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CHRISTIAN HERETICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE REBELLION OF BÖRKLÜCE MUSTAFA AND SHEIKH BEDREDDIN – REAPPRAISING THE EVIDENCE

Abstract. The outbreak and Balkan and Anatolian trajectories of the rebellions of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin in 1416 still pose a series of religio-historic problems which still do not allow a satisfactory and detailed reconstruction of their chronology. Widening the investigation of the source base for these uprisings and their following remains a crucial desideratum for a better understanding of the turbulent period of the Ottoman interregnum and the Ottoman-Byzantine transition in eastern Anatolia in the early fifteenth century. Apart from the social and political features of the rebellions (which have been treated in a variety of contrasting ideological and methodological frameworks, their striking religious dimension has been also increasingly attracting scholarly and general attention. Earlier and recent research on the Ottoman interregnum period have occasionally advanced arguments for the active participation of Christian heretical groups, whether Christian dualist (Bogomil or Paulician) or radical apocalyptic insurgents of Eastern or Western Christian provenance. Drawing on new advances in research on religious trends in the late Byzantine and Balkan Orthodox and early Ottoman religious life and inter-religious contacts, the paper will offer an reassessment of the evidence of such proposed Christian heretical presence in the uprisings, while also exploring other venues for the provenance of their religious and trans-confessional underpinnings.

Keywords: Islamic-Christian relations, syncretism, heresy, Christian dualism, Ottomans, Byzantium, apocalypticism, social movements and rebellions

The outbreak, course and suppressions of the rebellions of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin in 1416 still pose some of the most intricate religious and historiographic problems of the early Ottoman era in the Balkans and Anatolia. The uprisings broke out in the aftermath of the turbulent period of the Ottoman interregnum and civil war (1402–1413) which came in the wake of the defeat of Bayezid I's Ottoman forces (reinforced with his vassals) by Timur's Mongol army at Ankara in 1402. While the study of this period has lately enjoyed

various promising advances of research¹, the current state of evidence still does not allow a satisfying and detailed reconstruction of the provenance and exact chronology of these uprisings. Further close study needs to widen further the exploration of the source base for the principal instigators, leadership, organisation and justification of the rebellions, as well as for the main social groups which came to comprise the two Balkan and Anatolian trends of the rebellious movement.

The social and political aspects of the rebellions, as reconstructable from the sources, have been approached and interpreted in a variety of often contrasting ideological and methodological frameworks. The intriguing if overall abstruse evidence of their religious dimension (arguably verging on supra-confessionalism) also has been for some time the focus of scholarly and general attention. An objective and cautious evidence-based analysis of the religious agendas of the leaders and principal protagonists of the rebellions is of direct relevance to the ongoing and intensifying debates on the religious and cultural processes and transformations in urban centres and rural regions incorporated into the expanding early Ottoman state. Insufficiently illuminated as yet, these processes include the convoluted and controversial area of the nature of Christian-Muslim interrelations on both elite and popular levels in late Byzantine and early Ottoman Balkans and western Anatolia.

Progress in research on the religious climate of the early Ottoman empire (before the eventual more thorough Sunnization of Ottoman ruling establishments and what has been described as the parallel Shi'itization of the Anatolian *Kızılbaş* communities in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century) increasingly shows that it was characterized by fluidity and diversity. Shi'ite-Sunni religious and spiritual borders in particular were often fluctuating and permeable rather than fixed². Hence early Ottoman Islam seems to have been a more heterogeneous phenomenon, with pronounced syncretistic, antinomian and Shi'ite-related/leaning trends, which could provoke religious ferment and religio-political opposition and movements against the centralizing policies of the emerging empire. Among other important developments, during this period the main currents of Anatolian Sufism were evolving, either in their formative phases or already in a transition towards their eventual institutionalization and further growth in the early and mid-Ottoman era³.

¹ See, for example, the recent reconstruction of the political and military developments of the period and its specific political culture in D. KASTRITSIS, *The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*, Leiden–Boston 2007 [= OEI, 38].

² Cf., for example, C. KAFADAR, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1995, p. 76, *passim*; D. TERZIOĞLU, *Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization*, [in:] *The Ottoman World*, ed. C. WOODHEAD, New York 2011, p. 86–100.

