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Ahmed Yesevi and Turkic popular Islam

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When studying popular mysticism in Turkic speaking Countries, one figure comes to mind: that of Ahmed Yesevi, or Ata Yesevi, also called Pir-i Turkestan, whose tomb is still visited and venerated by pilgrims from among the Uzbeks, the Kirghiz, the Kazakhs and the Tadjiks.¹ In the XIIIth century Ahmed Yesevi created a genre of popular poetry whose purpose was to convert the Turkic nomads to Islam. That kind of poetry was to be developed in most of Turkic-speaking countries and reached its highest point in XIIIth century Anatolia with Yunus Emre. Ahmed Yesevi, who was a pioneer of popular mysticism, founded the first Turkic tariqat, the Yeseviye. which very quickly spread over the Turkic-speaking areas. Though this tariqat has disappeared in Anatolia, it is still alive in Central Asia where it has its center in the valley of the Ferghana. During the last century, it even produced two subbranches which differ somewhat from the mother-Tariqat in having a less mystical character.²

Ahmed Yesevi has become a legendary figure, He is venerated from the Altai to Anatolia and Rumelia, by people including the Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Turkmens, the Turks of the Volga district, around Kazan, in short the quasi-totality of the Turkic Islamic world. His fame has even spread beyond the Turkic world as it includes the Tadjiks as well.

According to tradition, his name is connected with two dervish orders of entirely different tendencies: in the East the Naqshibendis, in the West, the Bektashis.

Though dervish orders are not openly admitted by orthodox Islam, which rejects the explosive sentimentality of mysticism, some tariqats that are near to Sunnism and do not reject the dogmas of orthodox Islam are tolerated. Among these is the Nakshibendi Order, which is the nearest to Sunnism. This order was founded by Bahaeddin Naqshibend (1318–1389), who was born in the Bukhara district and is buried in that town. However, the basis of the Order was laid by Abd al-Hāliq Gudjduvānī (died in 1179 or 1189) who established the secret or silent *zikr*.³ This tariqat was very popular in Central Asia where it has continued until nowadays and still has many followers. It is still alive in most of the Near and Middle Eastern countries. It was a privileged tariqat in the Ottoman Empire and officially considered to be the most important of the Turkish Orders. After the dissolution of the Bektashi Order, in 1526, the Bektashi *Tekkes* which had not been destroyed were given over to the Naqshibendi.⁴

¹ For modern times, see Alexandre Bennigsen, *Les tariqat en Asie Centrale*, in *Les Ordres Mystiques dans l'Islam – Cheminements et situation actuelle*, Editions de l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes Sociales, Paris 1986, p. 31.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 33.

³ Cf. Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve tariqatlar*, Istanbul 1989, pp. 217sq.; Tahsin Yazıcı, *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, s.v. *Naqşibend*; K. Kufralı, *ibid.* s.v. *Gücvânî*.

⁴ Cf. Irène Mélikoff, "L'Ordre des Bektasi après 1826", *TURCICA*, XV, 1983, pp. 155–156.

In the tariqats which were not opposed to Sunnism, the *sil/sile*, or chain of mystical genealogy of the Sheykhs, went back to Abu Bakr. Such was the case for the Naqshibendis. In the more heterodox orders however, the silsile went back to Ali.⁵

Bektashism was the most heterodox of all the Turkish mystical orders. Its traditional founder, Hadji Bektash, was historically an offshoot of the heterodox Baba'i movement which disturbed the order of the Seljukid Empire of Rum during the years 1239–1240.⁶ The XVth century historian 'Ashiqpashazāde links the name of Hadji Bektash to that of his ancestor Baba Ilyas-i Horasānī, one of the leaders of the socio-religious revolt of the Baba'is. Both he and another leader of the revolt, Baba Ishak, who is said to have been called Baba Resulullah, were believed to have the power to accomplish miracles. The popular religious leaders were called *Baba*, hence the name given to the uprising. Hadji Bektash was a *mūrid*, disciple, of Baba Ilyas-i Horasānī.⁷ The Bektashi Order founded after the death of Hadji Bektash, traditionally refers to him. His silsile goes back to Ali through the eighth Imam of the Shiites, Ali-er-Riza, and it leads up to Archangel Gabriel.⁸ Hadji Bektash is considered to be the revelation of Ali, and Ali is the manifestation of God, as are all the great prophets and the Twelve Imams. In popular circles, the Bektashis believe in reincarnation and often even in metempsychosis.

