Bektāşī teachings focused on man's ultimate aim to awake from the sleep of unconsciousness and be brought back to his divine origin find their parallel in the *gnosis* of late antique Gnostic traditions, which entails salvation by knowledge about the origins of the inner self in the spiritual realm. Indeed in their traditional (and

hurufitskaia eres v Bosni kak reaktsiia na politicheskii krizis Ottomanskoii imperii vo vtoroi polovine XVI stoletii", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 28:1–2 (2000), pp. 34–40.

⁴⁵ For earlier studies of Shaykh Badr al-Din and his movement see F. Babinger, "Schejch Bedr ed-Din, der Sohn des Richters von Simaw", *Der Islam*, 11 (1921) pp. 1-106, and N. Filipović, *Princ Musa i šejh Bedreddin*, Sarajevo, 1971; more recent studies include M. Balivet, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans: Vie du cheikh Bedreddin, le "Hallâj des Turcs", 1358/59-1416*, Istanbul, Isis, 1995; D. Kastritsis, "The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-1413", in A. Anastasopoulos (ed.), *Halcyon Days in Crete VII*, Rethymno, pp. 221-238.

⁴⁶ O. Mir-Kasimov, *Words of Power: Hurufi Teachings Between Shi'ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam*, London, 2015, pp. 427-434.

esotericised) self-image Alevi groups cultivated a Gnostic-like self-definition, as reflected in a *nefes*, in which they self-identify as “those who attained redemption”.⁴⁷

Yet these teachings are certainly not sufficient to define Alevism/Bektāšism as a Gnostic creed⁴⁸, as Gnostic systems develop also a theological anti-cosmic and anti-somatic dualism (notably absent in Alevism/Bektāšism) which are among the main characteristics of medieval Christian dualism. The absence of such a type of Gnostic or Gnostic-related theological dualism in Alevism and Bektāšism needs to be emphasized along with the differentiation between the existence of “gnosis” and non-existence of Gnostic theology proper in Alevism and Bektāšism.⁴⁹

Furthermore, nineteenth-century evidence and developments in Alevism and Bektāšism (when the latter in particular was exposed to contemporary Western influences) need to be treated cautiously and critically. Such notions detectable in nineteenth-century Albanian Bektāšism⁵⁰, for example, which could be construed as echoing Gnostic or dualist traditions may be the result of such external impact whose likelihood should be assessed first before being projected back to the earlier religious history of Alevism and Bektāšism in the Ottoman empire.

It is thus becoming increasingly apparent that since the quest for non-Islamic “Gnostic” layers in Alevism and Bektāšism has so far yielded such meagre and inconclusive result attention should be re-focused on the Alevi and Bektāšī role and place in the history of esoteric Shi`ism (especially in the or formative stages) and in the phenomenon of Islamic

⁴⁷ See the characteristic *Kızılbaş* religious hymn (recorded in the north-east Balkans and containing this self-definition) quoted *verbatim* in N. Gramatikova, “Changing Fates and the Issue of Alevi Identity in Bulgaria,” in A. Zhelyazkova and J. Nielsen (eds.), *Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice: Proceedings of the British-Bulgarian Workshop on Sufi Orders 19-23 May 2000, Sofia, Bulgaria*, Sofia, 2001, pp. 564-622, at 584-585.

⁴⁸ Mélikoff, , ‘Le gnosticisme chez les Bektachis/Alévis’, *passim; eadem*, ‘Universalisme et gnosticisme dans les hétérodoxies du proche et du moyen-orient’, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 26 (2) (2002), 135-154, *passim; eadem*, ‘Hasluck’s Study’, 304-305.

⁴⁹ This important and rarely made distinction was made, for example, by A. Gökalp *Têtes rouges et bouches noires. Une confrérie tribale de l’Ouest anatolien*, Paris, 1980, pp. 176-182.

⁵⁰ See V.L. Guidetti, *Elementi dualistici e gnostici della religione Bektāšī in Albania fra il XVII e il XIX secolo*, in G. Sfameni Gasparro (a cura di), *Destino e salvezza tra culti pagani e gnosi cristiana (Itinerari storico-religiosi sulle orme di Ugo Bianchi)*, Cosenza 1998, 239-264.

gnosis in general. Some of the characteristic Gnostic-influenced themes in early Shi'ite esotericism (particularly in the spheres of cosmogony, emanationist theology and sacred history) do not seem to be attested in Alevi and Bektāṣī traditions on the basis of the current state of research on primary source material. At the same time, Alevism and Bektāṣīsm clearly share and elaborate on some of the principal notions of esoteric Shi'ism such as, among others, the polarity between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, the hybrid nature of the human being (with some Alevi anthropogonic traditions presenting obvious dualist tendencies) and soteriological knowledge, as well as some elements of early Safavid Shi'ism.

As the current progress of work on newly available (or previously under-studied) primary source material has highlighted the areas which presently provide especially promising vistas for future research on the provenance of doctrinal and cultic Alevi and Bektāṣī traditions (such as the impact of the futuwwa and Hurufi traditions) as well as their overlapping networks of socio-religious authority and sacred patrilineage through the earlier association with the Sufi Wafā'ī order. At the same time, interesting material maintained in oral transmission also should not be ignored; as argued one such orally transmitted Alevi story of creation shows some affinities with earlier Ismaili cosmological speculations,⁵¹ reviving the earlier raised questions of a possible Ismaili impact on heterodox and antinomian trends in Anatolia during the Seljuk period. Moreover, anthropological work among Alevi communities has highlighted how their "esoteric inner interpretation of Islam" has "imbued in a way of life" and "a pattern of sociality" that could be seen as "being potentially disruptive or inappropriate by the orthodox majority".⁵²

It seems certain that future research on Alevism and Bektāṣīsm (whether through work on hitherto unstudied manuscripts, under-examined aspects of their material culture and orally transmitted histories and cosmogonic and soteriological models) will considerably enrich the picture of the notions of esoteric Shiism and *gnosis* maintained and developed by

⁵¹ E. Gezik, "How Angel Gabriel Became Our Brother of the Hereafter (On the Question of Ismaili Influence on Alevism)", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 43, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 56-70.

⁵² D. Shankland, "Secrets and the Transmission of Knowledge in Heterodox Islamic Societies: the Question of the Alevis", Paper read at the conference, *Knowledge to die for: Transmission of Prohibited and Esoteric Knowledge through Space and Time*, Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin, 02-04.05.2011.

these communities in the Ottoman era (sometimes in interaction with local Balkan and Anatolian systems of beliefs and cultic observances) vis-à-vis the Sunni majority and Sunni ruling establishment and the ensuing periodic Sunnification and legalistic pressures.