³ The process of the migration and re-settlement of Sufi groups into Anatolia proceeded with various intensity from the beginning of the twelfth century onwards – see the wide-ranging reassessment of the extant evidence and recent scholarship in A. KARAMUSTAFA, *Çalendars, Abdâls, Hayderis:*

Other promising avenues for research which have been increasingly and successfully exploited in the last few decades concern the processes of Christian-Islamic syncretisms in the Ottoman era, including the involvement of the dervish orders in these long-term developments. The evolving study of the inter-relations and cross-fertilization between the different local varieties of Christianity and Islam has particularly expanded in the sphere of shared sanctuaries, saints and feasts or some superstitious and quasi-magic beliefs and practices. This accumulated evidence shows that ordinary and mostly illiterate Christians and Muslims (especially those inhabiting rural Balkan and Anatolian areas of the Ottoman empire could blend their respective beliefs and cultic practices much more easily than their corresponding intellectual and religious elites⁴.

An ample religio-historical understanding of the insurrections of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin hence seems essential for the exploration of a number of important and vigorously debated processes and episodes in early Ottoman religious history. Some of these processes raise the major question of whether major Ottoman-era mainline or heterodox religious and political figures and establishments also made attempts at rapprochement and even theological equivalentism between Islam and Christianity. Attempts at Christian-Muslim accord might have developed in missionary frameworks but also arguably could reflect distinct and broader religio-political programmes. Such wider agendas certainly could underlie the reports of Christian-Muslim alliances, solidarity and accord in the primary sources for the rebellious movements of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin. The reported trans-confessional aspects of the insurrections seem also significant in the context of the current reappraisals of the role of western Anatolian and Balkan Christian aristocratic and military figures and clans (and their power-sharing networks) in Ottoman state-building and initial expansions, as well as in the eventual formation of the Ottoman polity and elites. These reappraisals have also necessitated reassessments of the evidence of early Ottoman religious and ideological attitudes to Christianity and the Christian powers that they encountered in western Anatolia and the politically fragmented Balkans, whether as their adversaries,

the Formation of the Bektâşiye in the Sixteenth Century, [in:] *Süleyman the Second and his Time*, ed. H. İNALCIK, C. KAFADAR, Istanbul 1993 [= AI.OTS], p. 121–129; IDEM, *God's Unruly Friends. Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550*, Salt Lake City 1994 [repr. Oxford 2006]; IDEM, *Origins of Anatolian Sufism*, [in:] *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society. Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernisms*, ed. A.Y. OCAK, Ankara 2005, p. 67–95.

⁴ The collection and preliminary analysis of much valuable material on this phenomenon by Frederick William Hasluck (1878–1920): F.W. HASLUCK, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, vol. I–II, Oxford 1929, has been followed by a succession of studies and publications of further evidence of these syncretistic phenomena or reappraising Hasluck's earlier assembled data and conclusions – cf., for example, the various contributions in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia. The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878–1920*, vol. I–III, ed. D. SHANKLAND, Istanbul 2004–2013 [= AI.OTS, 2].

allies or vassals. All this accumulation of new material and explanatory models has led to more nuanced understanding of the various social, tribal and religious groups and networks of the characteristic western Anatolian frontier societies from which emerged the expansive Ottoman emirate.

The increasing awareness of the Byzantine/Christian contribution (apart from the Seljuk and Ilkhanid impact) to the inclusive socio-political “syncretism” of the early Ottoman state’s political and military administration⁵ have also led to some searching questions as to whether a corresponding syncretism also developed in the religious and cultural spheres. All the more that the steady progress of the study of the preceding Seljuk era in Anatolia (1077–1308) has extended beyond the written word into areas of material culture such as art, architecture, inscriptions, coinage and battlefield and conquest archaeology. Hence the chronology and nature of Christian-Muslim co-existence, interaction and symbioses during this period can now be explored in greater depth⁶. Symptomatically, much of this valuable material remains outside the scope and concerns of the contemporaneous and later historical chronicles and official documents, predominantly focused as they are on the grand narratives of military conquests, political events and deeds of rulers, high clerics and warrior chieftains.

At the same time, the Christian-Muslim accord and alliances ventured during the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin uprisings have been reported as going much further than the Christian-Muslim symbioses of the Seljuk era which were largely based on co-existence. This new kind of Christian-Muslim rapprochement went much further than mere fraternization of Christian and Muslim rebels along social lines. The evidence thus raises the question if the insurrections might have represented a manifestation of a religio-political Islamic-Christian synthesis which had been developing for some time among both the ruling elites and rural communities in the early stages of Ottoman conquest⁷. In this line of argument

⁵ H.A. GIBBONS, *The Foundation of the Ottoman Empire. A History of the Osmanlis up to the Death of Bayezid I (1300–1403)*, Oxford 1916; S. VRYONIS, *The Byzantine Legacy and Ottoman Forms*, DOP 23/24, 1969/1970, p. 251–308.