How could Ahmed Yesevi have been both a companion of Abd-al-Hāliq-al-Gudjduvānī and at the same time the traditional master of Hadji Bektash? This is what we shall try to explain.

The Turkic people began to convert to Islam during the Xth–XIth centuries, after they had set foot in Transoxiana. Before that, there had been individual cases of conversion, but they do not concern us here. The Islamisation of the Turks took place in such regions as Transoxiana, Khwarezm and Khorasan, where the prevailing culture was Iranian. It was mainly through the teaching of Iranian missionaries that the Turkic

⁵ According to Sufi tradition, Abu Bakr was the depositary of the secret zikr, whereas ecstatic dance proceeded from Ali. In the tariqats belonging to the first group, zikr is silent, whilst in the second group, liturgical singing and ecstatic dancing is practised. Cf. M. Mole, *La danse extatique en Islam, Les Dances Sacrées*, Paris, 1983, p. 178.

⁶ Cf. 'Ashiqpashazāde, *Tevāriḥ-i Al-i Osmān*, ed. 'Ali, Istanbul 1332, pp. 199–206; Ibid. ed. Çiftçioğlu N. Atsız, in *Osmanlı Tarihleri I*, Istanbul 1949, pp. 234–239. On the Baba'i revolt, see Evan Çelebi, *Menāsibi'l-Kudsiyye fī Menāsibi'l-Unsiyye (Baba Ilyas-i Horasānī ve sülālesinin menkabevi tarihi)*, edited by Ismail E. Erünsal and A. Yaşar Ocak, Istanbul 1984, pp. XLVII–LIV.

⁷ It is not exactly known which of the two babas was *Resulullah*. According to Simon de Saint Quentin (see Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, London 1968, pp. 136–137), "Pape-roissole" (Baba Resul) was Baba Ishak, but according to Elvan Çelebi (see above, note 6) the head of the revolt was his ancestor Baba Ilyas and he was Baba Resulullah.

⁸ This genealogy is quoted by Fuad Köprülü, *Türk Edebiyatı'nda İlk Mutasavvıflar*, 2d ed., Ankara 1966 (1st ed. Istanbul 1919), p. 44, note 60. The author mentions a manuscript from his private collection.

nomadic tribes came to know the new religion.⁹ That is why many Iranian elements have entered their popular Islamic creed.

The first Turks to officially adopt Islam were the Karakhanids, who had overthrown the Samanid power in Transoxiana. At the same time in the Xth century Islam was adopted by the Volga Bulgars, but the conversion of the latter was restricted to the Khan and his court, whereas the Karakhanid Satuk Bugra Khan adopted Islam as the official state religion. But among the Turkic nomadic tribes Islam was propagated by popular dervishes who spoke a language which was closer to their understanding than that of the ulema. These first dervishes were Iranian. However, Turkic dervishes were to appear very soon. They were the successors of the former *ozan* of the Shamanists, and were called *Ata* "father", or *Baba* "father" and also "grand-father".¹⁰

Very soon, these propagandists of the Muslim creed started to forge genealogies that linked them to the companions of the Prophet and the Prophet himself. For instance, Arslan Baba, who is said to have been the first master of Ahmed Yesevi, was, according to tradition, a companion of the Prophet who remained alive in order to bring the Turks to Islam. According to another legend Korkut Ata was an ancient *ozan* who came to reveal Islam to the Turks at Abu Bakr's order. He is known in the area of the Syr Darya, among the Turkmens, in Azerbaydjan, around Derbent; in Eastern Anatolia he became Dede Korkut.¹¹

The Karakhanids and the first Seljukids extended their protection not only to ulema and Sufi sheikhs, but also to dervishes. It was in the area of the Syr Darya that a dervish appeared who, thanks to his strong personality, was to play a great part in Turkic popular Islam. This was Ahmed Yesevi, by the Turks of Central Asia known as Ata Yesevi.

In the life of this sufi sheikh historical facts and legends are closely connected.¹² He was called Pir-i Turkestan and his influence extended to almost all the Turkic-speaking peoples.

