

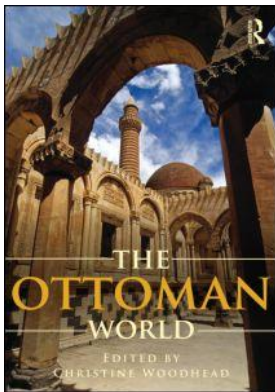
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CHAPTER SIX

SUFIS IN THE AGE OF STATE-BUILDING AND CONFESSIONALIZATION*



Derin Terzioğlu

The word ‘sufi’ evokes timeless images of whirling dervishes and an ancient but equally timeless lore of spirituality with only the most tenuous links to Islam. Thankfully, there is now a substantial scholarly literature which shows that sufi thought and practice also has a history, and that this history is inextricably connected with the history of Islamic piety at large. As the etymology of the word ‘sufi’ (wearer of wool) reminds us, the early sufis had emerged out of the ranks of Muslim renunciants in Baghdad between the late eighth and early tenth centuries. What distinguished this group from ordinary renunciants was their inward turn, their search for a more intimate knowledge of God through a variety of techniques of self-transformation. Initially a relatively marginal group, sufis had succeeded by the eleventh century in spreading across a vast Islamic world, and, notwithstanding the controversies surrounding some sufi beliefs and practices, normative sufism had become largely accepted as a legitimate part of what had by then been established as Sunni Islam.¹

However, it was only during the next four centuries – a period which began with the resurgence of nomadic tribalism under the Seljuks and ended with the formation of more durable empires by the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals – that sufism became truly popularized. The organizational features of sufi communities were also transformed during this period. Increasingly, it became usual for an aspirant sufi first to find a ‘perfect master’ and submit him or herself to his authority. Over time, these communities of masters and disciples became organized into sufi orders or *tarikats* (literally, ‘way’), each distinguished by a distinctive teaching method and a *silsile*, an authoritative chain of spiritual transmission that traced each living master to masters of the past.² Nevertheless, the institutionalization of sufism was not an orderly affair, and the late medieval period also saw some contrary trends, such as the rise of deviant, nonconformist dervish movements³ and the transfusion of sufism with elements of ‘extreme’ Shi’ism (*guluww*) throughout the eastern lands of Islam.

These transformations were still in progress when towards the end of the thirteenth century the Ottomans first made a bid for political power in the borderlands between a diminished Byzantine empire and a crumbling Seljuk sultanate of Rum. In this particular setting, where Muslims were initially a minority, the institutionalization of sufism took longer than in the more established lands of Islamdom. It was also inti-

mately connected with two parallel processes: state-building and confessionalization. The latter term refers here to the initiatives taken by Ottoman religious and political authorities during the sixteenth century to refashion the attitudes and behaviours of the empire's Muslim subjects in conformity with the principles of Sunni Islam.⁴

Historians have generally approached the institutionalization and confessionalization of sufism in Ottoman lands through a conceptual framework which was first formulated by Köprülü in the early twentieth century and extensively utilized by Ocak more recently. Generally, historians subscribing to the Köprülü–Ocak line assume that the Seljuk and, after them, the Ottoman authorities (and the urban elites under their rule) had always subscribed to Sunni Islam, but they also postulate the existence of a 'popular' or 'folk' Islam, which continued the pre-Islamic beliefs of the Turks beneath a sufi veneer. Accordingly, it was only in the sixteenth century when a rival Shi'i dynasty, the Safavids, commanded the loyalty of certain discontented elements among the Muslim population under Ottoman rule that this bifurcation attained a new sectarian dimension and led to a series of confrontations between the Ottoman state and some sufi circles.

Recently, however, some scholars have questioned key elements of this narrative by showing that the essentialized, dichotomous categories of 'high' vs. 'low', as well as 'orthodox' vs. 'heterodox' Islam or sufism, do little justice to the complexity and fluidity of religious (and social and cultural) affiliations in late medieval and early modern Ottoman Anatolia and the Balkans. They argue that the appeal of no sufi group or movement was restricted to a single social, political or cultural milieu, and that the social and religious profile of the adherents of any one group/movement/order could vary from region to region and from period to period.⁵ They have further emphasized that the religious transformations of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries entailed not only the Shi'itization of some sectors of the Ottoman population and the emergence of the Kızılbaş (modern Alevi) community, but also the Sunnitization of the Ottoman ruling elites and a broad cross-section of Ottoman society. This essay builds on these findings to present a more complex picture of the institutionalization and confessionalization of sufism in the Ottoman central lands during the first three centuries of Ottoman rule. It also strikes a middle ground between two co-existing tendencies in current scholarship by seeing Ottoman confessionalization not as driven by political expediency or by religious concerns alone,⁶ but rather as a complex process with significant socio-cultural, political and religious dimensions.

The late fifteenth-century legend about a prophetic dream seen by Osman (d. c.1324), the founder of the dynasty, represents Ottoman imperial success as the result of a joining of forces between Osman and a sufi, the Vefai dervish Edebalı.⁷ This dream narrative is almost certainly apocryphal, but evidence from Ottoman land surveys confirms that Edebalı was one of several Vefai dervishes already present in the Ottoman principality in the first half of the fourteenth century.⁸ The hitherto almost completely neglected history of the Vefais in Anatolia presents an apt point to begin discussion, because it challenges so many of the assumptions of earlier historiography. The Vefai order had originated not in Central Asia, the presumed 'homeland of the Turks', but in neighbouring Iraq. Its founder, Ebu'l-Vefa (d. 1107), was a *seyyid*, a descendant of the Prophet, who had spent most of his life among the Kurds in northern Iraq, and who had attracted disciples from many different ethnicities and social backgrounds. By the late twelfth century Vefai dervishes were found in eastern and

east-central Anatolia, and some had moved further west to the borderlands where the early Ottomans were based after the suppression of the Babai revolt (1239–41). One of the instigators of this Turcoman-cum-sufi-led messianic revolt against Seljuk rule was a Vefai sheykh by the name of Baba İlyas.

