

# NOMADIC SUFIS AS AGENTS OF LABOUR AND CULTURAL TRANSFER: MEVLEVI AND BEKTASHI NETWORKS IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

**Okan Keleş**

<https://doi.org/10.63356/FPNDP.2025.004>

Istanbul University, Faculty Of Theology, Islamic History And Arts, Turkey  
Department Of Turkish Islamic Literature  
[okan.keles@istanbul.edu.tr](mailto:okan.keles@istanbul.edu.tr)

## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper explores the role of Mevlevi and Bektashi dervishes as agents of labor and cultural transfer in Southeast Europe between the 14th and 19th centuries. By analyzing Sufi networks as dynamic channels of migration and economic exchange, it argues that wandering dervishes facilitated not only spiritual diffusion but also the circulation of skilled labor, crafts, and gendered labor practices across the Ottoman Empire. Focusing on vakıf records, travelogues (notably Evliya Çelebi), and artisan guild archives, the study reveals how dervish lodges (tekkes) functioned as hubs for labor mobility—connecting Anatolian craftsmen with Balkan markets, transmitting agricultural techniques through Bektashi networks, and professionalizing ritual performances like the sema. The paper highlights three key intersections: first, the economic underpinnings of Sufi migration, where itinerant dervishes doubled as masons, musicians, or scribes, embedding their labor into local economies; second, the gendered division of labor within tekkes, with Bektashi bacılar (female dervishes) managing textile production and oral knowledge transmission; third, the post-1826 transformation of these networks after the abolition of lodges, as displaced dervish-artisans adapted their skills into diasporic trade associations. By framing Sufi labor as a precursor to modern migrant worker networks, this research bridges Ottoman economic history with contemporary debates on labor migration's cultural dimensions. It also challenges the spiritual-secular dichotomy in labor studies by showing how sacred mobility fueled regional craft economies. The findings demonstrate how pre-modern religious migrations shaped labor transformation patterns in Southeast Europe and provide historical context for contemporary gendered and informal labor flows.

## **Review Article**

## **UDK:**

930.85:316.72(4-12)

## **Key words:**

Mevlevi and Bektashi dervishes, Labor and cultural transfer, Sufi migration networks, Southeast Europe

## **Introduction: The Conquest of the Balkans and the Multifaceted Role of Sufism and Brotherhood in Social Structure**

Throughout history, the Balkans, with its undeniable geopolitical importance due to its geographical and strategic location, has had a complex population structure, encompassing nations of different races, religions, and sects. making the region a constant intersection of political, religious, social, and cultural events

(Aydıncı, 2015, p. 75; Han, 2011, p. 245; Yılmaz & Sertkaya, 2016, p. 76). The Ottoman Empire's arrival in this region (14th century) brought with it not only military advances based on the power of the sword, but also a profound process of political, religious, and cultural restructuring (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 75-76; Bulut, 2017, p. 131-132).

The Ottoman administration's fair and tolerant approach to governance (*istimal*) in the region created a foundation for the people to live together happily and contentedly, without distinction of religion, language, or race which led to the local population embracing Ottoman rule (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 76). This progress eliminated the injustices of the pre-conquest feudal system and brought about structural changes (the *timar* system) that resulted in a social and economic revolution in favor of peasants and producers (Bulut, 2017, pp. 134, 135). Balkan peasants, who had a low share in the distribution of produce under the feudal system, were able to obtain nine-tenths of it if they converted to Islam, and four-fifths (after paying tribute) if they remained non-Muslims, thanks to the *timar* system, which shows that the Ottoman system was much more advantageous than the feudal system in Europe (Bulut, 2017, pp. 134, 135).

However, after the end of Ottoman rule in the Balkans, the peoples of the region (especially the Albanians) were subjected to the pressure of monarchy and strict communist regimes in their quest to establish a stable society and government. During these periods of oppression, all social tools from the previous era were deliberately labeled as reactionary and destructive by official historical institutions and suppressed. This historical process highlights the need for in-depth research into the mechanisms that shaped the social structure during the Ottoman period (Aydıncı, 2015, s. 76,78; Bulut, 2017, s. 132).

Much more than military force was effective in the conquest and Islamization of the Balkans; the role played by Sufis in the conquest and the long continuation of Ottoman rule cannot be overlooked. The Ottoman conquest strategy was based on preparing the society in advance and achieving a "conquest of hearts" before military advancement (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 76; Bulut, 2017, p. 133). The main reason why the first seeds of Islam in the Balkans were sown by Sufi orders was the adoption of the Sufi understanding (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 76). These characteristics and attitudes attracted the attention of masses experiencing political and ideological turmoil (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 76) and were effective in establishing a foundation of love and harmony between Muslims and Christians (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 76). Even before the Ottomans settled in the region, traveling dervishes had arrived (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 77), offering the communities living in the region an alternative system of tolerance they were unfamiliar with, trying to warm people's hearts to Islam and Sufi thought (Aydıncı, 2015, p. 77).

Among the orders that found the most followers in the Balkans were Bektas-

hism, Halvetism, and Mevleviism (Aydınç, 2015, p. 79). Bektashism began to settle in the region at the beginning of the 13th century through itinerant dervishes before the Ottomans, facilitating conversion to Islam by influencing the non-Muslim population with their tolerant attitude (Aydınç, 2015, pp. 77, 79). Mevleviism spread from Anatolia to the Balkans and the Middle East, with Konya as its center (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799), and was particularly influential in the development of art and scientific taste in Bosnia (the Sarajevo Mevlevihane is known as the earliest Mevlevihane) (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). Halvetism also became one of the most widespread orders, particularly in Macedonia and Albania (Aydınç, 2015, p. 79).