⁶ Cf. the syntheses of the evidence in M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée dans les Balkans ottomans. Vie du cheikh Bedreddin, le “Hallâj des Turcs”, 1358/59–1416*, Istanbul 1995, p. 5–35; K. HOPWOOD, *Christian-Muslim Symbiosis in Anatolia*, [in:] *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage...*, p. 13–30; cf. the contributions in *Islam and Christianity in Medieval Anatolia*, ed. A.C.S. PEACOCK, B. DE NICOLA, S.N. YILDIZ, Burlington, VT 2015.

⁷ H.W. LOWRY, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, Albany 2003, esp. p. 131–144; K. BARKEY, *Empire of Difference. The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge–New York 2008, p. 169–176 (K. Barkey provides a sociological framework to this thesis). Cf. the view of E. Zachariadou that Sheikh Bedreddin’s “revolution” aimed to establish a “state based on a new religion derived from both Islam and Christianity”, E. ZACHARIADOU, *Religious Dialogue between Byzantines and Turks During the Ottoman Expansion*, [in:] *Religionssprache im Mittelalter*, ed. B. LEWIS, F. NIEWÖHNER, Wiesbaden 1992, p. 295–304, at 301–302. A comparable and earlier version of this theory has been applied to the regime of one of the Ottoman princes of the interregnum period, Musa Çelebi, in the Balkans

the attempt to foster such Islamic-Christian synthesis reflected the new and changing political realities in the early Ottoman Balkans and Anatolia and came into conflict with the “high” Sunni Islam of the Ottoman urban administrative structures. The latter emerged victorious from this conflict and in the following decades during the successive reigns of Murad II and Mehmed II between 1421 and 1481 imposed further centralization and the stricter social and religious order of institutionalized Sunni Islam.

This attractively structured theory draws on novel approaches to and insights in the primary written records and surviving material culture of the early Ottoman era and would parallel comparable developments in regions newly annexed to Islamic rule. The period of Ottoman empire-building and initial conquests, however, still abounds in massive gaps and insurmountable research problems⁸ and such a reconstruction accordingly remains a “highly speculative” alternative to the construction of early Ottoman political and religious history in later Ottoman sources⁹. The other major problem is that the extant evidence of the Sheikh Bedreddin rebellion in the Balkans is insufficient to allow a conclusive reconstruction of Christian participation in its organization and abortive course. Hence the direct and circumstantial evidence of Christian involvement in and support for the Börklüce Mustafa insurrection in the Anatolian Aegean coastal area acquires even more importance, though the local Anatolian characteristics (despite some parallels) differed in a number of important respects from the north-eastern and eastern Balkans traversed by Sheikh Bedreddin in preparation for the armed rebellion¹⁰.

Both early and current research on Börklüce Mustafa’s rebellion have focused and spent much effort on identifying and reconstructing the social, socio-economic, political and religious realities behind the account of the insurrection in Doukas’ *Historia Turko-Bizantina*¹¹, with its assertions about the ideals of

(he acted as a co-sultan and reigned over the European/Balkan Ottoman provinces in 1411–1413 and appointed Sheikh Bedreddin as a chief military judge, *cadıasker*, in 1411) in P. WITTEK, *De la défaite d’Ankara à la prise de Constantinople*, REI 12, 1938, p. 21–4; cf. the critique of this approach to Musa Çelebi’s reign and policies in C. IMBER, *Paul Wittek’s De la défaite d’Ankara à la prise de Constantinople*, OARA 5, 1986, p. 65–81. Cf. also N. Siniosoglou’s thesis of that Sheikh Bedreddin’s syncretistic religio-political reformism represented “an attempt at unifying the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions into a universal religion destined to subvert the Ottoman establishment”, N. SINIOSSOGLU, *Sect and Utopia in Shifting Empires: Plethon, Elissaios, Bedreddin*, BMGS 36.1, 2012, p. 38–55, at p. 51–52.