It is difficult to find a blanket term to categorize the religious and sectarian orientation of the Vefais from their eleventh-century origins down to their extinction as a distinctive group sometime in the mid-sixteenth century. There is general scholarly consensus that Ebu'l-Vefa must have been at least nominally a Sunni, although he and his dervishes also indulged in practices that contemporary Sunni authorities found objectionable, such as holding religious ceremonies where both men and women were present. Nevertheless, four centuries later some Vefai adherents in eastern and east-central Anatolia came under the Shi'itizing influence of the Safavids and gradually became part of the nascent Kızılbaş community. Evidence for this has recently been found in a rich body of archival material preserved by Alevi *dede* families in that region.⁹ Those Vefais who headed further west towards the Byzantine frontier in the late thirteenth century seem to have evolved in several different directions. Evidence suggests that a good many Vefais in the early Ottoman principality became part of the *abdals* of Rum, a loose association of itinerant dervishes of many different *silsiles*, who were known for their strange and scant clothing, their consumption of illicit substances such as hashish and wine, and their open disregard for social and religious norms in general.¹⁰ Between the late fifteenth and seventeenth centuries many of these *abdals*, in turn, became absorbed into the Bektashi order, which had a 'Shi'itizing' tendency similar to the Kızılbaş. During the same period, however, other Vefais, or at least their descendants, seem to have 'come closer to an emerging Ottoman orthodoxy along Sunni lines'.¹¹ We find the perspective of Vefais of the second kind in the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazade (d. after 1484), who was also one of the sources of the dream narrative mentioned above. The great-great-grandson of Baba İlyas, Aşıkpaşazade was deeply proud of his family's Vefai past, but he was also a sheykh of the Zeyni order, which was known for its Sunni orientation and was popular at the time, especially with the *ulema*.¹² It must also have been Vefais of the second kind whom the Ottoman scholar Taşköprüzade (d. 1561) knew in person, and whom he had in mind when he represented the Vefais in the early Ottoman state even more forcefully as 'shariah-abiding' or 'orthodox' dervishes.¹³

Ultimately, the transformation of the Vefais in the central Ottoman lands cannot be understood in isolation from the transformation of the early Ottoman religious milieu generally. The latter process may have started earlier than presumed, but it was still rather gradual and took some two centuries to be 'completed'. It has been argued that a defining feature of the early Ottoman religious milieu was 'metadoxy', defined as 'a state of being beyond doxies, a combination of being doxy-naive and not being doxy-minded'.¹⁴ This point may be best illustrated by considering the religious institutions then existing. The endowment deed for the earliest *medrese* to be built on Ottoman soil, in Nicaea/Iznik, dates from 1331, but the institution might not have been operational until 1336.¹⁵ When the Maghribi scholar Ibn Battuta passed through Iznik and Bursa circa 1332–3, he wrote no word on the *medreses* of those towns, but dwelled rather more on the dervishes and especially the *ahis*, the quasi-mystical young men's associations he found wherever he travelled in Anatolia. Particularly striking is his description of a gathering he attended in the Ahi Şemseddin *zaviye* (convent) in

Bursa on the night of the Aşure. Religiously normative practices such as Koran recitation, the performance of the canonical prayers (*namaz*) and preaching were mixed with (from a Sunni point of view) more controversial practices such as *sema* (a ritual that entailed the audition of music and poetry) and dance (*raks*) – all in the presence of the public and of religious and political leaders.¹⁶ Such multi-functional convents were a characteristic and popular building type in the early Ottoman period and attest to a social and cultural milieu where different religious and social groups mingled, and where little need was felt to separate the ritual practices of the sufis and *ahis* from the prescribed rituals for all Muslims.¹⁷ Religious fluidity might also have been facilitated by the fact that the earliest *ulema* found in the Ottoman lands were often themselves immersed in the sufi tradition. This was the case with the first scholar said to have been appointed *müderris* in Iznik, Davud-ı Kayseri (d. 1350), one of the best-known commentators on the works of the great Andalusian mystic Muhyiddin İbn Arabi (d. 1240).¹⁸

According to the early Ottoman chroniclers, writing in the late fifteenth century but also drawing on earlier oral and written traditions, this seemingly idyllic relationship between the sufis and the *ulema* (or rather the proto-*ulema*, identified in these early texts as *fakı* – from *fakih*, jurist) first began to show some signs of stress during the reign of Bayezid I (1389–1402). In this era the Ottomans made an early bid at empire-building and at centralizing power at the expense of the former Anatolian beys and the frontier warriors (*gazis*). Sufis were also affected by this development because they had long-established links with the *gazis* as well as with other Anatolian beys, and because they resented the emerging *ulema*, most of whom came from the Anatolian interior and staffed the *medreses* which were then being built at an unprecedented rate.¹⁹ To judge by the anecdotal evidence provided in the chronicles, sufi resentment of the *ulema* stemmed partly from the roles the latter played as agents, allies and beneficiaries of a centralizing state and partly from a clash of values and mores between the peoples of the marches and the hinterland.

