

VI. The Turkish, Islamic-like phenomenon of mystic orders. Possibilities for a cultural syncretism in the geopolitical perspective of international mutual understanding¹

"What is a rite?" *asked the little prince.*
"Those also are actions too often neglected," said the fox.
"They are what make one day different from other days,
one hour from other hours"
Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, XXI.

1. Muslim Fraternities and Orders (Tarikat): their forms, structure and ideology

1.1. Introduction

Our effort in this text aims to identify the possibilities for mutual cultural understanding between civilisations of the Eastern- and Western- type (e.g. Turkey and Greece), on the one hand, and to suggest, on the other, that more challenges exist —from a geopolitical point of view— which could be exploited by future Turkish actors of power, whose intentions are not always clear.

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As will be clarified throughout this text, it is our belief that everything depends on the intentions of those who control these political tools. Indeed, only their democratic management may lead to the result which the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean long for, i.e. peace, international justice and respect for the human rights and political freedoms of their nations and national groups.

Nevertheless, any special reference to the Turkish Islamic internalised —as well as comparative— Sufi fraternities should be superseded by an overview of the Islamic and the Sufi syncretic Fraternities, their place in history, as well as by their examination in terms of ideology, in the framework of modern Islam and of the modern Turkish society. It is through this course of examination that we shall be able to draw conclusions on the correlation of these Fraternities with political activity, and to determine the forms, the levels and the qualities of this activity —which is placed well beyond the strict orthodox limits of the official Sunnite Islam of the state and viewed with mixed emotions by the governmental Directorate of Religious Affairs, the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*.

First of all, we should acknowledge the social necessity of this concept, i.e. the internalised and ideologically, eschatologically, and ethically “charged” Islam, as contrasted to the “dehydrated” legalistic Islam —whose only concern are the Five Fundamental Religious Duties and the observance of the *Shari’a*.

This “internalised Islam”, an Islam so complex and unknown and not susceptible of generalisations, an Islam which in the final analysis is an “Islam of veneer” consists essentially of a part of the widespread network of the Orders that have been present and operating in the Muslim world for around eight centuries. These Orders must be examined from this —geopolitical— perspective and clearly classified as Islamic, of Islamic origin or Islamic-like Orders. The aim of this text is to set a basis for this research and classification, to the extent permitted by its scope.

This continuous phenomenon revives and settles, based on the conjuncture. It remains, however, dark and inaccessible, for the most part, because the Fraternities do not operate legally in all cases and are rather internalising organisations which do not reveal their affairs to the “profane” society.

1.2. Historical Background

The history of Islamic, Islamic-originated and Islamic-like orders in the framework of the *Umma*, dates back to the era when the first Mystics of Islam, the Sufis, appeared. Their name originated from the Arab word *sûf* (meaning coarse wool, their usual cheap garment). Others suggest that the term originates from the Arab word *sofi* (<Greek *sofós*, a man of knowledge). In early times, the Sufis were persons trying to think and act beyond the “literal” perception of God’s will —a will deriving from the sacred texts— and seize “direct knowledge” of the Holy Essence.

Thus, the faithful, eager to approach the knowledge of the Divine, started to gather in special places (the *ribât*, the *Khânaqâh*, the *Zâwiya*, the *Khalwa*).

These primitive coenobia were transformed into true Fraternities in the 12th cent. Since then, there is the Master, Lord of the Initiation, who undertakes the spiritual guidance of the Order's "Brothers". This century is characterised by political realignment in the Muslim World. The Shiite regimes withdraw, to the benefit of the Sunnite ones in Iran and the Middle East. It is the time of the pagan —in terms of religion— Mongolian rule, which prevails upon the Umma. During this first —pagan Mongolian— stage of domination, the Shiite Islam, primarily, as well as Islam in general, are expelled from power. Simultaneously, the emergence of the first Orders (the *khirqâ*) is observed. These are Orders of dervishes "spreading Asia Minor with the mission to proselytise the infidel".

N. Sarris suggests that Sufism was manifested during the 13th cent. through three trends:

a) The Sunnite, or orthodox, Islamic mysticism, which was cultivated by what came to be known as the "School of Baghdad", with Al-Ghazali's direct participation.

b) The heretic trend, which was expressed by the warriors of the borders of the Osmanli beylik (Gazi — heroes of Islam).

c) The mystical perceptions of technicians and professionals, which, despite being closer to the "orthodox" Sunnite mysticism than were the second, were lacking in terms of the spiritual and divine element.

A study into the features of the Orders can easily reveal these trends, in their pure or melange form, within the context of a Fraternity. The prevalence of the second and third elements upon the first, within an Order, urges the Fraternity towards political action, which can easily become subversive activity against the "profane princes and their regimes".