He was born in Sayram, now Istidjab, north-east of Tashkent. The date of his birth is not known, but was probably during the last part of the XIth century. He lived in Yesi, now the town of Turkestan north-west of Istidjab in the valley of the Syr Darya. He died there in 1166-67.¹³ Under the Uzbeks, Yesi's name was changed in Turkestan because of the name given to its saint: Pir-i Turkestan. This shows how much he was venerated by the Uzbeks whose patron saint he became. During the XVIth century,

⁹ For the conversion of Turks to Islam, cf. V.V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj žizni Turkestana*, in *Sočenenija* II (I), Moscow 1963, pp. 234-256. Also see F. Köprülü *op. cit.*, pp. 8-18.

¹⁰ Cf. V.V. Barthold, *Dvenadčat' lekcij po istorii turečkix narodov srednej Azii*, *Sočenenija*, V, Moscow 1968, Pp. 117-9.

¹¹ Cf. F. Köprülü, *op. cit.* p. 14 and note 18.

¹²The best studies of Ahmed Yesevi are those of F. Köprülü, *Ilk Mutasavviflar*, pp. 5-153 and in *Islam Ansiklopedisi*, s.v. *Ahmed Yesevi*.

¹³For the geography of those regions, cf. V.V. Barthold, *K istorii orošenija Turkestana*, *Sočenenija*, III, Moscow 1965, pp. 225, 518-520; cf. note 10.

Turkestan was for some time the chief city of the Uzbeks.¹⁴ The Khans and their wives had themselves buried near the mausoleum of the saint.

The father of Ahmed Yesevi, Sheikh Ibrahim, is said to have been a well known sheikh in Sayram. When he was seven Ahmed was left an orphan. His eldest sister, who was his only remaining relative, moved with him to Yesi where the child's first master was Arslan Baba or Bab Arslan (*Bāb* A. "door" was the title given to those who taught Islamic religion).¹⁵

He then went to study in Bukhara which was a well-known center of Islamic culture. He became the disciple of Sheikh Yusuf Hamadani, an ālim of the Hanafi school who founded a school of dervishes in Transoxiana. Hamadani died in Marv and was buried there in 1140. Though he did not know Turkic, he nevertheless became a master of Turkic mysticism. Several saints who played an important part in the Islamisation of the Turks in Khwarezm and Transoxiana belonged to this school.¹⁶ Among his disciples were Ahmed Yesevi, who is said to have been his third *khalife*, Abu Muhammed Hasan b. Huseyn al-Andaki (died in 1157) who was his second khalife and Nedjmeddin Kubra who was to be the founder of the Kubraviya Order and who was killed by the Mongols in 1221, when they stormed Urgendj. The Kubraviya was a very popular order in Khwarezm, and it is still alive in the North of Turkmenistan.¹⁷ Another of Yusuf al-Hamadani's disciples was Abd-el-Hālik Gudjduvānī who established the *Hwadjagāniya* order from which the Naqshibendiya, founded by Muhammed b. Muhammed al-Bukhari known as Bahaeddin Naqshibend (1318-1389), issued. Gudjduvānī used to practise a silent and secret zikr, during which he said to have been covered in perspiration. He was to be the successor of Hamadani after his death. However, according to Fuad Köprülü,¹⁸ Ahmed Yesevi ought to have succeeded Yusuf al-Hamadani but he renounced his prerogatives to Gudjduvānī and went back to Yesi where he founded his own tariqat. He became the propagator of a popular islamic mysticism and is said to have had thousands of disciples.

During their meetings the adepts of the Yeseviye practised a special kind of zikr called *zikr-i erre* "the saw-mill zikr" The name came from the recitation which was reminiscent of the noise made by the saw-mill. It began with the cries: "hay...hu...".

As a means of proselytisation, Ahmed Yesevi composed hymns which were called *Hikmet* "wisdom". These hymns were intended to convert Turks to Islam.¹⁹ Though

¹⁴Cf. V. Barthold. *Dvenadcat lekci ...*, p. 183.

¹⁵*Idem*, p. 118.