Sufi discontent with the changing Ottoman regime first surfaced in a messianic rebellion organized in the name of the sufi and scholar Şeyh Bedreddin in 1416, fourteen years after the Ottoman defeat by Timur and three years after the reunification of the Ottoman sultanate. While modern scholars dispute the religious and political ideas of Şeyh Bedreddin, and even his role in the rebellion, there is more consensus on the social, political and cultural profile of the rebels.²⁰ It is highly relevant that the rebellion broke out in the former territories of the Aydınoğulları in western Anatolia and later spilled over to the Deliorman–Dobruja region in the Balkans. In western Anatolia nonconformist itinerant dervishes played a particularly active role as instigators of rebellion, mobilizing poor Christian peasants alongside Turcomans and recent converts to Islam, while in the Balkans Bedreddin made common cause with discontented frontier warriors. Such a heterogeneous group presumably held heterogeneous ideas about the nature of their endeavour; nevertheless, contemporary accounts suggest that, at least in western Anatolia, the rebels looked to Bedreddin as their saviour, who would eliminate injustice, abolish all forms of private property and bring together Muslim and non-Muslim alike under his messianic faith. It has been argued that the Bedreddin affair ‘represented the key moment of transition between the unbounded order of multiple forms of worship to the austere world of institutionalized religion’,²¹ but it is questionable how radical a break the event actually constituted in Ottoman

religious culture. To begin with, the messiah figure behind the rebellion, Şeyh Bedreddin, was himself a man of multiple worlds and affiliations. While on the one hand, as the son of a Muslim warrior (originally of the Karesi principality) and a Byzantine noblewoman, he was a typical child of the frontier, he was also a highly respected scholar who had studied jurisprudence and theology in Cairo before turning to the sufi path. Although his master, Hüseyin Ahlati (originating from or otherwise affiliated with Ahlat in eastern Anatolia), was considered highly controversial and even suspected of heresy by the Sunni *ulema* of Cairo, this had not prevented Bedreddin from being appointed *kazasker* (chief military judge) by the Ottoman prince Musa upon his return to Anatolia, a telling sign of the cultural distance that separated the Ottomans from fellow Muslims in the Islamic hinterlands. Perhaps even more telling for Ottoman religious attitudes in this period is the fact that, for all the rather bold ideas attributed to him and his followers, ultimately Bedreddin was executed as a rebel and not as a heretic. However, this is not to deny the importance of the rebellion as the first major event which alerted the Ottoman authorities to the dangers that sufis, particularly the nonconformist itinerant dervishes, could pose to public order.

Şeyh Bedreddin's revolt was actually part of a broader wave of messianism that washed across the eastern lands of Islamdom (and beyond) in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth century. The adherents of another messianic group, the Hurufiye, subjected the Koran to a radically esoteric interpretation and denied many fundamentals of Islamic belief such as faith in the afterlife. Hurufis had originated in Iran in the late fourteenth century but, after running into trouble with both the Timurids and the Karakoyunlu rulers there, had directed their activities towards Anatolia in the early fifteenth century. There they apparently found a receptive audience not only among some sufis, but also in the person of Mehmed II during his first period of rule (1444–6). By then, however, several of Mehmed's high-ranking administrators were sufficiently alarmed by the religious ideas and/or the political threat posed by these dervishes to persuade the young ruler to undertake a purge of Hurufis.²² Finally, as part of the same broad current of messianic fermentation, the Safavids were transformed during the fifteenth century from a nominally Sunni sufi order into a militant messianic movement with an 'extreme' Shi'i ideology. Although Ottoman rulers faced the full implications of this development only at the beginning of the sixteenth century, several sources suggest that they had begun to worry about the growing influence of the Safavid sheykhs in Anatolia already by the mid-fifteenth century.²³

It would be simplistic to assume, however, that the religious attitudes of the Ottoman ruling elites changed only in response to actual or perceived threats from messianic sufi circles. More broadly, the growth of Ottoman state power, the revival of trade and other economic activity under their rule, and the growth of Ottoman towns had created a much more attractive environment both for the *ulema* and for the representatives of an increasingly institutionalized, normative sufism. Some of these scholars and sufis flocked to Ottoman lands from the more established Islamic centres of learning in Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Syria, while others were native-born sons, some of whom had also been educated in these more distant centres. All these individuals were instrumental in conveying the norms and values that were deep rooted among the urban elites of the Islamic heartlands, and must also be taken into account when considering the changing religious landscape of the fifteenth-century Ottoman empire.