These institutions (tekke and zawiya) functioned as centers (hubs) that went beyond spiritual dissemination and embodied a multidimensional institutional and economic role. These institutions have had significant effects on the organization of religious, social, cultural, and economic life and the expansion of political borders. The main objective and focus of this study is not only to examine the effects of Sufi networks and orders (Bektashism, Halvetism, Mevleviism) in the Balkans in the spiritual and religious spheres, but also to analyze their roles in administrative, commercial, artistic, and social life (Aydınç, 2015, s. 76,78).

This broad role should be examined primarily along three axes:

1. *Economic Colonization and Settlement*: Dervishes appear not only as religious figures bearing the identity of dervishes, but also as individuals who worked the land, established villages, and practiced art and science (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76). According to Ömer Lütfi Barkan's colonization thesis, these dervishes settled on vacant lands, cultivated them, brought life to these areas, and distributed the produce they obtained to the public (Barkan, 1953, p. 225; Aydınç, 2015, p. 77). These institutions, which were endowments with zawiyas, large farms, vineyards, orchards, and lands, served as logistical centers, providing free lodging and shelter not only to members of the order but also to passing travelers (Ülkü, 2020, p. 3256).

2. *Commercial and Industrial Integration (Ahilik-Fütüvvet)*: The contribution of Sufi networks to economic life was particularly evident in the close relationships established with the Ahilik and Fütüvvet organizations. These organizations were religious and economic organizations that brought together craftsmen and artisans (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 15). In Albania, merchant organizations had close ties with the Bektashi, Halveti, Kadiri, and Rifai orders. For example, it is known that the artisans of Ilbasan (present-day Elbasan) covered all the expenses of the Mevlevi and Kadiri tekkes. The dervishes not only provided spiritual guidance but also spread craft secrets and professional knowledge (such as mother-of-pearl inlay) (Han, 2011, pp. 248, 250; Sarıkaya, 2018, s. 22-24).

3. *Cultural Transmission and Institutional Continuity*: Tekkes provided important services in areas such as science, culture, art, literature, music, and architecture in their locations. In Mevlevihanes, Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's views and teachings

were spread throughout the Balkans through Mesnevi conversations (Ösen, 2015, p. 1800). Furthermore, during and after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans, the tekkes became a refuge for the remaining Turkish-Islamic population. These roles, encompassing Sufi networks, sacred mobility, economic colonization, and institutional labor transfer, necessitate an analysis of Mevlevi and Bektashi dervishes as historical precursors to modern migrant worker networks, thereby linking Ottoman economic history with the cultural dimensions of contemporary labor migration. (Ösen, 2015, p. 1812).

## **1. Structure, Functions, and Spread of Sufi Institutions in the Balkans**

The Ottoman Empire's settlement in the Balkan geography and its process of building a lasting civilization are closely related to the activities of Sufi institutions and dervish groups, to an extent that cannot be considered independently of the influence of military power. These mystical institutions (tekke, zaviye, dergâh) undertook the mission of conquering hearts before the conquest, one of the most important strategies of Ottoman administration. Sufi institutions not only provided spiritual guidance but also had a major impact on the organization of social, political, cultural, and economic life in the region and on the development and settlement of the acquired lands (Aydınç, 2015, s. 75).

### ***1.1. Definition, Structure, and Architecture of Sufi Institutions***

The main venues where Sufi activities were carried out, such as tekkes, zawiyas, dervish lodges, and asitans, share similarities in terms of functionality and architectural structure, but differ in scale and sphere of influence. These spaces are defined as houses where members of the order, pirs, murshids, dervishes, and muhiplers reside, serve, and perform rituals. In general terminology, while the terms tekke (Tekye) or dergâh are commonly used, smaller tekkes are called zaviye, while larger and more centrally located ones are called âsitâne or hânkâh (hanekâh) (Bulut, 2017, p. 133). Zaviyes were usually established along roads, particularly during the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, providing lodging and shelter for travelers and passersby (Kara, 2011, s. 372-379).

Tekkes are complex structures that house various architectural units to enable worship, education, and daily activities. The basic architectural elements of a Bektashi tekke include the tevhidhane, where collective worship and rituals are performed; the meşruthane (guesthouse), where guests are welcomed; the türbe, where the founder or leading figures of the order are buried; the dervish rooms where the dervishes stay; the kitchen (aşevi) where daily meals are prepared; and the pantry used as a food storage room. The Kalkandelen Harabâtî Baba Dergâh

is a concrete example of this complex architectural structure. Located in the city of Kalkandelen (Tetovo) in Macedonia, this structure has been studied as a large Bektashi dervish lodge and has been determined to have the characteristics of a dervish lodge in terms of its structural features. Among the units that make up the structure are those that continue the cycle of life and have the characteristics of a building, such as the Askerihane (Guesthouse), Ahır (Stable), Aşevi (Kitchen), Kışevi (Winter House), Fatmaevi (Fatma's House), Meydanevi (Square House), and Ambarevi (Warehouse). Although the founder of the dervish lodge was Sersem Ali Baba, the structure is known by the name of Harabâti Baba. (Birge, 1965; Hatipler Çibik, 2014, s. 15,33).

## ***1.2. Multifaceted Roles of Dervishes and Tekkes: Colonization and Economic Integration***

The functions of tekkes and zawiya have had a significant impact on the organization of religious, social, cultural, political, and economic life in the Balkans, as well as in Anatolia. From the day they were established, these institutions contributed to many aspects of life:

### ***1.2.1. Settlement and Colonization Activities***

Dervishes and sheikhs were among the colonizing Turks who were settled in the region after the Ottoman conquests or who came voluntarily (Bulut, 2017, p. 133). As Ömer Lütfi Barkan has demonstrated based on archival documents, tekkes, zawiya, and the dervishes residing in them played an important role in giving old cities a new spirit and in the establishment of new cities (Seyyar, 2021, p. 241; Bulut, 2017, p. 133).