¹⁶Cf. V. Barthold, *Turkestan v epoxu mongol'skogo našestvija*, *Sočenenija*, I, Moscow 1963, p. 440; -, *Istorija kul'turnoj žizni Turkestana*, p. 251; cf note 10. See also above note 12.

¹⁷Cf. V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj žizni Turkestana*, p. 251. See also M. Mole, La Kubraviya entre Sunnisme et Shiisme aux huitième et neuvième siècles de l'Hégire, in *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, XXIX, 1961, I, pp. 61-142. For the persistence of the Order in modern times, cf. A. Bennigsen, *Les Tariqats en Asie Centrale*, p. 31.

¹⁸Cf. F. Köprülü, *Ilk mutasavviflar*, p. 93.

¹⁹Cf. V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj žizni Turkestana*, p. 251, 256; *ibid.*, *Kul'tura Musul'manstva*, *Sočenenija*, VI, 1966, p. 193. F. Köprülü, *Ilk mutasavviflar*, pp. 101-137. Ahmed Caferoğlu, La littérature turque d'époque Karakhanide, in *Philologiae Turcicae Fundamenta*, II, Wiesbaden 1964, pp. 272-273.

most of the poets of that time used to compose their works in Persian, the language of the court, the Turkic poems of Ahmed Yesevi had a great success and were to be imitated by popular poets.²⁰ They are still popular among the Turks of Central Asia. But they were transmitted orally, as is the case with popular poetry, and so their original form is unknown. They can be compared to the *nefes* of the Bektashis.

The Hikmets of Ahmed Yesevi were collected in a book called *Divan-i Hikmet*. but the oldest manuscripts of that work only go back to the XVIIth century. The poems are quatrains with lines of 7 or 8 syllables. They are exhortations to asceticism and celebrate the miracles of the Prophet and his saints.²¹ But the authenticity of these poems is subject to doubt, as they were collected and written down in the time when the Yeseviye had become part of the Naqshibendiye, as a result of which the spirit of the teachings of Ahmed Yesevi were completely changed.²²

Ahmed Yesevi and his disciples contributed to the spread of Islam among the nomads. Once converted to the new religion, these nomads were subjected to the influence of the local Iranian cultures and little by little gave up their nomad life for a sedentary one. But thanks to their great number, their Turkic language prevailed. The Turkicisation of Transoxiana and Khwarezm which began at that time, was almost completed by the XIIIth century when these countries had become Turkic speaking.²³

The first khalife of Ahmed Yesevi was Mansur Ata, the son of his first master, Arslan Baba.²⁴ Among his disciples were many popular mystics who wrote poems in Turkic and bore the title Ata. The most important was Süleyman Bakirgani known as Hakim Ata.²⁵ He was the propagator of Yesevism in Khwarezm. He died in 1156 and was buried in Bakirgan, south of Kungrad, and his tomb was still visited during Barthold's lifetime. Like his master he used to compose hymns as a mean of proselytism. They were collected in a book called *Bakirgan kitabi*, but as is the case with the *Divan-i Hikmet*, the authenticity of this work must also be doubted. Both these books were printed several times in Kazan, but no manuscript of them is known. According to Barthold these books were still used by the Turks of Central Asia and Kazan during his lifetime.²⁶

Ahmed Yesevi was venerated throughout his lifetime and his tomb became a center of pilgrimage. It contributed to the prosperity of Yesi. In 1497 Timur Leng, who was interested in the sufi saints connected with the nomads and their national traditions, had a fine mausoleum built over the tomb, as well as a *zaviye*, and he also established

²⁰Cf. V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj žizni Turkestana*, p.256.

²¹Cf. F. Köprülü, *I.A.*, s.v. *Ahmed Yesevi*.

²²Cf. F. Köprülü, *Ilk mutasavvufklar*, pp. 64, 93, 144–145.

²³Cf. V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj ...* p.251, 256; –, *Dvenadcat'lekčij...* pp. 117–119.

²⁴*Ibid*; F. Köprülü, *Ilk...* p.. 73.

²⁵Cf. V. Barthold, *Xakim Ata, Sočeneija*, II (2), 1964, p. 532. F. Köprülü, *Ilk ...*, pp. 74–82, 146–148.

