



The Psalms and Folk Songs of a Mystic Turkish Order

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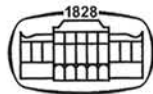


AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

János Sipos–Éva Csáki

THE PSALMS AND FOLK SONGS OF A MYSTIC TURKISH ORDER

The Music of Bektashis in Thrace



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ, BUDAPEST

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The expeditions and the writing of the book were supported by the Stein-Arnold Exploration Fund of the British Academy, (OTKA) National Scientific Research Fund program T77268 and the (NKA) Hungarian National Cultural Fund 1412/0392

Published by Akadémiai Kiadó
Member of Wolters Kluwer Group
P.O. Box 245, H-1519 Budapest, Hungary
www.akademiaikiado.hu

ISBN 978 963 05 8821 8

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Printed in Hungary

Whatever you look for, search in you

(Haji Bektash)

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PREFACE

The subject matter of our book is the psalms and folk songs of an Islamic mystic community, the Bektashis of Thrace, the European part of Turkey.¹

The Bektashi is one of the most important orders of dervishes in Turkey. After their victory at Manzikert (today: Malazgirt) in 1071 the Seljuk Turks began to move in from Central Asia, and parallel with orthodox Islam heterodox Islam also spread in Anatolia. The foundation of the Bektashi order is linked up with a Sufi thinker, Haji Bektash Veli, who moved from Khorasan to Anatolia and brought with him the Sufi thinker and poet Ahmed Yesevi's teachings, which fundamentally influenced the mystic currents of the Turkish world. Though together with other monastic orders this order was also suppressed on several occasions (in 1925 the latest), their communities are active to this day.

We collected music from members of various Islamic mystic groups already during our stay in Turkey in 1987–1993. Continuing Béla Bartók's Turkish collection of 1936, we first wished to outline a comprehensive picture of Anatolian folk music, without being able to devote profound interest to the individual cultures of smaller or greater communities to which Turkey owes its diversity. However, we were already then astonished to learn that among the tunes of Alevi–Bektashi communities songs very similar to Hungarian tunes constituted a high rate.

Most of the music of Bektashi religious communities is unresearched so far, although their deep respect for traditions, the salient role of music among them, and the preservation of pre-Islam customs all indicate that it is worth seeking for traces of the musical culture of ancient Turkic layers among them. Turkish researches into this field have only recently begun, which owes in part to the tension between the majority Sunni and minority Alevi–Bektashi religion and traditions (also embraced by the Kurds) to boot.

In the practice of Bektashi religion, the central role is played by the works of prominent Islamic mystic (Sufi) poets instead of the Quran. These poems folklorized and

¹ When speaking of Thracian Bektashis, we always mean the Bektashis living in the European part of Turkey.

varied on the lips of the people are and they not recited but chanted. The love of God often appears in them with the fervor of worldly love. The elevated or conversely the very practical teachings and guidelines of the poems are just as important for today's people as they were at the time of writing, and for centuries afterwards.

This work is the next step in a series of comparative ethnomusicological investigations which began with Bartók's trip to Anatolia in 1936, continued with László Vikár's and Gábor Bereczki's researches in the Volga–Kama region in 1957–1978 and with our field researches into Anatolian, Caucasian, Azeri, Kazakh, Kirghiz and Mongolian (as well as North American Indian) folk music. The music of Bulgarian Turks living between Anatolia and Hungary fits snugly into this series even geographically.

The fieldwork started in November 1999 when we had the opportunity to take part in the meeting of Bektashi religious leaders (*babas*). An important person – a university professor of law – was invited to the event. The participants were eager to hear answers to the questions about how to defend themselves against violence. They fear attacks, they are afraid to tell their children about incidents like the Sivas atrocity where the local Sunni crowd of some fifteen thousand set fire to the Madimak Hotel and to the Alevis who took shelter inside.

Despite their shyness of the outside world, we received invitations from several *babas*, doors opened to us and collecting work could begin. Between 1999 and 2003 we videotaped over 900 tunes in 24 Thracian villages from 150 Bektashi men and women. By the end of the fieldwork we felt we had attained our goal: we had recorded the overwhelming majority of their religious hymns and also several of their folk songs.