These dervishes were not only religious figures, but also individuals who worked the land, established villages, and practiced arts and sciences (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76). The primary function of tekkes and zawiya was to settle on vacant land, cultivate it to make it fertile and lively, and distribute the produce to the surrounding community (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76; Bulut, 2017, p. 133). Over time, families and tribes settled around the zawiya established in the fertile lands of the Balkans, which were suitable for transportation and trade, leading to the formation of new villages and cities (Seyyar, 2021, p. 240). The resulting settlements were generally named after the founding dervishes or in reference to the institution, such as Şeyhler Village, Dervişler Village, or Tekke Neighborhood (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76)

### ***1.2.2. Cultural and Social Service Centers***

Over time, tekkes and zawiya became not only settlement centers but also centers of religion, culture, and art; they profoundly influenced the intellectual and cultural life of the places where they were established; important figures who grew

up in the tekkes contributed to intellectual and cultural life with their works. In addition, a library was established in each tekke, scientific studies were conducted using these libraries, and these places became frequented by scholars and statesmen. (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76,78)

In the social sphere, tekkes approached all people with love, regardless of religion, language, or race, and supported those in need. This situation has been effective in establishing a foundation of love and harmony between Muslims and Christians (Aydınç, 2015, p. 76). These structures, which were endowed, served as free lodging and accommodation facilities, especially for traveling guests and poor dervishes (Ösen, 2015, p. 1801,1812). For example, Evliya Çelebi stated that the Sarajevo Mevlevihane was a shelter for guests (Ösen, 2015, p. 1800). It has even been recorded that soup, rice, and honey were distributed to travelers at the Bektashi/Nakshbandi tekke in Çaynıç.

### ***1.3. Sufi Orders Gaining Strength in the Balkans and Their Areas of Expansion***

The Balkan geography was one of the main areas where Sufi thought resonated and spread during the Ottoman period. Among the orders that gained the most followers in the Balkans were Bektashism, Halvetism, and Mevleviism (Aydınç, 2015, p. 80)

#### ***1.3.1. Bektashism and Colonizing Dervishes***

Bektashism played an extremely important role in the Islamization of the Balkans. The order's settlement in the Balkans occurred in two stages: The first stage took place in the early 13th century through itinerant dervishes, before the Ottoman Empire arrived in the region (Aydınç, 2015, p. 77). Sarı Saltuk is considered the true hero of this initial settlement (Aydınç, 2015, p. 77). It is known that Sarı Saltuk obtained permission from Hacı Bektaş and settled in Kaligra Castle and its surroundings, which belonged to Varna, bringing with him approximately 370 poor people. Sarı Saltuk became a symbol of the Islamization of the peninsula and, apart from his tomb in Babadağı in Dobruca, has numerous shrines (places of pilgrimage) in Eastern Thrace, Albania, and Macedonia (Çibik, 2014, s. 8.) Aydınç, 2015, s. 78).

The second wave of Bektashism spread through Bektashi babas such as Seyyid Ali Sultan (Kızıl Deli), in connection with the Ottoman Empire's conquest and settlement policies (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 23). The Seyyid Ali Sultan Tekke (Dimetoka, 1397) was a caliphate office in Bektashism, rising to the position of the second largest tekke (âsitane) after Hacı Bektaş and becoming influential in the eastern Balkans (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania) (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 23). The Kalkandelen Harabâtî Baba Dergâhı in Macedonia, based on the Bektashi principle that dervishes



should have a profession, provided a strong representation in Kalkandelen and its surroundings (Çibik, 2014, s. 9,41; Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 22).

### *1.3.2. Mevlevi Order and the High Cultural Environment*

After the death of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi in Anatolia, Mevleviism, which was systematized by his son Sultan Veled, became an institution that could influence political authority during the beylik and Ottoman periods (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). As a result of the respected position it acquired among the rulers of the Ottoman Empire, Mevlevism spread across a wide geography from Edirne and Istanbul to Egypt and Belgrade after Anatolia (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). The earliest of the Mevlevi tekkes established in the Balkans is the Sarajevo Mevlevi House (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). Mevleviism began to operate in Bosnia and Herzegovina around the middle of the 15th century, after the establishment of Ottoman rule (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). Although the terms “menzil and misafirhane” appear in Isa Bey’s vakfiye, it is believed that this structure was established as a Mevlevi lodge, and its construction date is traced back to January 1462 (Ösen, 2015, p. 1800). Mevleviism has been influential in the development of art and scientific taste in Bosnia and all other regions where it spread, contributing to the education of many Bosnian scholars and to Ottoman culture (Ösen, 2015, p. 1799). Mevlevi houses played an important role in establishing a refined cultural environment in the cities where they were established (Ösen, 2015, p. 1807).

Among the important centers where Mevlevîhâne were established in the Balkans outside Sarajevo were Skopje (renovated in 1909 during Sultan Reşad’s visit, demolished in 1955) (Ösen, 2015, p. 1803), Thessaloniki, Elbasan (founded in H. 1068/1657-58) (Ösen, 2015, p. 1804), Belgrade and Chania are included (Ösen, 2015, p. 1806). However, these Mevlevîhânes were destroyed as a result of political developments, with the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region, or, as in the case of the Filibe Mevlevîhâne, the semahane was purchased by a Bulgarian and began to be used as a restaurant (Ösen, 2015, p. 1807).