⁸ See, for example, the well-known definition of the earliest history of the Ottomans as a “black hole”, with any attempt to fill it, resulting *simply in the creation of more fables* in C. IMBER, *The Myth of Osman Gazi*, [in:] *The Ottoman Emirate (1300–1389)*, ed. E. ZACHARIADOU, Rethymon 1993, p. 66–76, at p. 75.

⁹ H.W. LOWRY, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State...*, p. 143.

¹⁰ On the differences between these two rebellions, cf. N. ANTOV, *The Ottoman “Wild West”. The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Cambridge 2017, p. 103.

¹¹ DOUKAS, *Historia Turko-Bizantina*, ed. et trans. V. GRECU, *Istoria Turco-Bizantina*, Bucharest 1958; for the account of Börklüce Mustafa’s revolt, cf. ch. 21.11–14, 149–153. Translations in DOUKAS,

communal property, voluntary poverty and Christian-Muslim equality advocated by the rebels, as well as its messianic and prophetic aspects. The history of the study of the Börklüce Mustafa's insurrection displays an obvious tendency to project modern political and social concerns and/or agendas on the motives and goals of the insurrection. This is especially visible in cases where Börklüce Mustafa's movement is regarded as entirely or predominantly a manifestation of a violent peasant, anti-feudal protest, triggered by socio-economic conditions and socio-political conflicts or shifts during the early Ottoman conquests and the Ottoman interregnum period. This approach has been most forcefully and consistently advanced in the Eastern Block's institutionalized Marxist historiographies of the Ottoman empire during the Cold War period¹² (or in some contemporary politicized leftist ideological schemas).

At the same time, the possibility that Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa could have joined and transformed the two rebellious social movements which were already in progress in the Balkans and Anatolia, initially as participants and not as principal instigators, cannot be ignored. An analogous evolution of socio-political engagement could be indeed discerned in other popular uprisings which were not necessarily triggered by social and economic crises and conditions. If Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa did not act as the main ideologues of the revolts at the time of their outbreak, these uprisings were not necessarily linked (at least in their early stages) to their personal beliefs and agendas¹³. Nevertheless, the evidence of Sheikh Bedreddin's travels in Anatolia and the Balkans and his accumulation of associations with major political regional players prior to the insurrection do suggest that he was already involved in the establishment of a network of anti-Ottoman alliances. The political objectives of the rebellion

Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks. An Annotated Translation of "Historia Turco-Byzantina", ed. et trans. H.J. MAGOULIAS, Detroit 1975; DOUKAS, *Historia Turco-Bizantina*, ed. et trans. J. DAYANTIS, Doukas, *histoire turco-byzantine*, Lille 2004. On Doukas' *Historia Turco-Bizantina*, as a source on Christian-Muslim relations, cf. now G. PRINZING, Doukas, [in:] *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History (1350–1500)*, vol. V, ed. D. THOMAS, A. MALLETT, Leiden–Boston 2013, p. 469–478.

¹² A brief treatment of references to Soviet and Bulgarian Cold War-era historiography of the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin movement can be found in N. GRAMATIKOVA, *XIV. Yüzlü Sonundan XV. Yüzlü Başına Kadar Gerçekleşen Olayların Biyografik ve Tarihsel Kaynağı Olarak Simavnalı Şeyh Bedreddin'in Hafız Halil Tarafından Yazılan Menâkıbname's*, [in:] *International Börklüce Mustafa Symposium / Uluslararası Börklüce Mustafa Sempozyumu*, ed. A. KAYA et al., Izmir 2017, p. 141–187, at p. 144–147; for a systematic application of Marxist methodology to the rebellions of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin, cf. E. WERNER, *Häresie, Klassenkampf und religiöse Toleranz in einer islamisch-christlichen Kontaktzone: Bedr ed-Din und Börklüce Mustafa*, ZG 12, 1964, p. 255–276; IDEM, *Ketzer und Weltverbesserer. Zwei Beiträge zur Geschichte Südosteuropas im 13. und 15. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1974, p. 27–47.