Besides the Bektashi material we managed to collect some religious songs from Anatolian Alevi *dedes*, as well as some dance tunes from local Sunni men and women. Some pieces under the name Bulgarian are exerted in this book in order to serve as material valid for comparison. Naturally we indicate the origin of each single tune.

This material seemed sufficient enough to present the musical culture of the community. For us, however, the tunes mean more than bare dry data needed for analysis because each tune is embedded in a set of personal experience, existential situation, people, their behavior and milieu.

Some of the ancestors of Thracian Bektashis had settled in the territory of today's Bulgaria from Anatolia and then they fled back to Turkey in several waves in the 19–20th centuries to escape persecution. Consequently, the connection between their folk music and Anatolian as well as Bulgarian folk music must also be examined. We also try to explore contact points between Bektashi folk music on the one hand and the music of other Turkic peoples and the Hungarians, on the other.

Several books and studies have been published about the history of the Bektashis of Turkey, about mysticism, Sufism and specifically about the basic religious principles and philosophy of the Bektashis. They generally agree on the essential facts but there are many deviations and divergences as well as blank spots. It was not our job to provide an up-to-date summary of the history of the Bektashi order, but it appeared

indispensable to present the most widely accepted variants. Following a brief introduction into Sufi ideas, thoughts will be cited from a book attributed to Haji Bektash Veli and a book by Kaygusuz Abdal dervish. The aim is to bring the reader closer to mystic Islamic thinking and the texts of the religious hymns.

Our book has several novelties. There is hardly a study, let alone a book, on folk hymns of the peoples of Turkey. There is none that is devoted to the systematic presentation of the music of a community or region, comparing Turkish folk and religious tunes and interpreting them in a broader context. It is clear, however, that folk religions preserve a lot of elements of pre-Islam Turkish culture and hence their research is of prime importance for an understanding of Turkish identity, Turkish ethnic and cultural genesis. A broad comparison involving several peoples allows us to establish whether a musical feature is a general or a specific phenomenon.

It is also a novelty that hundreds of folk song texts and the sung poems by Bektashi poets are given together with their English translation. Reading the texts one can get an insight into the everyday thought and religious principles of the community. A glossary is also appended to explain special expressions and concepts.

The overwhelming majority of the tunes in the volume were recorded and all the tunes were transcribed by us, thus they are from first-hand experience, and their authenticity is unquestionable. The collection allows us also to present the most typical tunes in audio variants on the CD attached to the book.

Notations, abbreviations

- Approximate *phonemic values* of Turkish letters different from English:

a-A	<i>a</i> in <i>father</i> (English)
ı-I	<i>ы</i> in <i>мы</i> (Russian)
i-İ	<i>i</i> in <i>if</i> (English)
ö-Ö	<i>u</i> in <i>un</i> (French)
ü-Ü	<i>ü</i> in <i>une</i> (French)
c-C	<i>dj</i> in <i>hadji</i> (English)
ç-Ç	<i>ch</i> in <i>chain</i> (English)
ğ-Ğ	lengthens preceding vowel
ş-Ş	<i>sh</i> in <i>show</i> (English)

- №: The numbers indicated with this abbreviation are serial numbers of tunes in the anthology.

- The tones of the scale are marked by the following symbols: A' G' F E D C B A G.



– A note of the scale is put in brackets if it does not play an important role in the tune. For instance, in a melody with the (G′)-E-D-C scale, the main role is played by the notes of the trichord E-D-C, with occasional G′ added, but not in an accentuated role. A-B-C-D/E-C-B-A stands for A-B-C-D-C-B-A and A-B-C-E-C-B-A melodic movements.

– A *cadential note* is the last note of a musical section. For tunes with more than two lines, we sometimes present a cadential formula. The line-ending notes are enumerated in them, with the note of the most important line being in parentheses. The last note of the last line is not shown, because it is always A. Example: for an Aeolian tune E(C)C signifies a tune whose cadential notes are E, C, C, A. E/D(C)C stands for E(C)C and D(C)C cadences.

– The word *chord* designates penta-, tetra- and trichords alike. Instead of the cumbersome “(G′-F)-E-D-C penta-, tetra- and trichord” we use “(G′-F)-E-D-C chord”.

– *Conjunct movement* means that the tonal ranges of the lines overlap, and on the other hand, the tone steps are primes, seconds and rarely thirds.