### *1.3.3. Halveti Order and Geographical Spread*

After Seyyid Yahya Şirvani, the Halveti order split into four main branches (Rûşeniyye, Cemâliyye, Ahmediyye, and Şemsiyye) and became one of the most widespread orders in many other Islamic countries (Aydınç, 2015, p. 83, 87). Halvetiism was particularly prevalent in the Balkans (especially Macedonia and Albania) and was quite widespread in Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Aydınç, 2015, p. 79).

During the early period of Ottoman rule, the most widespread Sufi order in Albania was Halveti. In Macedonia, Halveti was active in the Sinani, Karabaş, and Hayati branches. The founder of the Hayatiyye branch, Pir Mehmet Hayati Haz-

retleri, completed his education in Edirne and made Ohrid his final destination (Aydınç, 2015, p. 87). The Ohri Halvetî Hayâtî Tekke became the headquarters of the Hayâtîye branch of the Ramazanilik sect. In addition to being a Sufi center, it was quite influential in the social and cultural life of Ohri and the surrounding cities (Aydınç, 2015, p. 87). Halveti tekkes were established in various places such as Ujiçe, Leskovac, Prizren, Köprülü (Derbent Dergâhı), Kumanova, the village of Raşçe in Skopje, and the village of Vrutok, the source of the Vardar River. However, with the withdrawal of the Ottomans from these regions, most of the tekkes were destroyed or abandoned and turned into ruins. These institutional structures formed the most important traces of Ottoman civilization in the Balkans as central elements that shaped society, provided settlement, spread culture, and supported economic life in the Balkan geography (Uludağ, 1997, s. 394; Öztürk, 2003, s. 6; Aydınç, 2015, p. 72).

## **2. Economic Integration and Moral Regulations: The Impact of Ahilik, Fütüvvet, and Waqf Institutions in the Balkans**

The Ottoman Empire's construction of civilization in the Balkan geography was achieved not only through military conquests or political administration, but also through complex institutional networks and moral regulations that organized social and economic life. At the center of this institutional infrastructure were Sufi institutions such as tekkes and zawiya, as well as the Ahilik and Fütüvvet organizations, which directly regulated economic life. These structures were supported by waqf institutions that ensured financial stability. This integration formed the basis of the Ottoman Empire's long-term presence in the Balkans and its social order (Bulut, 2017, p. 133).

### ***2.1. The Fütüvvet-Ahilik Tradition and Guild Organization***

Futuwwet is an ancient way of thinking and living in Islamic cultural history that encompasses noble spiritual values such as magnanimity, bravery, chivalry, generosity, and selflessness (Erdem, 2021, p. 100; Köprülü, 2018, p. 143). This aspect of futuwwa, based on generosity and self-sacrifice, has also been called Sufi futuwwa and has shown great similarities with the Sufi understanding and the structures of the orders in most of the Turkish, Iranian, Arab, and other Islamic countries (Erdem, 2021, p. 100; Köprülü, 2018, p. 143). With the migration of the Turks to Anatolia, Futuwwa, while retaining its fundamental characteristics, predominantly took the form of a trade-based economic organization and became known as Ahilik (Erdem, 2021, pp. 106, 109). Essentially a merchant and artisan-based organization, Ahilik became, from the 13th century onwards, under the leadership of Ahi Evran,



a merchant organization consisting of people who were skilled, moral, brave, and generous throughout Anatolia (Erdem, 2021, pp. 106, 109). This Anatolia-centered organization moved to the Balkans with the Turks and maintained its strong tradition even during the period when it transformed into a guild (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 14). From the Ottoman arrival in Albanian lands until its final period, the guild organizations maintained close ties with the Sufi orders and tekkes, playing an important role in the development of society from an economic, social, and traditional perspective (İzeti, 2012, p. 57).

The professional and moral life of the Ahilik organization was regulated by statutes or rules called *Fütüvvetnâmeler* (Aykaç, 2021, p. 2474). These texts were also considered one of the fundamental sources of Alevism and Bektashism, demonstrating the strong interaction between Sufi institutions and artisan communities. Shaped by the principles of Ahilik, the *futuwwa* manuals influenced the rules, ceremonies, customs, and interactions of guilds (Erdem, 2021d, p. 109). The instructions “Keep your hand open, keep your table open, keep your door open” (generosity and hospitality) and “Keep your eyes covered, keep your tongue covered, keep your waist covered” (self-control and moral stance) were also adopted by Albanian merchant organizations (İzeti, 2012, p. 69). Another important aspect of this economic organization was education: While merchants were busy with their daytime work, in the evenings they received religious education under the leadership of their sheikhs in tekkes and zawiyas. When a problem arose within the *futuwwa* organizations, the matter had to be discussed and resolved first within the lodge by the Ahi, Hûda, Yiğitbaşı, or Tekyenîşin; however, if this was not possible, the matter had to be referred to the qadi (Aykaç, 2021, pp. 2478). This legal hierarchy shows that the guild system had a control mechanism that balanced moral and commercial life (Aykaç, 2021, pp. 1478).

## ***2.2. Relations between Sufi Orders and Guilds, Financing, and Craft Transfer***

The relationship established between guild organizations and orders in the Balkans was based on social solidarity and economic cooperation (İzeti, 2012, p. 57). The guilds in Albania had close ties with the Bektashi, Halveti, Kadiri, and Rifai Sufi orders, and these tekkes supported each other. (İzeti, 2012, p. 69).

The most concrete examples of this relationship can be seen in Albanian cities:

1. *The Ilbasan Example:* The merchants of Ilbasan covered all the expenses of the Mevlevi and Kadiri tekkes in this city; they also sent the necessary materials to the mosque in the city of Peçin (İzeti, 2012, p. 69). In the city of Berat, there was also a mosque and zawiya built by furriers (İzeti, 2012, p. 67).