In this sense, a two-tier organisation can be observed in the Orders of this era, whose quality and essence bear proof to the holy war-, and therefore political, meaning of their formation. It is the organisation of the dervishes, on the one hand, and the warriors/Gazis, on the other. A similar organisation is also observed in the West during the same period, i.e. the groups of Knights and the military — monastic Orders (Knights Templars, Johannites) and the wandering knights and monks. As in Medieval Europe, these organisations had a complex military/economic and religious function, despite the differences in their conditions of life. It is natural to observe this amalgamated character of the Orders, given that the adhesion of Turks to Islamism did not eliminate the ways of life or the customs associated with their social composition.

On the other hand, the notion of Jihad was fully adapted to their warlike spirit as well as to their inherent trend for expansionism. The two-tier organisa-

tion of the religious missionaries/dervishes and warriors/Gazis was the result of a strange admixture of Islamism with Turkism.

The Orders were named after their Grand Master, leader of the Fraternity. Examples are the Order of Kubrawiyya, led by Nadjm ad-dîn Kubrâ (died in 1221), the Order of Kâdiriyya, led by Abd al-Qadir al-Djilânî (died in 1166), the Order of Rifâ'iyya, led by Ahmad ibn ar-Rifâ'î (died in 1182), the Order of Madyaniyya, led by Abû Madyan (died in 1197) —which was renamed to Shâdhiliya owing to its second founder and Grand Master, Abû l-Hassan ash-Shâdhilî (died in 1258)— and the Order of Chistiyya, led by Mu'în ad-Dîn Muhammad Chishtî (died in 1236).

The 13th century marks the appearance of the Orders of Qalandariyya, Ahmadiyya, Mawlawiyya (Mevlevi), which was inspired by the great myst from Horasan, Mewlâna Djâlâl-ad-Din Rumî, who emigrated to the Southwest, in Asia Minor, during the charge of the Mongols, and died in Ikonion, in 1273.

The 14th century marks the appearance of the Order of Bektashiyya (Bektashi), which was founded by Hâdjî Bektash Velî, from Horasan in Iran (died in 1335), the Order of Naqshbandiyya (Naksibedi) in Central Asia, which was founded by Bahâ ad-Din an-Naqshbandî (died in 1389), the Order of Safawiyya, which was founded by Safiyyad-dîn al-Ardabilî (died in 1334) and consisted of Turkomans of Eastern Azerbaijan, and the Order of Khalwatiyya, which was founded by Umar al-Khalwatî (died in 1397 appr.).

The Order of Shattâriyya, which was founded by Abdallâh ash-Shattâr (of Iranian origin, died in 1428) appeared during the 15th century in India and Sumatra.

Many of these Orders, despite having emerged within the context of Islam, were significantly influenced by Neoplatonic syncretism and, following the Western example of the Knights Templars, derouted from Islamic orthodoxy and their holy war role and ended, through symbolism and syncretic contemplation, to a purely philosophical quest —as happened also with Western Masonry which places the sources of its Medieval identity on Templarism.

1.3. The structure of the Sufi mystic orders in general

In the course of the 14th and the 15th century, i.e. during the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Orders formed organised bodies (the *Ta'ifa*), in which there are more than insignificant similarities between their ranks —the Postulant, the Initiated and the Master— and hierarchies corresponding to those of the modern symbolic Orders of guilds of European origin (e.g. Masonic Orders).

The local centres of the Orders multiplied and were soon organised in a pyramidal structure, at the peak of which is the “Maternal House” (*âsitâne, pîrhâne*). The Grand Master of the Order concedes part of his responsibilities on the various “district centres” (*Walâya*=districts) to a hierarchy of accredited and

controlled officials—representatives, such as the *Khalifa*, the *Naqîb* and the *Muqaddam*.

The role of these accredited officials is quite important, given the fact that in some cases the appearance of the same and official Order in society is directly linked to these persons. For example, the name of the Order of Bektashi refers to its founder, Haji Bektash Veli, who died in 1335. However, the Order (*ta'ifa*) develops short before the end of the 15th century, after being organised by Bâlim Sultan—its “Second Founder” (*pîr-i sânî*), who undertook the leadership the “Maternal House” in 1501 and died in 1516.

Also important is the role of the Master within a Fraternity. This is readily understood, if we assume that the principal aim of a Fraternity lies in preserving, transferring and spreading the teachings of its founder, as well as his mystical experience, his methods and the means by which postulants attain the experience of the Spiritual Leader.

This mystical message, enriched with the contributions of the most important Brothers and Heirs, constitutes the core of the Fraternity’s dogma, together with the methods utilised by the Order to approach the Divine and ultimately unite with it. Naturally, differences are common in these characteristics, even within different branches of the same Order.