– *Single-core tunes* consist of the usually varied repetition of a single musical idea, while *two-core melodies* are built from two different musical ideas (A and B) arranged so that varied repetition of A is followed by variants of B.

– A_v indicates a variation of the musical section A.

– A_c and A^c indicate a variation of the musical section A where the deviation between the two lines is in the last part of the lines. In A_c the end of the modified section is lower than that of the original, in A^c it is higher.

– A_{ex} or A+ indicates an extended musical line in comparison to line A.

– We mark \underline{A} the musical line that runs parallel, at times identically, with line A, and ends on the same note as line A. In the course of systematization, we did not differentiate the lines \underline{A} , A_v and A_{ex} from the A lines to which they can be retraced. At the same time we handled the A_c and A^c lines as separate.

– The arrows above some notes signify a pitch modification upward (↑) or downward (↓) by less than a semitone.

THE BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BEKTASHI ORDER

From the 9th century onwards, Turks turning away from the material towards the spiritual realm tried to find God and the way to Him inside themselves and gradually separated from the adherents of the rigidly scholastic religious theology of Islam. Islamic mysticism or Sufism considered asceticism a practice to be appreciated, supported by the name of the trend which derives from Arabic *suf* 'wool': 7–8th century ascetics wore gowns of rough wool in their eremitic solitude or in their tiny communities.


The thinkers who developed the Sufi ideology also incorporated the ideas of neo-Platonism in their system called *tasavvuf* 'Islamic mysticism'. They were also influenced by Central Asian, Indian, and primarily Buddhist notions.² On the other hand, vestiges of earlier Turkic natural religions, the cult of the ancestors and Shamanism have also been preserved at many places.

Together with Islam, Sufism also spread among Arabs and Persians alike and is known to this day from the Tatars – the northernmost branch of western Turkic peoples – to the Azeris, and from the Balkanian Turks – who are the westernmost Turkic group – to the Uighurs.³ Outstanding figures of Sufism include Al-Farabi (870–950) and Ibn Sina (980–1037). In the 13th-century Spain Muhyiddin Arabi's work was considered a milestone, while in Turkish areas in the wake of the activity of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, Yesevi, Shah Ismail, and others a peerless cultural and civilisational phenomenon unfolded from Khorasan to the Balkans. Rumi's *Mesnevi*, in which Islam is interlaced with Sufism, exerted great influence in Islamic areas and even in the West, for centuries.

Khorasan, the centre of the Seljuk Empire had special importance for the Turkish groups immigrating to Anatolia. Anatolian Turks kept in contact for a long time with this Central Asian city in a region of high cultural and scientific knowledge. The first

² Goldziher (1981: 155, 173).

³ Several scholars addressed themselves to the connections between some elements of Central Asian Sufism and the Shamanism of Central Asian tribes of Turkic tongues: Knorozov (1949), Shukhareva (1959: 130), Bayaliyeva (2003: 83). On Sufism among the Tatars, see Shibgatullina (1997).



The subject matter of the book is the psalms and folk songs of an Islamic mystic community, the Bektashis living in the European part of Turkey. Most of the music of these religious communities has been unresearched so far, although their deep respect for traditions, the salient role of music among them and the preservation of pre-Islam customs all indicate that it is worth seeking for traces of the musical culture of ancient Turkic layers among them.

During their fieldwork between 1999 and 2003 the authors videotaped the overwhelming majority of the religious hymns and also several of the folk songs in 24 Thracian villages from 150 Bektashi men and women. Consequently, beside the analysis there are personal experiences, a deeper knowledge of these people, their behavior and the social context.

After a brief introduction to Sufi ideas in the book thoughts are cited from a writing attributed to Haji Bektash Veli and from a book by Kaygusuz Abdal dervish. These will bring the Reader closer to mystic Islamic thinking and the texts of the religious hymns.

The main novelty of the book is a study devoted to the systematic presentation of the music of a Sufi community, comparing folk and religious tunes and interpreting them in a broader context. Also hundreds of folk song texts and the poems sung by Bektashi poets are given together with their English translation. By reading the texts one can get an insight into the everyday thought and religious principles of the community.

All these are completed by several photos, many transcriptions and a CD-supplement with the most typical tunes of the Bektashi community.

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