2. *Tanning and the Kadiri Tekke:* The profession of tanning (leather tanning) was considered one of the most important professions of the Ahilik and was as-

sociated with Ahi Evran, the founding figure of the Ahilik (Aykaç, 2021, p. 2480). Located next to the Tabaklar Mosque in the city of İlbasan, the Tabaklar Tekke operated as a Kadiri tekke and was financed directly by the tabaklar guild (leather craftsmen) (İzeti, 2012, p. 69). This example is striking evidence that the orders and artisan guilds established an economic network. The orders not only provided spiritual guidance but also disseminated craft secrets and professional knowledge. According to Bektashi etiquette, the principle that dervishes should have a profession ensured their economic integration (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 22). During his visit to the Osman Baba Tekke in Hasköy, Evliya Çelebi recorded that the dervishes made mother-of-pearl items such as spoons, envelopes, and cups; which shows that the dervishes were a skilled artistic workforce that nourished the regional craft economies (Han, 2011, pp. 247). Furthermore, vocational training rituals were also intertwined with the orders. Ahi-Kadirî members in Elbasan and its surroundings would wear a şedd and take an oath of allegiance (ahd u bey'at) during their apprenticeship and journeyman ceremonies. During these ceremonies, the secrets of the profession and the mysteries of the art were whispered into the young master's ear, and a belt was tied around his waist (İzeti, 2012, p. 69). These practices are similar to the practices of Bektaşîism, such as musahiplik and tığ-bend.

### ***2.3. The Social and Financial Role of Waqf Institutions***

The foundation institution holds a special place and importance in meeting the basic needs of people living in cities in Islamic societies (Bulut, 2017, pp. 135). The Ottomans built a Waqf Civilization in the Balkans based on this understanding (Bulut, 2017, pp. 137). In addition to establishing charitable institutions such as mosques, madrasas, and hospitals, foundations also undertook functions such as increasing social welfare, redistributing wealth, and alleviating the financial burden on the state (Bulut, 2017, pp. 137).

From the time they were established, tekkes and zawiya had the status of foundations and owned large estates, vineyards, gardens, and land. Thanks to these waqf revenues, they served as logistical and social centers, providing free accommodation and lodging not only to members of the order but also to poor dervishes and guests who were traveling (Ösen, 2015, p. 1812). Thanks to these revenues, Mevlevihânes were important centers that provided accommodation (Ösen, 2015, p. 1812).

The Ottoman Empire's institutionalization of Vakf-ı Nukud (Money Foundations), its own invention in the early modern period, played a significant role in the field of Islamic economics and finance (Bulut, 2017, pp. 139). The first money foundation was established in Edirne in 1423, in the first half of the 15th century, by Hacı Muslihiddin (Semmân) bin Halil (Bulut, 2017, pp. 139). Money foundations gained legitimacy after intense discussions among scholars in the 16th century and

continued to develop rapidly in the 17th century (Bulut, 2017, pp. 140). Money foundations played an important role in ensuring financial stability and meeting the needs of credit markets (Bulut, 2017, pp. 140). These institutions have generally provided loans through lending (*karz*), labor-capital partnership (*mudaraba*), and purchasing goods in advance and selling them at a profit (*murabaha*), with the *murabaha* method being the most commonly used (Bulut, 2017, pp. 143). It has been determined that the majority of borrowers from money foundations were small consumers and producers rather than entrepreneurs and investors (Bulut, 2017, pp. 142). Therefore, these foundations have played an important role in meeting the capital needs of small-scale producers, along with basic social and religious investments (Bulut, 2017, pp. 144). In addition, monetary foundations have enabled the financing of public expenditures and significantly alleviated the financial burden on the central budget by investing in areas such as education, health, and infrastructure financed by governments (Bulut, 2017, pp. 138). The cost of the capital of monetary foundations was considered zero because the capital owner did not receive any interest or payment commitment; this situation is an indication that the endowed capital served religious and social purposes (Bulut, 2017, pp. 143). The Ottomans' development of monetary foundations instead of the interest-based capitalist banking system in the West is seen as a fundamental building block in the continuation of their own economic and financial system until the mid-19th century (Bulut, 2017, pp. 140). This institutional structure (*tekke-Ahilik-vakif*) enabled the establishment of a fair and strong economic order that spread social welfare across the Balkan geography. The moral principles of the *Ahilik* organization and the Sufi orders' doctrine of vocational training ensured the transfer of skilled labor to the region, while the *Vakf-ı Nukud* served as a critical financial infrastructure that ensured the sustainability of this social and economic structure.

### **3. Heterodox Groups, Criticisms, and Institutional Transformation Dynamics**

The Ottoman Empire's long-term presence and social integration in the Balkan geography was achieved through Sufi institutions (*tekke* and *zawiyas*), while this vast and heterogeneous area also became a center of activity for various heterodox religious movements and intra-sectarian deviations that challenged the traditional Sunni-sectarian understanding (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 23). These heterodox tendencies were subjected to harsh criticism, particularly by Sunni scholars and Sufis attached to the *Zahiri* school, which led to discussions of institutional and moral corruption (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 24).