²⁶See above, note 25.

a *Vakf*.²⁷ Next to the mausoleum was a reception hall for guests, with a huge cauldron for preparing the food. The plans of this mausoleum and its dependencies were drawn by N.I. Veselovskij in 1905.²⁸ Following the Timurids, the Uzbeks venerated Ahmed Yesevi as their national saint. Many Uzbek princes and princesses had their tomb built near the saint's mausoleum. According to Fuad Köprülü,²⁹ the tomb of Ahmed Yesevi is still a center of pilgrimage; it is visited every year on the 10th of the month of Zilhidjdje and hymns are sung. The Kirghiz and the Kazakhs come to visit this tomb to pray for children.

The English traveller Schuyler, who visited Yesi after the Russian conquest, writes about the persistence of Yesevi legends among the people.³⁰ Another Englishman, Shaw, mentions commemorative ceremonies held on the tomb of Ahmed Yesevi.³¹

The legendary life of Ahmed Yesevi is full of accounts of his miracles. He had the power to become a bird and also to make mountains disappear. He was always assisted by Khidr who was his constant companion.

The power to become a bird and fly occurs frequently among the Turkic popular saints. For instance Hadji Bektash had the power to become a dove and also to move mountains.

An important point in the description of the *medjlis* of the Yeseviye is that women were admitted to the meetings without wearing a veil and alongside men. This custom also exists among the Bektashis.

Ahmed Yesevi's legend is found throughout three main areas: 1) in Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan. 2) among the Turks of Kazan and the Volga district. 3) in Anatolia and Rumelia.

But there is a fundamental difference between the areas. In the first two, the name of Ahmed Yesevi is connected with the Naqshibendis and the spread of this tariqat, which began in the XIYth century. In Anatolia and Rumelia the name of Ahmed Yesevi is linked with the heterodox order of the Bektashis. According to tradition, Hadji Bektash is said to have been a disciple of Ahmed Yesevi.

Though the XVth century historian 'Ashiqpashazāde does not mention Ahmed Yesevi when writing about Hadji Bektash, his name does occur in old hagiographical sources, such as the *Vilayetname of Hadjim Sultan* and that of Hadji Bektash. In the first of these works Hadji Bektash is said to have been a disciple of Ahmed Yesevi,³² whilst the

²⁷Cf. V. Barthold, *Istorija kul'turnoj...*, p. 225; -, *Turkestan, Sočeneija*, III, pp. 518-520; -, *Ulugbek i ego vremja*, II (2), p. 125 n. 33; -, *O pogrebenijTimura*, II (2), pp. 440-441; -, *Dvenadcat'lekčij...*, pp. 117-119, 174, 177-175.

²⁸Cf. V. Barthold, *Dvenadcat'lekčij ...*, pp. 177-178. M. Masson published an article in Russian entitled "The mausoleum of Ahmed Yesevi"; it was published in Tashkent in 1930: see F. Köprülü, *I.A.*, s.v. *Ahmed Yesevi*.

²⁹Cf. *Ilk...*, pp. 69-71.

³⁰*Ibid.* pp. 66-68.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 35.

³²Hadjim Sultan was a *khalife* of Hadji Bektash; he is often mentioned in the *Vilāyetnāme*: see A. Gölpınarlı, *Manakibnāme-i Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli "Vilāyetnāme"*, Istanbul 1958, pp. 36, 81-91. The *Vilāyetnāme* of Hadjim Sultan was edited and translated into German by Georg Jacob and Rudolf Tschudi, Berlin 1914. See F. Köprülü, *Ilk ...*, pp. 40-44.

Vilayet-name of Hadji Bektash ³³ says he was a disciple of Loqman Perende, himself a disciple of Ahmed Yesevi.³⁴ Loqman Perende is said to have lived in Herat in the XVth century, in the days of Huseyn Baykara. According to Fuad Köprülü he was a sheikh of the Yesevi tariqat; his mausoleum was in Herat.³⁵ Of course the legend does not give much importance to historical data.