In modern scholarship, most of the new orders in Ottoman lands during this period – notably the Bayramis, Zeynis, Mevlevis, Halvetis, Kadiris and Nakşibendis – are labelled ‘Sunni’. This designation is not so much wrong as in need of qualification. First, in the absence of a neatly defined church to dictate ‘right belief’, the term ‘Sunni’ was necessarily more ambiguous and open to dispute than the term ‘Orthodox’ in Orthodox Christianity. Second, even the ‘institutionalized’ sufi orders were considerably less institutionalized than, say, religious brotherhoods in medieval and early modern Europe. Important differences of belief and practice could exist even among the adherents of the same order.²⁴ Third, just as fifteenth-century Ottoman society was becoming socially and culturally more differentiated, considerable religious and doctrinal fluidity still characterized sufi piety in this crucial transitional period, poised between the relative ‘metadoxy’ of the fourteenth century and the strident sectarianism of the sixteenth. Consider the case of Eşrefoğlu Rumi (d. 1469–70?), the founder of the principal Ottoman branch of the Kadiri order and a self-identified Sunni. In his *Tarikatname*, a manual written for fellow sufis and sufi novices, Eşrefoğlu explicitly declares the Sunni faith to be superior to others, but he also writes positively of the ‘Alevis’, a term he uses to mean sometimes the descendants and sometimes the followers of Ali.²⁵ Further, he asserts that the ‘perfect master’ (*şeyh-i kamil*) must descend from the ‘House of Muhammad and Ali’, that all must obey him (*ulu’l-emrlik anun hakkıdur*) and that those who oppose him may be considered ‘Kharijis’²⁶ and legitimately killed.²⁷ Rapprochement between sufism and Shi’ism manifested itself also in certain beliefs and practices of the self-professedly Sunni sufis: in their *silsiles*, nearly all of which went back to Ali, in their admiration for the descendants of the Prophet in general and for the Twelve Imams in particular, as well as in their use of symbols commonly associated with Shi’ism (twelve-cornered headgear, black turbans, etc.).²⁸ While some of these features of late medieval sufism survived the confessionalization of the sixteenth century, others did not, at least not without modification.

Likewise, the institutionalization of sufism must also be understood as a process begun but by no means completed in the fifteenth century. The Bayrami order is one example. Even though Bayrami sheykhs such as the Yazıcızade brothers Mehmed and Ahmed Bican exercised a formative influence on Ottoman religious culture in the fifteenth century, the early history of the Bayrami order is curiously shrouded in mystery.²⁹ There is little definite information about its ‘founder’, Hacı Bayram (d. 1430): he left no writing of his own, while his followers provided divergent images of him and his order. The earliest available records suggest that Hacı Bayram lived with numerous followers in a semi-rural setting outside Ankara, supporting themselves through agriculture and sporadically by asking for alms like common beggars rather than living off income from pious endowments like most representatives of institutionalized sufism. This indicates a group touched less by institutionalized sufism and more by the teachings of *fütüvvet* (the code of manliness and chivalry that guided the *ahi* groups) and *melamet* (the path of ‘blame’, initially a separate path of mystical piety that emphasized hiding one’s spiritual state while outwardly living a life of anonymity and sometimes even of seeming profanity). Also, Hacı Bayram had been the disciple of Somuncu Baba, whose *silsile* derived from the Safavid sheykhs and who had also been a close associate of Şeyh Bedreddin. The question then arises: how was this seemingly unwieldy group of dervishes transformed into an institutionalized sufi order? The answer may lie in an early brush between Hacı Bayram and the Ottoman authorities.

Apparently, at some time during the reign of Murad II (1421–51), Hacı Bayram was called to the Ottoman court in Edirne to be questioned about rumours that he was claiming worldly as well as spiritual dominion (*saltanat* is the word used). By all indications, however, the sufi master was able to allay these suspicions, and he returned to his lodge in Ankara with many favours. This early encounter with the Ottomans may have opened the way for various disciples of Hacı Bayram to establish themselves in the Ottoman Balkans and to gain adherents among the powerful. It also seems that closer relations with the Ottoman authorities led to some fine-tuning and adjustments by these dervishes. These adjustments and accommodations were probably at the heart of the split evident in Bayrami ranks some time after the death of Hacı Bayram. One group, under the leadership of the learned Akşemseddin (d. 1459), evolved into the Şemsi branch of the order (generally considered the Bayrami order proper), developed close links with Ottoman ruling elites and spread rapidly westwards. The other group, led by an artisan, Ömer Dede the Cutler, resisted institutionalization and persisted on the path of *melamet*, rejecting the distinctive paraphernalia and rituals as well as the dependence on charity which characterized *tarikât* sufism. This second group of Bayramis appeared in major Ottoman cities to the west only a hundred years later, in the sixteenth century, where they faced persecution and hid their Melami affiliation under different guises.

As the Bayrami example illustrates, the institutionalization and domestication of sufi groups were closely related processes. However, the representatives of institutionalized sufism should not be considered simply as agents of a centralizing state. Rather, when Zeynis and Bayramis and, slightly later, Halvetis and Nakşbendis established convents in major Ottoman cities such as Edirne, Bursa and İstanbul, and enjoyed the patronage of leading members of the *ulema* and the political elite, they continued to exercise a considerable degree of autonomy. The Bayrami sheykh Akşemseddin was, on the one hand, the tutor and a confidante of Mehmed II and a supporter of his campaign to take Constantinople and, on the other hand, profoundly ambivalent about the latter's decision to adopt the 'infidel's city' as his capital.³⁰ A similar ambivalence about Mehmed's imperial project is evident in the chronicle of Aşıkpaşazade, who was both a Zeyni and a descendant of prominent Vefai sheykhs.³¹ In both cases, the ambivalence reflected not only the personal concerns of the sheykhs in question but also the collective concerns of their social circles. The latter included in both cases the frontier warriors, who, like other members of the political elite and contrary to what is often assumed, were patrons not only of 'heterodox' dervishes³² but also of seemingly more Sunni-oriented sufis.³³