¹³ S. SALGIRLI, *The Rebellion of 1416: Recontextualizing an Ottoman Social Movement*, JESHO 55, 2012, p. 32–73.

may indeed reflect several political programs¹⁴. There a number of indications that Sheikh Bedreddin's rebellion was related with the simultaneous revolt of the Ottoman Prince Mustafa Düzme (the False)¹⁵ and that Sheikh Bedreddin's Anatolian travels and designs represented an endeavour to form an anti-Ottoman political alliance with the lord of Smyrna (Izmir), Cünayd¹⁶, and the Anatolian emirates of Karaman¹⁷ and Germiyan¹⁸. This network of anti-Ottoman alliances clearly possessed some kind of a coherent political programme which underpinned the rebellion from its onset. The reports of the announcement of the Balkan insurrection in the sources¹⁹ suggest strong links between the political agendas of the Balkan and Anatolian rebellions. The important role of the (formerly) enfeoffed and disaffected cavalry in Sheikh Bedreddin's revolt and its downfall indicates another military-political power base for his movement, with its specific socio-economic interests²⁰. At the same time, the evidence of Börklüce Mustafa's leadership of the Anatolian revolt demonstrates some of the obvious traits of charismatic leadership (prophetic claims, miracle-making²¹, etc.) which find analogies both in contemporary Europe and in earlier oppositional (especially Shi'ite) movements

¹⁴ N. ANTOV, *The Ottoman "Wild West"...*, p. 104.

¹⁵ Cf. N. FILIPOVIĆ, *Princ Musa i šejh Bedreddin*, Sarajevo 1971, ch. 10, *passim*; M. BALIVET, *Un épisode méconnu de la campagne de Mehmed 1^{er} en Macédoine: L'apparition de Serrès (1416/819 H.)*, Tur 18, 1986, p. 137–146; D. KASTRITSIS, *The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin in the Context of the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413*, [in:] *Halcyon Days in Crete VII*, ed. A. ANASTASOPOULOS, Rethymno 2012, p. 221–238, at p. 236; M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 80–85.

¹⁶ DOUKAS, *Historia Turko-Bizantina*, p. 115–161, 18.5–22.6; on the possible alliance between Sheikh Bedreddin and Cünayd, cf. M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 80–85, 88–91.

¹⁷ HALİL BİN İSMÂİL BİN ŞEYH BEDRÜDDİN MAHMÛD, *Simavna Kadısioğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, ed. A. GÖLPINARLI, İ. SUNGURBEY, Istanbul 1967 (cetera: HALİL BİN İSMÂİL, *Simavna Kadısioğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*), p. 86–87.

¹⁸ Cf. N. FILIPOVIĆ, *Princ Musa...*, ch. 10; H.E. ÇİPA, *Contextualizing Şeyh Bedreddin. Notes on Halil b. İsmâ'il's Menâkıb-ı Şeyh Bedreddin b. İsrâ'il* (sic), [in:] *Şinasi Tekin'in Anısına. Uygurlardan Osmanlıya*, Istanbul 2005, p. 285–95, at p. 290; D. KASTRITSIS, *The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin...*, p. 229–231; M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 80–85.

¹⁹ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarih*, ed. K. YAVUZ, Y. SARAC, Istanbul 2003 (cetera: AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarih*), p. 427; NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-numa: Neşri Tarihi*, vol. II, ed. F.R. UNAT, M.A. KOYMEN, Ankara 1957 (cetera: NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-numa: Neşri Tarihi*), p. 541–547; ORUÇ BEĞ, *Oruç Beğ Tarihi*, [*Osmanlı Tarihi (1288–1502)*], ed. N. ÖZTÜRK, Istanbul 2014, p. 47–49; MÜNECCİMBAŞI AHMET DEDE, *Müneccimbaşı Tarihi*, vol. I, ed. I. ERÜNSAL, *Saha-if-ül-Ahbar fi Vekayi ül-a'sar*, Istanbul 1974, p. 189–190; HOCA SÂDEDDİN EFENDİ, *Tâci'ü't-tevârih*, vol. II, ed. İ. PARMASIZOĞLU, Ankara 1974–1979 [repr. 1999], p. 179; M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 80–85.

²⁰ HALİL BİN İSMÂİL, *Simavna Kadısioğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, p. 111; AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarih*, p. 427; NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-numa: Neşri Tarihi*, vol. II, p. 547; *Die Altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken*, pars 1, *Text und Variantenverzeichnis*, ed. F. GIESE, Breslau 1922, p. 54, 55.

²¹ DOUKAS, *Historia Turko-Bizantina*, p. 149–150.

in the Islamic world. These analogies do not diminish the social dimension of the Börklüce Mustafa uprising but indicate that it is hardly possible to isolate its social from its religious and political features²².