According to the Vilayetname of Hadji Bektash, the latter was sent to Rum by Ahmed Yesevi who gave him the sacred tokens (*emānet*): *ḥādīj* (head covering), *ḥirqa* (robe), *ṣofra* (table, or rather tablerug), *sedjdjāde* (praying-rug), *čerag* (candlestick) and *‘alem* (banner). The Vilayetname of Hadjim Sultan mentions a wooden sword too. These tokens are to be found in all the Bektashi tekkes. They had all been given to the Prophet by God Himself, then to Ali, the Twelve Imams, Ahmed Yesevi, and last of all to Hadji Bektash. In giving him these tokens, Ahmed Yesevi, said to him: "I am sending you to Rum and making you head of the Abdals of Rum."³⁶ Ahmed Yesevi is the head of the *Khorasan Erenleri* "the dervishes of Khorasan". The *Rum erenleri* "the dervishes of Rum" are mentioned here as different from the *Khorasan Erenleri* from whom they issued.

When sending Hadji Bektash to Rum Ahmed Yesevi—or one of his dervishes, according to different traditions—picked up a piece of wood burning in the fire-place and threw it up into the air. It was a mulberry branch. It fell to earth at Soludja Kara Oyuk (now Hadji Bektash) where it became the sacred mulberry tree which is still to be seen. Hadji Bektash himself changed into a dove and flew off to his new abode.

All these elements are to be found in the legendary lives of different Turkic saints. These pay very little attention to historical facts or chronology; we find people who lived in the XIIIth century, such as Ahmed Yesevi, connected with others who lived in the XIIIth, such as Hadji Bektash, and even in the XVth, like Loqman Perende.

Let us now examine what we actually know about the religious beliefs of Ahmed Yesevi.

According to an early study of F. Köprülü, he belonged to the Hanafite school, like his master Yusuf al-Hamadani, and he tried to conciliate Sharia and tariqat.³⁷ Yet later on, F. Köprülü was to change his point of view, writing: "The Yesevi tariqat had an entirely heterodox character from its very beginning."³⁸ In the light of this assertion, the opinions of other scholars must be reconsidered, in the first place that of Abdalbāki Gölpınarlı, who considers the Yeseviye as a fundamentally Sunni tariqat.³⁹ This favourable opinion has been mainly arrived at by bringing together the Yeseviye and the Naqshibendiye.

³³Cf. A. Gölpınarlı, *op. cit.*; see note above.

³⁴Cf. *Vilāyetnāme* of Hadji Bektash, pp. 5–7.

³⁵Cf. F. Köprülü, *Ilk ...*, pp. 40–42.

³⁶Cf. *Vilāyetnāme* of Hadji Bektash, pp. 14–20. For the term *Abdal*, see F. Köprülü, *Les origines de l'Empire Ottoman*, Philadelphie 1978, pp. 113–114 (1st ed. Paris 1935).

³⁷Cf. F. Köprülü, *Ilk ...*, pp. 96 sq.

³⁸Cf. F. Köprülü, *Les Origines ...*, pp. 118–9.

³⁹Cf. *Türkiye'de mezhepler ve tarikatlar*, pp. 199–201.

In Zeki Velidi Toğan's book, *Türk Tatar Tarihi*, the author mentions a work published by the University of Kazan in 1901, *Sherā'it ul-Imam*. This is what is said in this work under the mention *mezheb*:⁴⁰

“Question: What is your silsile?

Answer: It is the silsile of Ahmed Yesevi.

Q. How many silsile are there?

A. There are four silsile.

Q. Which are they?

A. First that of Hodja Ahmed Yesevi, then that of Abd-al-Hālik Gudjduvānī, the third is that of Sheykh Nedjmeddin Kubra, the fourth is that of Abu'l Hasan-i Ashq.”

The last one could perhaps refer to Abu Muhammed Hasan al-Andaki, the second *khalife* of Yusuf al-Hamadani, in which case the four names mentioned would be those of the four *khalifes* of Hamadani.

There are quite a few points of contradiction in the connection between the Yeseviye and the Naqshibendiye and the assertion of the Yeseviye's apparent orthodoxy.

First of all the zikr. The zikr of the Naqshibendiye is the zikr-*i hafī*, “the silent zikr”; the silent and secret zikr used by Gudjduvānī, whereas the zikr of the Yeseviye is the zikr-*i erre* or zikr of the saw-mill. That zikr is called zikr-*i djehriye* “zikr in loud voice”

The second point in which the Yeseviye differs from the Naqshibendiye is the presence of women at the meetings (medjlis), unveiled and sitting alongside men. The same thing happens at the meetings of the Bektashis. This accords with the traditions of Turkic nomads, but it would be unthinkable for the Naqshibendis. It can only be explained as a survival of ancient pre-Islamic tradition.