In Ottoman historiography, the reign of Mehmed II is usually taken as the turning point that finally transformed the Ottoman state from a frontier polity, in which the sultan was only 'first among equals', into a centralized bureaucratic empire with an absolutist ethos. In many ways, however, it fell to Mehmed's much less charismatic son and successor Bayezid II (1481–1512) to sort out the institutional arrangements that would sustain this newly forged empire. It was also during Bayezid's reign that the institutionalization of the sufis gained pace. As his epithet Veli ('saint', or 'friend of God') indicates, Bayezid was known to be pious, with a personal attraction to sufism. His patronage of sufis nevertheless also had important policy dimensions. In his early years, Bayezid was concerned especially to enlist the support of the major power groups within the empire in his struggle to secure the throne against

a challenge from his brother Cem; influential sufi sheykhs provided him with crucial contacts. Throughout his reign, Bayezid was also concerned to win over various groups alienated by Mehmed II's state-building and centralization, including the sufis. This concern gained particular urgency after the Safavids under Shah Ismail replaced the Akkoyunlus as the rulers of western Iran in 1501.

Bayezid supported sheykhs from a wide variety of sufi orders.³⁴ Interestingly, the chief beneficiaries of his patronage were not the Nakşbendis and Zeynis, who were reputed to be the most Sunna-oriented of the sufi orders and were particularly favoured by the *ulema*, but the Halvetis. Bayezid's close relations with Halveti sheykhs went back to his days as a princely governor in Amasya, when the latter had supported him in his struggle for the throne, but their attraction for Bayezid probably went beyond this early alliance. Halvetis, like Bayramis, had issued from the same *silsile* as the Safavids and exhibited strong forms of Alid loyalty even while they remained within the orbit of Sunni Islam.³⁵ This must have made an alliance with them particularly valuable for Bayezid (and later Ottoman rulers) in his attempt to reach out to social and religious groups potentially receptive to Safavid propaganda.

It may have been with similar considerations that Bayezid viewed the up-and-coming Bektashis. Historians have long puzzled about the considerable overlap between the religious beliefs and practices of the Kızılbaş communities, who were persecuted as heretics, and the Bektashi dervishes, who were viewed with suspicion but still largely tolerated by the Ottoman authorities. It has been argued that Bektashi dervishes were initially sent by the Ottoman authorities as 'missionaries' to properly Islamize the Turcoman tribal population in Central Anatolia but that in the process they had themselves been acculturated into the heterodox, syncretistic beliefs of that population.³⁶ This argument, however, seems problematic for at least two reasons. First, because it (at least initially) attributes an overriding agency to the state when in fact it was only one of several different actors involved and when the mores and predilections of the ruling elites themselves were quite heterogeneous. And, second, because it overlooks the diversity of both the Bektashis and the Kızılbaş in terms of geographic and ethnic provenance. Others, following Köprülü,³⁷ have explained the doctrinal and ritual similarities between the Kızılbaş and the Bektashis with reference to their common religious affiliations, particularly their connections with the *abdals* of Rum. It is now generally accepted that the cult of Hacı Bektaş, an enigmatic Vefai dervish of the thirteenth century, had initially been the patrimony of the *abdals*. Accordingly, the Bektashis proper had emerged out of the ranks of these itinerant dervishes in the late fifteenth century, and continued to absorb many of the remaining *abdals* into their ranks during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Other *abdals*, however, seem to have resisted Bektashization and instead became part of the nascent Kızılbaş community.³⁸

The reign of Bayezid II was a key period for the early institutionalization of the Bektashi order. The writing down of the hitherto oral traditions about Hacı Bektaş, the renovation of the lodge of Hacı Bektaş,³⁹ and the reorganization of the administrative structure of the order by the sheikh Balım Sultan all took place around this time. Even though Bayezid's role in each of these developments remains unclear, his conciliatory policies may have laid the foundation for the subsequent accommodation of various nonconformist sufis under the Bektashi umbrella. However, the growing prominence of the Bektashis was owing also to their links with other socio-political actors. Among

Bektashi patrons were the old *gazi* families of the Balkans, whose powers had been considerably reduced by Mehmed II but who still continued to serve the Ottomans as provincial governors.⁴⁰ In addition, the Bektashis had established a foothold among the Janissaries, the elite military corps whose ranks were filled with *devşirme* recruits from among the Christian population in the Balkans. It has been speculated that the Ottoman rulers had encouraged the spread of the Bektashi dervishes among the Janissaries because the syncretistic beliefs and practices of the former were found to be a particularly effective way to Islamize these Christian-born soldiers.⁴¹ If indeed the state elites had played a role in this process, they may also have aimed thereby to draw the nonconformist dervish milieu closer to the imperial centre at a time of growing tension between the two. It is also possible, however, that the Bektashis (or, before them, the *abdals*) had gained a foothold among the Janissaries independently of any state involvement. The fact that some Janissaries turned Kızılbaş in the sixteenth century or that the tie between Janissaries and Bektashis survived efforts by the central state to replace it with another – the Mevlevi – should indicate that state control over this elite military corps was not as absolute as has been generally assumed.⁴²

Contrary to the prevalent image of Bayezid as a ‘softie’, archival records indicate that Ottoman surveillance of and punitive actions towards suspected supporters of the Safavids had already begun under his rule, around the time Shah İsmail had set himself up as an independent sovereign in 1501.⁴³ Still, Ottoman religious policies did harden considerably following the pro-Safavid Şah Kulu rebellion, which erupted among the Turcoman tribes of the Taurus mountains in 1511 and which was joined by a wide variety of disgruntled groups, from timariots to *ahis*. Within a year, Bayezid was deposed by his hawkish son Selim I (1512–20), who adopted a much more aggressive policy vis-à-vis both the Safavids and Ottoman subjects suspected of being Kızılbaş.