The contemporary Master (*Murshid*, *pîr*, *shaykh*, *baba*) is linked to the Grand Master and Founder, through a chain of spiritual continuity (*Silsila*) among generations.

However, it is observed that the strict organisation and concentration that had prevailed in the Orders, did not last long. As a rule, the Orders were divided into branches, more or less independent, or even contrasting one another. The paradigm of the diffusion of an Order’s potential to isolated cells and hermitages is so common, that the unique denomination of an Order may not correspond to any material organic linkage.

During the following centuries, and while the old Fraternities continue to exist and spread across new areas, new Fraternities emerge in the Islamic world, always taking care to attribute their origin to some old Grand Master.

2. Masonic Orders in the Ottoman period and Sufi Tarikats: relations of form and ideology

2.1. Relations of Form

Masonry is an initiation society, in all its forms (Anglo-Saxon, i.e. Scottish, Irish, British or American, or Latin, i.e. French and Italian).

The same observation applies also—in terms of form—to the Tarikats, whether Islamic, Islamic-like or of Islamic-origin. In this sense, and in order to explicate the meaning of the term “initiation society”, we should mention that

it is a *thiasite organisation*, characterised by a specific knowledge, which it gradually conveys to a strictly selected circle of members, following a mystical and invariable rite and using an essentially symbolic language.

Compared to all Tarikats, the Bektashi Order is the one closer to the above definition. Being more detached from this type of mystical societism, which refers to “mystery schools” of the Antiquity, the other Tarikats are unprepared for the process of “Safeguarding the Secrets” and less penetrated by the symbolic method. It is, of course, known that symbolism is a fundamental method for Freemasonry. It should also be stressed that the many different Masonry doctrines present an immense complexity of symbolisms in their rites. Nevertheless, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, despite the existence of many and varying European Grand Orients and the variety of Masonic ideologies, it should be noted that the core of structures of the various Freemasonry rites and symbolisms remains essentially unchanged. On the other hand, we should accept that small variations are totally natural and understandable, given that none of the European Masonry Orders was able to avoid its history. It is therefore natural for the Masonry Orders that were established for about 150 years on Eastern territories (Asia Minor, Persia, India) to have been influenced –to a certain extent– in their rites and to have used an Eastern “fragrance” on the body of their austere, Protestant-derived, Western Masonic rites.

1. It is thus observed that the terms “Apprentice–apprenti”, “Fellow Craft–Compagnon”, “Master–Maître” and “Grand Master–Grand Maître” were translated into Turkish as «*çirak*», «*kalfa*», «*üstad*» and «*üstad-i â'zam*», respectively. These terms were however common throughout the Muslim mystical societism. And, speaking of Muslim mystical societism, we mean the order-type mystical societism that develops within a Muslim cultural context without necessarily being Islamic (as exemplified by Bektashism) but rather Islamic-like or of Islamic origin. Referring to Bektashism, it should be said that it is a form of Islamic-like Neoplatonic syncretism of Islamic origin, the relations of which to the Islamic religion are only those deriving from a comparative analysis.

2, 3. The other two common points are (a) the existence, in both Orders, of the notion of the strictly observed “secret”; and (b) the decoration of the apprentice with a apron (*tablier*). Apparently, it is the *şedd* or *elif-i nemed* in *fütüvvet* (the Muslim *Knighthood*), the *tiğ-bend* in the Bektashi Order and the rite of *peştemal* in the Order of “Fellow” Brothers (*Ahiler*). A particularity of the Order of Brothers brings us again closer to the Masonic rite: it is the decoration of the Master (*üstad*) *Ahi*, with a new apron, following removal of the apron corresponding to the rank of Fellow Craft (*kalfa*).

4. Also, the Muslim secret societies are characterised by certain initiation catechisms, that are almost identical to the corresponding Masonic “ceramists”. It is true that the common items identified in the three monotheistic religions of the “Peoples of the Bible” are inherent, in one way or another, in mystical so-

cietism, whether Christian or Muslim. Besides, Freemasonry, no manner how it is seen, can only accept that it bears significant influences of Neoplatonism. The deep influence of *Shaykh al-Yunânî* (=the Greek [*Yunânî*] Master [*Shaykh*]), Plotinus's Arab name, is apparent also in the East.