There is another point worth mentioning: the silsile of Ahmed Yesevi does link his name not to Abu Bakr, as is the case with the sheikhs of the Naqshibendiye and other tariqats which follow the path of Sunnism, but to Ali by the way of Muhammed al-Hanefi. As for Hadji Bektash, he is linked to Ali through Huseyn, and is of the lineage of the eighth Imam, Ali-er-Riza. According to a Bektashi silsile belonging to Fuad Köprülü, the lineage of Hadji Bektash is the following: “Hadji Bektash—Hodja Ahmed Yesevi—Memshad Dinūri Kutbeddin Haydari—Imam Ali-er-Riza... Ali—Muhammed Djebail—Mikail—Israil—Azrail.”⁴¹ F. Köprülü considers Hadji Bektash as a Yesevi dervish who emigrated to Anatolia. He considers both tariqats—Naqshibendiye and Bektashiye—as issuing from the Yeseviye.⁴²

The Bektashis and Yesevis have elements in common. They both use—or used—Turkic during their ceremonies instead of Arabic or Persian; in both cases, hymns are sung; in both cases, women are admitted to the ceremonies; in both cases, we find the persistence of pre-Islamic elements, such as the belief in the bird metamorphosis: a dove for Hadji Bektash, a *turna* “crane” for Ahmed Yesevi.

⁴⁰Quoted from F. Köprülü, *İlk ...*, p.37 n.40.

⁴¹Quoted from a private MS, idem, p.44.

⁴²Idem, p. 92.

But one thing is certain: In Central Asia, the name of Ahmed Yesevi is connected to the Naqshibendi Order. Nevertheless we know that the Yeseviye was included in the Naqshibendiye only after the XIVth century. It was then rid of its pre-Islamic and heterodox elements.

In Anatolia and Rumelia the name of Ahmed Yesevi is connected with the Bektashis. Hadji Bektash was certainly a heterodox dervish; 'Ashiqpashazāde is there to state it and he is well aware of the facts, being himself a descendant of Baba Ilyasi Khorasānī whom Hadji Bektash is said to have followed.⁴³ But the heterodox elements of the Bektashis were still to be developed and amplified after the XYIth century, when the order acquired a syncretistic character through the addition of Hurufi doctrines and the incorporation of the Kizilbash belief in the divinity of Ali. To these elements must be added the belief in reincarnation and sometimes metempsychosis,⁴⁴ but these creeds may have existed among the pre-Islamic Turks. We know the Yesevi adepts believed in the bird metamorphosis, according to ancient nomadic traditions. They may also have believed in reincarnation. The bird metamorphosis and the religious beliefs of the Eastern Turks have been associated with Buddhism, which was widespread among the Turks, especially the Uyghurs. The belief in transmigration and metempsychosis is therefore not at all improbable.⁴⁵

At all events Ahmed Yesevi can be considered as one of the first Turkic sufis of Central Asia and the first outstanding Turkic saint. He founded the first Turkic tariqat and played an important part in the conversion of Turkic tribes to Islam. He lives on in both the Bektashi tradition of Anatolia and the Naqshibendi tradition of Central Asia. But he remains essentially a mystic of the people and of the nomadic tribes. He lived at a time when the Islamic religion was spreading rapidly and effectively among the Turks, but the social milieu in which he operated had not yet been rid of its ancestral beliefs and creeds and was still deeply attached to its ancient nomadic traditions.

⁴³See note 6. The name of Hadji Bektash is also found in the *Menākibnāme* of Baba Ilyas-i Khorasānī (cf. note 7). Cf. p. 169, verse 194ff, p. 170, verse 2003ff, 2111f.

⁴⁴Cf. I. Mélikoff, L'islam hétérodoxe en Anatolie, *TURCICA*, XIV, 1982, pp. 142-154; -, Recherches sur les composantes du syncrétisme Bektachi-Alevi. *Studia Turcologica Memoriae Alexii Bombaci Dedicata*, Naples 1982, pp. 379-395.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 387-390.