Modern historians have rightly emphasized the pivotal role played by the Ottoman–Safavid conflict in transforming the religious landscape of both empires during the early modern period. Some changes were quite dramatic, like the persecution of thousands⁴⁴ of suspected Kızılbaş supporters and the destruction of scores of dervish lodges and convents that harboured them during Selim’s march through Anatolia, first to suppress the Şah Kulu rebellion and later to confront the Safavids (1512–14). Similar waves of persecution, though smaller in scale, were repeated during later pro-Safavid rebellions and Ottoman–Safavid campaigns.⁴⁵ At the same time, however, the Ottoman state did not and could not afford to forget its old policies of containment and accommodation. Even in times of war, the authorities often dealt with Kızılbaş communities in a differentiated manner, executing individuals identified as agents (*halife*) of the Safavids while subjecting others to surveillance, banishment and a variety of other, lesser, forms of punishment.⁴⁶ Moreover, persecution or threat thereof was only one component of the Ottoman policies of Sunnitization. The state also sought to reshape the behaviour of its subjects by distributing posts and benefits and by conferring or ratifying claims to privileged status. Recently, Canbakal, analysing the Ottoman registers of *seyyids*, or descendants of the Prophet, has suggested a link between the state’s attempts to regulate the appropriation of this status and its policies of containment directed at the Kızılbaş, for whom descent from the Prophet was of particular significance.⁴⁷

In addition to these ‘carrot-and-stick’ policies directed at specific religious communities, the state pursued more positive measures which required time to take effect,

like the campaign to build neighbourhood and Friday mosques wherever Muslims lived in Anatolia and the Balkans. This policy was closely linked to attempts to enforce communal performance of the five daily canonical prayers by the region's Muslim population. Strikingly, the mosques built in this period were no longer conceived as multi-functional spaces that could accommodate sufis, *abis* and travellers alongside the congregations for the Friday service.⁴⁸ Rather, guest rooms were now separated from the mosques and built as free-standing dependencies. Along with monasteries and churches, many of the remaining multi-functional convents were also converted into Friday mosques, while some of the dervish lodges affiliated with 'heterodox' sufi groups were converted into *medreses*.⁴⁹

Significantly, such changes corresponded with the onset of a more discriminatory attitude among the Ottoman elites towards sufism. This appears most clearly in religio-legal literature, which contains, for the first time, a sustained critique of a wide variety of sufi beliefs and practices as *bid'ats*, inadmissible 'innovations' introduced into Islamic tradition after the lifetime of the Prophet. Recent scholarship has tended to downplay sixteenth-century attacks on sufi *bid'ats* either as the work of a tiny minority among the Ottoman *ulema* or as campaigns directed specifically at 'heterodox' and especially Shi'itizing sufis such as the *abdals*. In fact, however, not only 'hardliners' like Çivizade Muhyiddin Mehmed (d. 1547) but also 'moderates' like Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534) issued *fetvas* declaring the use of ritual music and dance during sufi gatherings illegitimate.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the nuances between their positions, it proved exceedingly difficult to draw the boundary between the 'sharia-abiding' and 'deviant' dervishes on this issue. It is true that the central government primarily targeted Shi'itizing itinerant dervishes (*ısrık*), instructing local authorities to prevent them from playing musical instruments and dancing in public.⁵¹ Apparently, however, some local *kadis* drew a different conclusion from the legal debates and wanted to interfere also with the Halveti *devran* (*zikir* ceremonies in which dervishes moved rhythmically in a circle).⁵²

Attempts to negotiate between these groups appear in the *fetvas* of Ebussuud (d. 1574). The son of a Bayrami sheykh, Ebussuud is widely regarded as the architect of a new consensus between the Ottoman ruling elites and sufis during his long tenure as *şeyhülislam* (1545–74). We lack detailed studies of the many compilations of Ebussuud's *fetvas* that might clarify the development of his thought on the subject. Nevertheless, when viewed as a whole, his *fetvas* indicate that even this known compromiser was unable openly to defend the 'sufi *devran* and dance' (*raks*) as had Ali Cemali (d. 1525), another *şeyhülislam* from a prominent sufi family, half a century earlier. Rather, Ebussuud entered into hairsplitting discussions about how it is 'better' to practise *zikir* sitting down rather than standing up, and, if standing up, then at least not to move one's waist and head, and, if moving one's waist and head, then at least not to move the feet. Only when confronted with a question about the permissibility of calling 'the Halveti sheykh and disciples as well as all who befriended them' infidels because they practised *devran*, did Ebussuud respond by saying that there were 'valuable' people among them, and that it was wrong to slander people and make false attributions about 'matters of which one has little knowledge'.⁵³ As much as he may have strived to protect 'valuable' people among the Halvetis and their sympathizers, his *fetvas*, like those of other sixteenth-century *müftis*, point to a religious milieu in which such sufi groups as Halvetis, Mevlevis, Kadiris and Bayramis were also coming

under pressure, if not to give up their controversial practices then at least to modify them, and certainly to practise them more discreetly, away from the public eye.