5. Freemasonry, having initially formed its structure in the context of the Christian Western world and having drawn on the guilds of Christian technicians and the Christian Fraternities, which were devoted to the quest of the "lost Word" of the holy and sacred "Name of God" in order to create its symbolic and subsequently "proven" form, simultaneously utilises the symbolism of the structuring of the "Perfect Temple", which represents the perfect human. This last symbol is common in the mystical Muslim societism, the aim of which was to reinstate Man to a perfect psychological and spiritual condition (the *in-sân-i kâmil*). Nevertheless, even in the Muslim guilds, it is easy to observe the significance attributed to the need for a mystical life. The Bible of *Fütüvvet* (*Fütüvvet-nâme*), of Yahyâ ibn Halîl, proves that the aim of the Ahiler Fellows was the conquest of holiness. Henry Corbin, in his research on the Ismailitic Order, has largely insisted on the sign of the "drama of the lost Word". Through his analysis of a rite of the Ismailitic Order, he observed that the action formed the parable of the "searcher" who set off his long journey, in his quest for the Lost Word. It should be underlined here that we should not forget the suggestion that revisionist Ismailism of Al-Alamût has had some influence on Bektashism. Besides, in Freemasonry the quest for the "Lost Word" is the centre of initiation to the 18th degree, i.e. the Knight Rose Croix, of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, an order not included in Anglo-Saxon Masonry.

6. The Anglo-Saxon Lodges, on the other hand, are characterised by a hierarchy of (four) degrees, which is not applied in the orders of the Latin Masonry (French and Italian). It is the rite of the Holy Order of Royal Arch. At this level, the substantial part of the initiation is covered by the "quest for the name of God".

7. Impressive is also the similarity between the two forms of mystical societism, as pertains to the notion of the "Renaissance" or "the birth anew". The Bektashi, who became members of Masonic Orders, were rightfully impressed by these similarities. According to P. Naudon, in the first degree of initiation of the Freemasonry order, the teaching pertains to the "passage from the world of the Dark to the world of Light". Also, in the third symbolic degree of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, the teaching relates to the death and the rise of Master Hiram, Architect of the Temple of Solomon. In a practically identical manner evolves a similar rite in the Bektashi ritual, where the *talip*, i.e. the applicant (to know the secret) dies and rises before *Baba* (the Bektashi Master) and kisses his hand after the resurrection. This can only remind us Plato in *Phaedon*, where *philosophising* is knowledge of *dying*.

8. The persistence of the Orders on absolute secrecy for the property of the Mason and the Bektashi, as well as the “secret” of the activities taking place in the temples of both these Orders (the Tekke and the Lodge) is yet another common feature of these two forms of mystical societism. The cost of this persistence has been the excommunication of Freemasonry, by means of two papal bulls, in 1738 and 1751. The Bektashi was the only Muslim order that never permitted the presence of “profane” persons at the rituals inside the tekke. Besides, one of the ten principles of mystical Muslim societism, which corresponded also to the Masonic *landmarks* created by Ahmed Yesevî, one of the inspirers of Hâcî Bektaş, related to the prohibition for the initiated to reveal any of the secrets handed down to them by the Master (*Şeyh*).

“*Le secret relève du sacré*” (the secret reveals the Sacred) and, according to Myrsea Eliade, “the secret is not only a period in the history of human conscience, but also a constitutive element of this conscience”. It is the “*elusive point*”, notes Simon,² “where the spark of a smile transforms everyday life into Enlightenment, where the moment touches eternity”. Besides, the Sacred, whose nature is distinct and delineated, invisible and imposing for human conscience, can only “mystically” communicate with man. “It is only this way that the possibility is offered to create another world, next to the everyday visible world”, according to Georg Shimmel.³

9. The supper of the “Brothers”, following the conclusion of their work, is also common in the two Orders. In the Bektashi order, the supper is known as the “twelve services” and is also found with the Alevis. The reference to the Last Supper is obvious in both Orders.

Our comparison and the citing of similarities found in the rites and symbols of the two Orders could go on for long, something that bears proof to their common Neoplatonic roots. What should be mentioned, is that this similarity, which impressed the members of the Orders, was the factor permitting the uninhibited presence of members of the one Order in the works of the other. This finally led to a fraternal solidarity between the “Brothers” of these two forms of mystical societism in Asia Minor.

10. Yet another analogy is to be found in the Masonic rite. It is the assimilation of the stars’ orbit. In this sense, Pierre Simon, former Grand Master of the Grand Loge de France (GLF) repeats the words of Marcus Aurelius:

2. SIMON, P., *La Franc-Maçonnerie*, Flammarion-Dominos, 1997, p. 79.

3. Cf. SCHIMMEL, G., *Secret et Sociétés Secrètes*, Circé, Paris, 1996.

“Observe the course of the stars, thinking that you turn with them. Thus [...] we turn (N.B. the Masons, also) between the Zenith where the starry dome (N.B. the roof of the Temple) opens and the Nadir (N.B. the Floor of the Temple), between the East, where the Light comes from, where the RWS of the Lodge is enthroned, and the West, where brother Tyler stands”.⁴