### 3.1. Criticisms of Heterodox Groups and the Role of Münîrî-i Belgrâdî

Münîrî-i Belgrâdî (real name Ibrahim b. İskender), one of the important authors of the 17th century, presented a striking panorama of religious-mystical life in the Balkans in his works, especially in “*Nisâbu’l-İntisâb ve Âdâbu’l-İktisâb*” (Sarıkaya, 2018, p. 13). Originally from Bosnia, Belgrâdî received his spiritual training from Mevlana Ali Efendi and Aziz Mahmud Hüdayî, held important positions in Belgrade, including that of mufti, and adopted a Sufi understanding based on zahira (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 15). Belgrâdî’s criticisms were directed not so much at a Sufi understanding that was incompatible with the outward Sharia, but rather at those who abused the Sufi tradition (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 15) often exploiting popular ignorance by assuming the titles of seyyid or sheikh and displaying an indifferent attitude toward religion (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 18).

The author has determined that the Hurufis, Hamzavis, and Simavnevis were active in the Balkans and has accused these groups of Hululism and Hurremism (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 17). These heterodox groups exhibited practices unacceptable to religious authorities:

1. *Shiite-like Appearance*: The groups expressed their love for Hz. Ali and the Twelve Imams through the art of depiction and used Shiite-Imami principles such as *tevellî-teberrî*; which led to their association with the Kızılbaş-Râfîzî phenomenon (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 19).

2. *Social Deviance and Moral Criticisms*: According to Belgrâdî, these groups organized entertainment sessions that exceeded their purpose during long night gatherings, performed local plays with meddah-like acting skills, and even organized activities that led to smoking hashish and addiction (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 22)

3. *False Claims of Miracles*: Belgrâdî’s biggest complaint was that false sheikhs used the ignorance of the people, claiming to perform magic with elements such as talismans, selected names, and amulets, distributing healing, and claiming to perform miracles (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 21). Belgrâdî stated that such actions have no place in religion and that only “fools and idiots” would believe in them (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 21)

Historically, these marginal groups (Melâmî, Hamzavî, Simavnevî) either tried to escape state persecution by coming under the umbrella of Bektashism after the second half of the 17th century, or it has been suggested that Bektashism evolved towards their views (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 22). Indeed, in Macedonia, it has been observed that the Rifâî and Halvetîs behaved similarly to the Bektashis in some of their religious practices (such as lighting candles and praying at shrines) (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 22).

### **3.2. The Fütüvvet-Ahilik Tradition and Its Interaction with Shiite-Bektashi Belief Motifs**

Another important dimension of heterodox debates in the Balkans is the intense interaction between the institutional structure of the guild organization, Ahilik (Fütüvvet), and Shiite-Alevi-Bektashi belief motifs (Erdem, 2024, s. 39). Although Fütüvvet and Ahilik were essentially non-sectarian structures, they became intertwined with Sunni and Shiite beliefs and Sufi traditions throughout history (Erdem, 2024, s. 41). The similarities in the rituals and practices between these two traditions are quite significant, leading to the acceptance of Fütüvvetnamas as one of the fundamental sources not only of Ahilik but also of Alevism and Bektashism (Erdem, 2024, s. 43). The common beliefs and ritual motifs are as follows:

- -Musahiplik (becoming a brother/soul brother in the Fütüvvetnamas).
- -Şed Kuşanma (tığ bend), understood in Bektashism as “to be in control of one’s hands, waist, and tongue,” and the tradition of tying three knots on the şed mentioned in the Fütüvvetnâmeler signifies covenant, allegiance, and bequest.
- -The Four Gates (Sharia, tariqa, ma’rifa, haqq) are described in detail in both traditions.
- -High Reverence for Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt: The rituals of reverence shown to Ali, the Ahl al-Bayt, and Salman al-Farisi, such as sema, gülbank çekme, and sherbet ikramı, are common. Furthermore, the chain of futuwwa is linked to Hazrat Ali through the Twelve Imams, almost the same chain as the genealogy of Shiism. (Erdem, 2024, s. 44.)

In this intense interaction, the prevailing view is that the Shiite (Isna Ashariyyah) beliefs and practices transmitted through Iran from the 14th century onwards had a significant impact on Ahilik through Alevism and Bektashism (Erdem, 2024, s. 47). This situation led to Shiite-Imami-Alevi-Bektashi beliefs permeating futuwwa texts over time and becoming the dominant language in these documents, resulting in the use of the term “Shiization of futuwwa” in the relevant literature (Erdem, 2024, s. 53). Fuad Köprülü argued that the esoteric nature of Ahilik was undeniable and that this esoteric content most likely pushed the Ahis to adopt the name Bektashi in the late 14th century and link their lineage to Hacı Bektaş Veli (Köprülü, 2018, pp. 309-310). However, this transformation in Ahilik and Fütüvvet brought with it a loss of prestige. It is highly probable that one of the most important reasons for the weakening of the Ahilik tradition and its inability to maintain its prestige was the loss of prestige of Ahilik both in the eyes of the state and the ulema and among the wider masses due to the increasing influence of Shiite and esoteric views originating from Safavid sources in the futuwwa texts (Erdem, 2024, s. 55). Especially from the 16th century onwards, the Ottoman ulema and Sunni Sufi groups began to adopt a more distant attitude towards the Ahis (Erdem, 2024, s. 37). Münîrî-i Belgrâdî’s criticisms also drew attention to this moral decay, stating

that the Ahis had abandoned their fundamental moral principles and turned to negative behaviors such as lying, eating forbidden food, corruption, and ignorance, and that they had taken refuge in the doors of the beys instead of the door of Allah (Gölpınarlı, 1953, s. 112; Erdem, 2024, s. 50).