Much the same can be said about the controversies surrounding the teachings of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, whose posthumous title ‘Sheykh Akbar’ (Greatest Master) nicely captures his high standing among the sufis. While hardliners like Çivizade were no doubt in the minority among the Ottoman *ulema* for their refutation of this great sufi, it is striking that even defendants of Ibn Arabi such as Kemalpaşazade cautioned that his highly complicated texts were not fit for the eyes and ears of the common folk, who could easily misunderstand them and be led astray into ‘heresy’.⁵⁴ Hence it was perfectly possible for the religious and political authorities to criticize some sufis for expounding on the teachings of Ibn Arabi in ‘improper’ ways and contexts, while protecting and patronizing others from a wide variety of orders who did the same more discreetly. This is also what got some Bayrami-Melami and [Halveti]-Gülşeni sheykhs into trouble and led to their persecution as ‘heretics’ during the sixteenth century, even as other sufis from the same orders attracted adherents among the ruling elites.

It is important to emphasize, nevertheless, that sufis were not only at the receiving end of Ottoman confessionalization policies. They, too, shaped the Ottoman religious landscape in various ways, whether by rebelling, dissimulating, negotiating and compromising or by acting themselves as agents of Sunnitization, a role which became more important in the later sixteenth century. It was not uncommon for sufi masters to acquire a solid grounding in the religious sciences even in the fifteenth century, while dervish lodges had long been major sites of literacy and book learning alongside the *medreses*.⁵⁵ Zeyni, Nakşibendi and some Halveti sheykhs had enjoyed particularly close relations and partly overlapped with *ulema* circles during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. During the second half of the sixteenth century, these existing relations were intensified when, on the one hand, increasing numbers of *ulema* frustrated by the congestion in the learned establishment left their careers as judges or *müdürrises* for the sufi cloak⁵⁶ and, on the other hand, a more pronounced Sunna consciousness emerged among the representatives of institutionalized sufism. It is also in this period that the state began to appoint sufi sheykhs, most notably those equipped with religious learning and presumably the appropriate Sunni consciousness, as preachers. Many served as preachers in the neighbourhood mosques adjacent to their dervish lodges, while the privileged few preached in the large imperial mosques in İstanbul, Edirne and Bursa. Sufi sheykhs who occupied these influential posts used them not only to preach their brand of Sunni piety tempered with sufism but also to denounce others who deviated from it, whether the Kızılbaş or other ‘heretics’, like the ‘İdrisis’ and ‘Hamzevis’ (derogatory terms used for Bayrami-Melamis).⁵⁷ Continuing trends which had originated under Bayezid II, Halvetis once again dominated the most influential of these preacherships during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.⁵⁸

Did this rapprochement between the self-professedly Sunni sufis and the Ottoman ruling elites then signify an end to the 150-year-long process of institutionalization and confessionalization of sufi groups in the Ottoman empire? This is usually the impression given by the existing literature, which has defined ‘classic’ Ottoman religious culture as a welding together of Sunni (Hanefi) legalism and sufism. However, no sooner was this synthesis achieved than it was also challenged. During the seventeenth century, what constituted the Sunna, the normative example of the Prophet,

and who could be considered as part of the Sunni community continued to be hotly debated. Now, however, the main protagonists in this debate were no longer the *ulema* elite, but preachers, represented by the militantly Sunni ‘puritanical’ preachers known as the ‘Kadıızadeli’, on the one hand, and sufi (especially Halveti) preachers, on the other. In the secondary literature, the Kadıızadeli challenge to institutionalized sufism has generally been treated as a temporary aberration from the norm, explicable only in the context of the crisis of the central state and its elites in the seventeenth century.⁵⁹ Historians have tended to overlook the extent to which this movement was also a sequel to, or an episode in, a long history of Ottoman Sunnification. Throughout the seventeenth century both the Kadıızadeli and their adversaries continually made references to sixteenth-century debates on *bid’ats* in order to bolster their position.⁶⁰ Both sides also played out their differences before a broad urban public, whose ways and habits had been significantly moulded by some 150 years of Sunnification. Significantly, the seventeenth-century controversies testified not only to the tremendous success of that process, but also to the continuing ambiguities and counter-trends among the broader lay public. Not all who were disenchanted with institutionalized sufism turned Kadıızadeli; others embraced an increasingly Sunnified Melamism, while representatives of institutionalized orders such as the Halvetis, Celvetis, Nakşbendis and Mevlevis also continued to attract adherents among the urban public.⁶¹

Finally, it should be added that neither the institutionalization nor the confession-alization of sufism were processes that were concluded in either the sixteenth or the seventeenth century. Early nineteenth-century attempts to recentralize the empire brought about important sequels to both developments. Also, while this essay has concerned itself primarily with institutionalized sufism, there was at all times more to sufism than a set of more or less formalized sufi groups and whatever they believed and practised. In fact, the spread of the sufi orders in Ottoman cities during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries also helped open up new channels for sufi beliefs and practices and sufi-tinged attitudes and sentiments to be disseminated across the social board and to inform a wide variety of cultural practices from the shadow theatre to poetry. It awaits future studies to take account of these less ‘authorized’ but no less important and creative uses of sufism.

NOTES

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- 1 Karamustafa 2007.
 - 2 Trimingham 1971; Meier 1999.
 - 3 Karamustafa 1994.
 - 4 For a more extensive discussion of the term’s relevance in the early modern Ottoman context, see Krstić 2009: 37–41 and 2011: 12–16.
 - 5 Karamustafa 1994: 4–11; Le Gall 2005: 4–7.
 - 6 Generally speaking, Ottomanists proper tend to privilege explanations based on political expediency and reasons of state, while specialists on Ottoman sufism and particularly the Turkish scholars of sufism, trained in schools of theology rather than in history departments, tend to give primacy instead to religious doctrine.