11. As pertains also to matters of origin, there are similarities between these two Orders. It is known that Freemasonry owes much to the customs and traditions of the old English guilds of builders and technicians. What is not known, however, is that the Bektashi Order, too, owes much to this Sufi mystical and professional “knighthood” of the *fütüvvet*, as well as to its Turkish analogue, i.e. the Order of the Brothers (Ahiler) which, in its turn, owes much to the corresponding Ottoman guilds of technicians and builders. However, what is worth noting, is that the by-laws of the *fütüvvet* provided for the moral improvement of their members, to a large extent. It is also true that, contrary to the English guilds of builders and workers, the Muslim professional organisations were influenced by the Sufi mystical movements.

2.2. Relations of Ideology

E.E. Ramsaur,⁵ historian and Turkologist, compared the revolutionary and reforming role of the Masons in European politics of the 19th century with the role which the Bektashi order played in the Ottoman Empire. Rizâ Tevfik, member of the Bektashi Order and Grand Master of the Ottoman Grand Orient of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite (1918–1921) suggests that the Bektashi were characterised by their “appropriate mental disposition to welcome any form of political revolution which would favour the absolute freedom of ideas and a more acceptable type of government for the Empire”. Louis Petit,⁶ in 1879, says of the Bektashi: “*they were epicurean, sceptic, lovers of power, slightly socialistic, but without ulterior motives and philanthropists*”. Osman Bey suggests that they “*had always represented the spirit of democracy [...] contrary to the Imams, who had always been subservient agents of despotism*”. Rizâ Tevfik⁷ suggests that they were “*the most liberal of all the Dervish orders*”. This kind of descriptions has contributed significantly to consider the “typical Bektashi” as the Eastern

4. SIMON, P., op.cit., p. 73.

5. RAMSAUR, E., *The Bektashi Dervishes and the Young Turks*, M. W. XXXII, Jan. 1946, p. 7-14.

6. PETIT, L., *Les Confréries Musulmanes*, Paris, 1879, p. 17.

7. Taken from a letter of R. Tefvik to E. Ramsaur (16 May), in: RAMSAUR, E., *The Young Turks, Prelude to the Revolution of 1908*, Princeton, 1957, p. 113.

equivalent of the “typical Mason”. Proof of this can be traced in the behaviour of the Italian Masons, when they discovered Bektashi orders in Albania. They thought that they had discovered the “protestants of Islam” and, motivated by their usual Mediterranean enthusiasm, considered that “they would go well beyond the true Protestants, bringing about significant changes to Islam, in the direction of the freedom of thought, equality and fraternity, thus rendering Islam capable of approaching the Masonic ideal to a significant degree”.⁸

It would also be useful to mention a memorandum addressed by the British Embassy in Istanbul to the Foreign Office in 1910, which suggested that the Bektashi Order was inspired by the Masonic ideals in their purest form, as this was conceived within the context of Anglo-Saxon Masonry, i.e. deistic and conservative, and not by its European equivalent. The memorandum was favouring the government of the Young Turks and reproduced, within the Ottoman context, the usual criticism of the Anglo-Saxon Masonry against its Latin branch (i.e. the French and the Italian Masonry) and particularly against the Grand Orient de France.⁹

It should also be underlined that there are very few Bektashi texts referencing Freemasonry directly, while there are only scarce testimonies —as pertains to the personalities of the Ottoman Empire that belonged to both these orders. The most important of these, is the one referring to the above-mentioned Rizâ Tevfik, Grand Master of the Ottoman Grand Orient, who declared (in newspaper articles as well as in his correspondence with Turkologist Ramsaur¹⁰) that both he and Talaat Pasha were members of both Orders.

With the exclusion of certain cases, analogous to the case of Talaat Pasha, the two Orders were characterised —in theory at least— by a spirit of tolerance to heterodoxy. A typical example of this Bektashi activity is the missionary action of Sarı Saltık, elect student of Haji Bektash, founder of the order, as cited by E. Zeginis,¹¹ who suggests that Sarı Saltık, “executing orders from his Master, was ferried across the Balkan peninsula, developing an activity comparable to that of the Christian clerics”. It is also known that, half a century after the death of Sarı

8. IVANOJ, N., «La questione albanaise e la guerra turco-balcanica», *Rivista Massonica* 9-10, 15-31 maggio 1913, p. 213.

9. Cf. KEDURIE, E., «Yung Turks, Freemasons and Jews», *M.E.R.* 7, 1, Jan. 1971.

10. Op.cit.

11. ZEGINIS, E., *Ο Μπεκτασισμός στη Δ. Θράκη: Συμβολή στην ιστορία της διαδόσεως του μουσουλμανισμού στον ελληνικό χώρο* (Bektashism in W. Thrace. Contribution to the history of the spread of Islamism in Greece) Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1988, p. 84 ff (in Greek).