### ***3.3. Institutional Closure, Resistance, and Adaptation Process***

The greatest institutional shock experienced by Sufi institutions in the Balkans was the abolition of the Janissary Corps in 1826 (Vaka-yı Hayriyye) (Çibik, 2014, s. 10). Due to the deep institutional ties between the Janissary Corps and Bektashism, this decision initiated the process of officially closing Bektashism and dissolving its existence, along with the confiscation of the tekkes' property (Çibik, 2014, s. 10 (Beydilli, 2012, s. 455). This period of political pressure and destruction (post-1826) led to the destruction of many tekkes (Çibik, 2014, s. 10; Beydilli, 2012, s. 455). For example, the mosque, minaret, madrasa, and dervish cells of the Filibe Mevlevihâne were destroyed, and the remaining semahane was purchased by a Bulgarian and began to be used as a restaurant (Ösen, 2015, p. 1809). However, despite this intense pressure, the Bektashi tekkes managed to maintain their presence in the Balkans.

The strongest example of this resistance was Albania, which became a refuge for Bektashism; under these political conditions, the order took on a national structure and played an active role in the "Albanian National Revival Movement" between 1830 and 1912 (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 23). This situation demonstrates the Bektaşî networks' ability for local integration and diasporic adaptation. Albanian Bektashism declared its independence from the Hacı Bektaş central tekke in 1922 (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 23). In this process of institutional adaptation, the ongoing ties between Bektaşî dervishes and artisan groups, rooted in the Ahilik tradition's emphasis on acquiring a profession, played an important role (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 24). This professional continuity enabled them to retain their craftsmanship skills in the face of political pressure (Sarıkaya, 2018, pp. 24).

In a broader context, during and after the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans (especially after 1878), tekkes took on the identity of a refuge for the remaining Turkish-Islamic remnants (Ösen, 2015, p. 1800). Nevertheless, as a result of the efforts of local governments in the region to erase traces of Turkish-Islamic culture, tekkes were destroyed or used for purposes completely different from their original construction goals. Structures such as the Kalkandelen Harabati Baba Dergâhı, however, have survived to the present day, proving that tekkes were not only a means of settlement but also a long-term institutional support for maintaining political and social stability in difficult times (Aruçi, 1997, s. 70).



## Conclusion

This study has evaluated the role of Sufi orders, particularly Bektashism and Mevleviism, active in the geography of Southeast Europe from the founding of the Ottoman Empire to its withdrawal period. The findings reveal that the mission of these Sufi networks and institutions went beyond simple spiritual propagation, placing them at the center of the Ottoman Empire's settlement, economic integration, and cultural transfer policies. Tekkes and zawiyas functioned not only as places of worship and education, but also as dynamic institutional centers that regulated economic life, provided social solidarity, and supported the circulation of skilled labor.

As a concrete example of this work, the analysis of the Harabâtî Baba Dergâh in Kalkandelen in the context of energy efficiency criteria has revealed the advanced awareness of historical structures in adapting to natural conditions. The dergâh was built with passive architectural solutions to counter the continental and mountain climate characteristics of its geography (especially cold and snowy winter periods). Evaluations have determined that conscious measures were taken against the prevailing wind effect in the positioning of the structures comprising the dergâh, namely the Askerihane, Fatmaevi, Meydanevi, and other structural units. Structures facing the north, where cold winds come from, were positioned close to each other, creating a wall effect and providing thermal protection. These technical findings reinforce the conclusion that concepts such as energy efficiency are not a modern invention, but rather already existed in historical structural practices through designs that adapted to environmental factors and prioritized the use of local materials. This awareness is important in terms of preserving cultural heritage and integrating modern sustainability principles.

The parallelism between the structural resilience of the Harabâtî Baba Dergâh and its socio-economic function demonstrates the inadequacy of reducing the presence of Sufi orders in the Balkans to a single dimension. Dervishes and tekkes played a pioneering role in the implementation of the Ottoman administration's economic colonization policy. The dervishes' role as individuals who worked the land, established villages, and practiced crafts led to the development of vacant lands and the formation of new settlements (named after figures such as Sheikh Village and Dervish Village). The key point of this movement was the combination of the dervishes' principle of acquiring a profession with the institutional structure. This principle ensured the transfer of skilled labor and crafts (such as tanning and mother-of-pearl inlay) from Anatolia to the Balkans. Close ties with the Ahilik and Fütüvvet organizations institutionalized this process; guilds (such as the financing of the Elbasan Tabaklar Tekke by leather craftsmen) provided logistical and financial support to the tekkes. This mutual dependence confirms the regulatory role of Sufi institutions not only in spiritual life, but also in administrative, commercial, and artistic life.

The presence of Bektashi and Mevlevi dervishes in Southeast Europe was the product of socio-economic and cultural dynamics rather than military conquest. Despite political difficulties and the 1826 ban on Bektashism (Vaka-yı Hayriyye), these Sufi networks demonstrated their ability to survive and functioned as a refuge for the remaining Turkish-Islamic remnants even during the Ottoman withdrawal from the region. This historical process demonstrates that Mevlevi and Bektashi dervishes, in addition to their cultural and spiritual missions, functioned as a vehicle for economic and demographic transfer and, in this respect, established a complex and resilient proto-migrant network that can be considered the historical precursors of modern migrant worker networks.