- 7 Aşıkpaşazade 2003: 325–7; cf. Anon. 1992: 10, where the dream is ascribed to Osman’s father, Ertuğrul.
- 8 Kafadar 1995: 128–9, 187.
- 9 Karakaya-Stump 2008: 36–83.
- 10 The first scholar to note the link between the Vefais and *abdals* of Rum was Gölpınarlı 1961: 11–13, 46–50. Later, the connection was made more categorically by Ocak 1989: 117–34; cf. Ocak 1996: 166–214, esp. 200–1.
- 11 Kafadar 1995: 143–4.
- 12 İncalcık 1998; Öngören 2003: 126–7.
- 13 Taşköprüzade 1985: 4–6, 11; for similar assessments of the early Ottoman Vefais by modern scholars, see İncalcık 1998: 42–3; Karamustafa 2005: 82.
- 14 Kafadar 1995: 76.
- 15 Bayrakdar 2009: 18.
- 16 Ibn Battuta 1962: 413–68, esp. 450–1.
- 17 Eyice 1962–3; Wolper 2003: esp. 4–7, 30–32, 74–81.
- 18 Aşıkpaşazade 2003: 368, 569.
- 19 Kafadar 1995: 90–117; Darling 2008: 29–30; İhsanoğlu, 2008: 296, 322–5.
- 20 Balivet 1995; Ocak 1998: 136–202; there are some alternative views in Yüksel 2002: 111–32.
- 21 Barkey 2008: 174.
- 22 Babinger 1950: 245–9, based on Taşköprüzade (see 1985 edn: 59–61).
- 23 Yıldırım 2008: 19–20, 170–82, 187–96.
- 24 Le Gall 2005; Gölpınarlı 1983.
- 25 Eşrefoğlu Rumi 2002: 13, 15.
- 26 Literally, ‘those who go out’ – an Islamic sect whose origins lay in a group of Ali’s supporters who deserted their leader and eventually formed a distinctive sect considered beyond the pale of Islam by both Sunnis and Shi’is.
- 27 Eşrefoğlu Rumi 2002: 25.
- 28 See Karamustafa 2007: x, on the relationship between Sufism and Shi’ism as a ‘thorny question’ among scholars. On Alid elements in Mevlevi beliefs and practices, see Gölpınarlı 1983: 293–302.
- 29 Curiously, much less has been published on the Bayrami order proper than on its Melami offshoot. On the former, see Kissling 1956; Bayramoğlu 1989; Bayramoğlu and Azamat 1992; and Yurd and Kaçalın 1994. While Gölpınarlı 1931 remains a standard reference, for more recent views see Erünsal 1993 and 2003. Cf. also Imber 1991; Ocak 1998: 251–327; and Clayer *et al.* 1998.
- 30 Yurd and Kaçalın 1994: 56–8, 134–5.
- 31 İncalcık 1998; Kafadar 1995: 95–105.
- 32 Kiprovska 2008; Yürekli 2005: 203–10.
- 33 Umur 2008: 110–35.
- 34 Kafesçioğlu 2009: 99–102, 220–26; Öngören 2000: 256–9.
- 35 Kissling 1958.
- 36 Mélikoff 1975.
- 37 Köprülü 1989: 372–87.
- 38 Karakaya-Stump 2008: 84–129.
- 39 Yürekli 2005.
- 40 *Ibid.*: 203–25.
- 41 On the related argument about the role of Bektashi dervishes as agents of Islamization in the Ottoman Balkans, see Köprülü [1922–3] 1993 and Barkan 1942; there are more recent views in Krstić 2004: 90–131.
- 42 Yürekli 2005: 215–20.
- 43 Şahin and Emecen 1994: xxiv–xxv.
- 44 According to some Ottoman chroniclers, 40,000 people were killed during the years 1513–14, though this estimate appears exaggerated in view of much more modest numbers cited in the

Ottoman *mühimme* registers (Savaş 2002: 70–71). However, *mühimme* registers record only those dealt with by administrative-judicial proceedings; numbers of those killed in battle are unknown.

- 45 Altınay 1932; Imber 1979; Savaş 2002; Şener 2002.
46 Savaş 2002: 102–18.
47 Canbakal 2005 and 2009.
48 Allocation of the mosque exclusively to normative religious practices, such as the canonical prayers and preaching, and relocation of all other functions to separate dependencies had started earlier, with the imperial mosque built by Mehmed II, but his example was not followed by either Bayezid II or lesser patrons of architecture: Kafesçioğlu 2009: 76–7, 191–6, 220.
49 Necipoğlu 2005: 47–59.
50 Öngören 2000: 369–84; cf. Terzioğlu 1999: 220–33.
51 Altınay 1932: 15; Savaş 2002: 190, 199.
52 Öngören 2000: 381–2.
53 Düzdağ 1983: 83–8.
54 Öngören 2000: 384–90.
55 Faroqhi 2000a: 188–203.
56 Öngören 2000: 358–68; Niyazioğlu 2003: 174–204.
57 Clayer 1994: 69–112.
58 Zilfi 1986: 267–8; Zilfi 1988: 165.
59 Zilfi 1986, 1988; Baer 2008.
60 Terzioğlu 1999: 216, 220–33.
61 Terzioğlu 1999: 234–58.