Saltık (1300), a rumour was spread in the area of Thrace, according to which Sarı Saltık was considered a Christian saint and the Christians identified him with St. Nicholas, St. George, St. Simeon, Prophet Elias, St. Spyridon and St. Naoum. This view is enhanced by other testimonies, such as the depiction of Sarı Saltık in-between Christian saints, on frescoes of churches and, principally, the testimony of Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller who suggested that “*according to tradition, Sarı Saltık was the man to whom God revealed his will. However, during our visit there, we were informed that he had violently breached Shari’a*”.

This trend is nevertheless explained by the syncretic character of the Bektashi Order. Another noteworthy feature is the existence of crypto-Bektashi Christians, pseudonym authors of mystical poems (*nefes*). There are also testimonies by Irène Melikoff¹² on the openness of Abu Muslim’s spirit, a brilliant personality of the Bektashi Order. According to Abu Muslim, “*the only noteworthy element is the kindness of a person’s soul. One can do the right thing, either as a Jew, or as a Muslim*”. Several centuries later, in 1868, the Orator of the Greek-speaking Lodge “Progress” (*I Proodos*) in Istanbul announced to his Brother Masons of the Pillars: “*Let us make clear to the people that every man, Jew, Christian or Muslim, is equal to all other men, he is their brother and in this capacity they owe him love and protection*”.¹³

A characteristic feature is that the “*true meaning of these words was found in the fact that Turkey’s Masons swore to the ‘four Books’, three of which were the Koran, the Torah, and the Evangel. This tradition lived up to 1909 (N.B. year of the Young Turks’ rise to power)*”.

One of the most interesting points, as pertains also to the political role of these two orders, is the fact that many members of the organisation named “Union and Progress” were also members of the Freemasonry Order and the Bektashi.

Indeed, towards the end of the 18th century, when Sultan Abdul Hamit II hardened his stand, things worsened and the revolutionary spirit intensified in Istanbul and other areas of the Empire. The Freemasons, having aligned with many leaders and members of the Young Turk opposition movement, controlled a significant part of the activities that would soon change the form of

12. MELIKOFF, I., *Abu Muslim, le Porte-Ashe de Khorassan dans la tradition épique turco-iranienne*, Paris, 1962, p. 80.

13. DUMONT, P., «La Turquie dans les Archives du Grand Orient de France: les Loges Maçonniques d’Obédience Française à Istanbul du milieu du XIV s. à la veille de la première guerre mondiale» *Actes du IIe Congrès International d’Histoire Économique et Sociale de la Turquie*, Paris, 1983, p. 171-201.

the Empire. Many revolutionary movements opposing Abdul Hamit were inspired by the structure of the international Masonic network that had been established by a Greek in Istanbul, Kleanthis Skalieris,¹⁴ starting from the Greek-speaking Lodge "Progress" of Istanbul (which was subject to the Grand Orient de France) during the years following the fall of Sultan Murat V in 1876. Skalieris did everything in his power to make the Ottoman system adopt liberal reforms, having in mind a new type of Ottoman empire, the culture and economy of which would be prevailed by the Greek element. Unfortunately for Skalieris and his collaborators, his elaborated conspiracy failed after the betrayal of Murat's Jesuit physician and Skalieris was forced to self-exile.¹⁵

Skalieris's plots enjoyed consensus from the British Ambassador in Istanbul, Sir Henry Elliot. This consensus is apparent in a later text written by Skalieris and addressed to the British government. "*Murat's political programme*", wrote Skalieris, "*after having been thoroughly studied by Sir Henry Elliot and me, a few days before the coup of May, 18/30 1876, became the object of admiration and was considered more than appropriate for the Turkish requirements*".¹⁶ It should also be noted that during the initiation of Prince Murat, the Temple's ritual was attended by Epaminondas Deligiorgis, governor of Greece from July, 1872 to February, 1874. His foreign policy was characterised by a close collaboration with the British government and by intense suspicion for Russia, a "major enemy of Hellenism". Moreover, Deligiorgis remained a trusted advocate of Greek-Turkish consultation and friendship, the objective of which was the confrontation of pan-Slavism.¹⁷ Besides, Deligiorgis was initiated in Masonry the same year with Murat (1872), showed Masonic ferventness and strongly believed the need for a "*close approach and collaboration between Greeks and*

14. SVOLOPOULOS, C., «L'initiation de Murad V à la Franc-Maçonnerie par C. Scalieri: aux origines du mouvement libéral en Turquie», *Balkan Studies* V, 21, 1980, p. 441-447.