## REFERENCES

- Aruçi, M. (1997). Harâbâtî Baba Tekkesi. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 16, ss. 69-71). İstanbul: TDV Yayınları.
- Aydınçe, N. (2015). Balkanlarda Tarikatlar; Makedonya'daki Halvetiliğe Genel Bakış. *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2, 75-90.
- Aykaç, M. (2021). 17. Yüzyıl Arnavutluk/Elbasan'da Bir Fütüvvetnâme Örneği. *Çalışma Metni*, 29-38.
- Barkan, Ö. (1953). Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu Olarak Sürgünler. *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, 15(1-4).
- Beydilli, K. (2012). Vaka-i hayriyye. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 42, ss. 454-457). İstanbul: TDV Yayınları.
- Birge, J. K. (1965). *The Bektashi order of dervishes*. Luzac & Co.
- Bulut, M. (2017). Balkanlardaki Osmanlı Medeniyetinde Vakıf, İktisat ve Finans. *ADAM AKADEMİ*, 7(2), 129-148.
- Erdem, E. (2021). Fütüvvetnamelerin Türleri ve Farklı Dillerde Yazılmış Bazı Fütüvvetnamelerin İçerikleri Üzerine Bir İnceleme. *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi İİBF Dergisi*, 5, 88-113.
- Erdem, E. (2024). Anadolu Ve Rumeli Coğrafyalarında Fütüvvet-Ahilik Düşüncesi İle Şii-Alevibektaşî İnanç Telakkilerinin Et-kileşimi. *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*.
- Gölpınarlı, Abdülbaki. "Burgazi ve Fütüvvet-namesi". *İ.Ü. İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15/1-4 (1953), 76-153.
- Han, V. (2011). Balkan Sanat Tarihi Kaynağı Olarak Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi. (A. Kılıç, Çev.). *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 11(2), 245-259.
- Hatıpler Çibik, T. (2014). *Balkanlardaki Bektaşî tekkelerinin enerji verimliliği açısından değerlendirilmesi: Harabati Baba Dergâhı örneği* [Yüksek lisans tezi]. Trakya Üniversitesi.
- İzeti, M. (2012). Arnavut Esnafı ve Tekkeler. *MİLEL VE NİHAL inanç-kültür-mitoloji*, 57-69 (veya 57-70).
- Kara, M. (2011). Tekke. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 40, ss. 370-379). İstanbul: TDV Yayınları.
- Köprülü, M. F. (2018a/2018b). Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar. (Haz. G. Erdem). İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları.
- Ösen, S. (2015). Balkanlarda Mevleviliğin Yayılması ve Kurulan Mevlevihâneler. *Yeni Türkiye Dergisi*, 67, 1799-1814.
- Öztürk, A. (2003). *XVI. yüzyıl Halvetî şiirinde din ve tasavvuf* [Doktora tezi]. Ankara Üniversitesi.
- Sarıkaya, M. (2018). Balkanlarda Ahilik Ve Bektaşilik (Nisâbu'l-İntisâb Bağlamında Bir İnceleme). *Alevilik Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 8(15), 13-29.
- Uludağ, S. (1997). Halvetiyye. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 15, ss. 393-395). İstanbul: TDV Yayınları.
- Ülkü, O. (2011). Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesinde anlatılan tekke ve zaviyeler ile kurucu şeyhleri. *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi* içinde (C. 40). İstanbul: TDV Yayınları.
- Yılmaz, Y. & Sertkaya, A. (2016). Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesinde Balkan Halkları Algısı. *International Multilingual Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(1), 77-83. <https://doi.org/10.15640/imjcr.v4n1a9>

# PUTUJUĆI SUFIJI KAO NOSIOCI RADA I KULTURNIH TRANSFERA: MREŽE MEVLEVIJA I BEKTAŠA U JUGOISTOČNOJ EVROPI

**Okan Keleş**

Univerzitet u Istanbulu, Fakultet teologije, islamske istorije i umjetnosti, Turska

Katedra za tursku islamsku književnost

*okan.keles@istanbul.edu.tr*

## APSTRAKT

Ovaj rad istražuje ulogu derviša mellevija i bektaša kao nosilaca rada i kulturnih transfera u Jugoistočnoj Evropi u periodu od 14. do 19. vijeka. Analizom sufijskih mreža kao dinamičnih kanala migracija i ekonomskih razmjena, rad pokazuje da su putujući derviši omogućavali ne samo širenje duhovnih učenja, već i cirkulaciju kvalifikovane radne snage, zanata i rodno određenih radnih praksi unutar Osmanskog Carstva. Fokusirajući se na vakufske zapise, putopise (posebno Evlije Čelebije) i arhive zanatskih cehova, studija otkriva kako su derviški zavodi (tekije) funkcionirali kao centri mobilnosti rada — povezujući anadolske majstore s balkanskim tržištima, prenoseći poljoprivredne tehnike kroz mreže bektaša i profesionalizujući ritualne prakse poput seme. Rad ističe tri ključne tačke: prvo, ekonomske temelje sufijske migracije, gdje su putujući derviši istovremeno radili kao majstori, muzičari ili pisari, integrišući svoj rad u lokalne ekonomije; drugo, rodnu podjelu rada unutar tekija, pri čemu su „Bektas-hi bacilar“ (žene derviši) upravljale proizvodnjom tekstila i prenošenjem usmenog znanja; treće, transformaciju ovih mreža nakon 1826. godine, nakon ukidanja tekija, kada su raseljeni derviši-zanatlije prilagodili svoje vještine dijasporičkim trgovinskim udruženjima. Posmatranjem sufijskog rada kao preteče modernih mreža migranata-radnika, ovo istraživanje povezuje osmansku ekonomsku istoriju sa savremenim debatama o kulturnim dimenzijama migracije rada. Rad također dovodi u pitanje duhovno-sekularnu dihotomiju u studijama rada, pokazujući kako je sveta mobilnost pokretala regionalne zanatske ekonomije. Nalazi pokazuju kako su premoderni vjerski pokreti oblikovali obrasce transformacije rada u Jugoistočnoj Evropi i pružaju istorijski kontekst za savremeni rodno određen rad i neformalnu radnu snagu.

## Ključne riječi:

derviši mevlevije i bektaši, rad i kulturni transfer, sufijske mreže migracija, Jugoistočna Evropa