15. As Svolopoulos mentions, the endless talks held at the Palace between Skalieris and Prince Murat were always attended by their close collaborators Hristakis and Agop Kentseoglu, well-known traders of Istanbul, and Field Marshal Riza Pasha, Ibrahim Pasha (spouse of Princess Münire), Namik Kemal and the Jesuit physician Kapoleone. The latter is responsible for the betrayal.

16. F.O. 195/1332, C. Scalieri à S. E. Monsieur Goshen (envoyé extraordinaire de S. M. R. Britannique à Constantinople), Athènes, 18 juin 1880, in: SVOLOPOULOS, C., op. cit., p. 453 ff.

17. See: *Επ. Δεληγιώργης, Αθήνησι* [1879]. (*Ep. Deligiorgis* [Athens, 1879]). First published in "Neologos", 3097 & 3098, Istanbul, p. 33 ff, in: SVOLOPOULOS, C., op. cit., p. 455.

Turks”, as the requirement for “*a renaissance of the East originating from the East*”.¹⁸ It can therefore be concluded that K. Skalieris’s initiatives, as well as the general ideological principles that prevailed them, converged with the directions and views of the Western governments and the Masonic circles of Paris, London and Istanbul. Nevertheless, as K. Svolopoulos notes, it cannot be assumed that these actions were part of an orchestrated activity. What can be assumed, beyond doubt, is the identity of views of Skalieris, his Ottoman “Brothers” and the aforementioned Western governments. Besides, Georgios Skalieris, son of Kleanthis, notes that the “*general context of the Constitution was elaborated by His Excellency, Sir Henry Elliot, the Grand Orient de France and Gamvetas himself*”. It is also accepted that the permanent interest of the Prince of Wales for Murat was expressed with regard to the Prince’s two capacities: that of the Royal Prince of England, on the one hand, and that of a prominent Mason, on the other.

In the decades that followed, more revolutionary movements approached Masonry: in 1891, “*La Turquie Libre*” publishes an article strongly criticising the Sultan and supporting Murat V, written by a so-called “*Liberal Ottoman Committee*” —an organisation gathering many Masons.

Another point of interest, cited by Şükrü Hanioğlu,¹⁹ and proving the devotion of these Masons to their ideals, refers to an application presented in 1901 before HM the King of England and Grand Master of the Order, Edward VII, requesting the monarch’s intervention to the Supreme Court in favour of his “*two times Brother, Murat V*”. “*Two times*”, given the Masonic qualities of the King and Murat and their noble descent.

The passage of Masonic influences from the Neo-Ottomans to the Young Turks must be attributed to Kleanthis Skalieris and his activity. The Young Turks started to show interest in Masonry during 1900–1901. Italian Masonry, and particularly the Freemasons of Thessaloniki, played an important part in the Young Turks’ movement, as we shall briefly examine below.

In 1864, the Lodge “*Italia*” of Istanbul (subject to the Grande Oriente d’Italia), founded the Lodge “*Macedonia*” (later renamed to “*Macedonia Risorta*”) in Thessaloniki. One of the most distinguished RWPs of “*Macedonia*

18. See: *Τεκτονικόν Μνημόσυνον του Αδ. Επαμεινώνδα Δεληγιώργη εν τη εν Σμύρνη ελληνική Τεκτονική Στοά «Η Νίκη»* (*Masonic Commemoration of B.: Epaminondas Deligiorgis at the Greek Masonic Lodge “I Niki” of Izmir [Athens, 1881]*), in: SVOLOPOULOS, C., op.cit., p. 455.

19. HANIOĞLU, Ş., “*Notes on the Young Turks and the Freemasons (1875-1908)*”, *M.E.S.* 25, 2, April 1989, p. 188-191.

Rissorta”, who transformed the lodge also to an annex of the “Union and Progress” organisation, Emmanuel Karasso (died in 1934), published an interesting text in the “Rivista Massonica” review, explaining the symbolic significance which only the utterance of the term “Masonry” released to the conscience of these nationalist rebels: “*If we observe clearly and with an open mind what usually happens in countries where governments impose their will with military power, we shall see ardent patriots gathering around the Masonic emblems [...]. This is exactly what happened in Turkey, where one might assume that the variety of ethnic groups and political expediencies would constitute an unsurpassable barrier for Masonic work*”.

Of course, we shall not agree in principle that the racial panspermy of Turkey would constitute an “unsurpassable barrier for Masonic work”. It is true that the tolerant and beyond superstition Masonic spirit was the ideal adhesive material for all these different cultural, racial and religious entities. Freemasonry allowed the members of the different national and social groups to rally around common humanistic values and democratic ideals, as derived from the principles of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. There are many examples of this. Indeed, one of the typical examples relates to the evolution of Lodge “Macedonia Rissorta” and to the process by which it was gradually transformed into a revolutionary society. The information is provided by E. Karasso’s successor in the leadership of the Lodge, M. Levy.²⁰

The active involvement of the Lodge in the opposition started with the arrival of three Masons, who availed themselves to participate in its works and requested its support “*against the intensifying persecution of the largest part of the intelligentsia of the Ottoman Empire, with the only cause being their love for liberty*”. These Masons were Talaat Pasha (1874–1921), Midhat Şükrü (1874–1957) and Rahmî Bey. It is 1903, a few years before these Masons created the *Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*. Further down, the Italian text mentions that two more liberal Turks “net products” of “Macedonia Rissorta” joined the newcomers and created with them “*il primo gruppo di agitazione organizzato del partito dei Giovani Turchi*”. We should also stress the remark of Ettore Ferrari that the principal cadres of the “Union and Progress” Committee (Young Turks) in Thessaloniki were all Masons. Of course, Zarcone underlines that Ferrari is rather exaggerating in this point and suggests that many, but not all, members and high-rank cadres of the Committee were Masons, and cites as example the chairman of the organisation, Mehmet Tâhir.

20. Levy provided this information to E. Ferrari. («La Massoneria et la rivoluzione turca», *Accacia*, Roma, ottobre 1910, p. 121-131).

3. Conclusions

It would be possible to cite many more items proving the close relationship between the Young Turks and Freemasonry. However, this would be beyond the scope of this text. What is important is to prove that Bektashism, Masonry and the liberal nationalistic ideology operated like communicating vessels in the Ottoman Empire, during this era.

This conclusion is necessary in order to realise the political utility (as pertains to the national and cultural approximation between Turkey and its neighbouring Mediterranean countries) of a part of the –Sufi-reliant– mystic Orders, particularly the Islamic-like orders and/or the orders of Islamic origin, i.e. the majority of the Orders.

In conclusion, it can be said that these two Orders (Bektashism and Masonry) had a common Neoplatonic philosophical basis and professed principles of tolerance for heterodoxy and religion. Masonry adopted Neoplatonism for the reasons known per se, which were “politically” formed during the 18th century, while Bektashism, having assimilated a major part of the Greek–Ionian and Neoplatonic syncretic influences, realised that it could exploit these principles to increase the number of its supporters within the context of the dissolving multinational, formerly Byzantine, mosaic. These supporters would derive from a common Hellenic cultural superstructure, even though presenting many differences in terms of customs, traditions and beliefs –mainly in terms of religion.

The 18th century was catalytic for both these orders, whose structure and organisation formed an excellent shell for hosting an –indeed liberalising– ideology, which commenced with the Treaty of Westphalia and matured to form an ideology and a political thought with the French Revolution.

No matter how consciously this was effected, the operation of the two Orders (the Bektashi and Masonry), led to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and to the “distribution of its remnants”. It is therefore natural, at least in terms of ideology, that these Orders have always been considered as having assimilated a political thought characterised by the prevalence of secularism, the rejection of religious absolutism and the trend for religious tolerance. Of course, we always refer to the Sufi Bektashi and all other orders that adopt the Bektashi political philosophy, such as for example the Order of Nurju.

It should of course be noted that these transformed orders are prevailed by the nationalistic –and indeed the chauvinistic– element, such as anti-communism.

Therefore, it is logical for these orders to turn, by nature and destination, to Kemalism and to become, in future Turkey, the *par excellence* evangelists of Kemalist/nationalistic secularism for the “milder” religious masses of Asia Minor and Central Asia (in which the Islamic conscience is significantly mod-

ernised —something that couples with the liberal Bektashi spirit). These masses cannot distinguish between the notions of “secret” (which *simply conceals the fact that “there is no secret”*) and “sacred” (which, of course, is “conceived” in the form of a “secret”).

Furthermore, they constitute an excellent cultural product for export by future Turkey to the West, a continent dehydrated by the “deification” of technology —a modern product in exotic packaging, ready for consumption. And, given the fact that the experiment has already succeeded in the West, who would be the one to prevent it from succeeding even more in the multinational and multi-cultural Balkans? Let us not forget that the centre of Balkan Bektashism is in Albania.

If, on the contrary, the use intended by the geopolitical planner for these cultural exports does not purport to serve the expansionism of circles within Turkey’s leadership, these orders can become the element of consultation and the basis for a mutual cultural understanding and tolerance between the peoples of the Mediterranean and Turkey.

This phase, if it is to develop first, can lay the ground and form the conditions also for a political consultation between these peoples.