The decades preceding the rebellion witnessed dramatic social changes, escalating forms of protest from the urban and rural poor, as well as anti-aristocratic tensions and violence in the western Anatolian and Balkan regions controlled by the Ottomans, the Aegean emirates and fractured Byzantium. These turbulent socio-political shifts and transformations undoubtedly impacted crucially the social dynamics and aspirations of the Börklüce Mustafa movement²³. Such emphasis on the socio-economic dimension of the insurrections, however, should not downplay or ignore the cumulative evidence of the various written and material culture records, attesting their religious features, and in the case of Sheikh Bedreddin, their dynastic aspects. The socio-economic approach alone cannot account for the complexity and diversity of this evidence, including the participation of the *torlak* mendicant dervishes in the the Börklüce Mustafa revolt²⁴. Arguments for parallels between some of the reported notions of socio-religious utopianism of the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin movements, on one hand, and their contemporary, George Gemistos Plethon, on the other²⁵, also deserve a fresh reappraisal.

A growing amount of data and research indicates that the aspirations for Christian-Muslim solidarity and equality articulated in the sources for the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin movements need to be explored and contextualized in the wider framework of the evolving trends towards Christian-Muslim theological and religious-political accord during the fifteenth century²⁶ (as well as some earlier precedents). Arguments that the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin uprisings represented the high point of a movement towards “Islam-ochristian synthesis” need to integrate the earlier and newly made available data regarding the nature, tensions and patterns of Islamic-Christian syncretism (and

²² Cf. D. Kastritsis's comments on the impossibility of studying Sheikh Bedreddin's rebellion as “purely social, political or religious phenomenon” as it represented a combination of these characteristics, D. KASTRITSIS, *The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin...*, p. 238.

²³ See the up-to-date analysis of these social, economic and political developments in S. SALGIRLI, *The Rebellion of 1416...*

²⁴ HALİL BIN İSMÂİL, *Simavna Kadısoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, p. 84–94, 117. On the participation of the *torlak* dervishes under the leadership of Torlak Kemal (described as a disciple of Sheikh Bedreddin) in the rebellion of Börklüce Mustafa, cf. *Die Altosmanischen Anonymen Chroniken*, ed. F. GIESE, p. 54–55; AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları'nın Tarih*, p. 426; NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-numa: Neşri Tarihi*, vol. II, p. 543, 544. On the *torlak* dervishes, cf. also A.Y. OCAK, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Marjinal Sufilik. Kalenderiler, XIV–XVII. Yüzyıllar*, Ankara 1992, p. 74–85; KARAMUSTAFA, *God's Unruly Friends...*, p. 65–67.

²⁵ Cf., for example, N. SINOSSOGLU, *Sect and Utopia...*, p. 51–52; M. BALIVET, *Deux partisans de la fusion religieuse des chrétiens et des musulmans au XV^e siècle*, *BuÇ* 10, 1980, p. 363–390.

²⁶ Cf., for example, M. BALIVET, *Deux partisans...*, *passim*; IDEM, *Islam mystique...*, chs. 1–2.

anti-syncretism)²⁷. The same applies to new studies of the fourteenth and fifteenth century fortunes of those major (originally) Christian families and figures who took an active and crucial part in the early Ottoman conquests and power struggles, including those of the interregnum period²⁸.

The inter-relations and inter-dependencies between the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin uprisings are repeatedly asserted in the written testimonies and Sheikh Bedreddin is reported to have enjoyed considerable popularity and following in the Smyrna area. The comparative survey of utopian, universalistic, prophetic, messianic and egalitarian ideas in the sources for the Börklüce Mustafa uprising and the teachings of Sheikh Bedreddin thus clearly needs to be further widened. Starting with the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin-related accounts in the Ottoman chronicles, Sheikh Bedreddin's *Menakıbnâme* (composed by his grand-son, Halil bin İsmâil)²⁹, earlier ground-breaking research³⁰ has paved the way for a scrutiny of his own writings, lately and with a mixed success for notions anticipating the radical agendas of the 1416 uprisings³¹.

While critically sifting through the evident agendas of its author, evolving research on the *Menakıbnâme*, in particular, has made it possible to chart the intellectual and religious evolution of Sheikh Bedreddin during his extensive travels and his eventual and intensive involvement with mysticism, mystical and Sufi milieu³² (his proficient scholarship in law and theology is attested also in other sources)³³. The *Menakıbnâme* contains also some useful indications regarding the religious and political networks and alliances he was seeking and establishing. At the same time, other episodes and assertions in the *Menakıbnâme* need to be treated critically (such as the posited Seljukite ancestry of Sheikh³⁴ and the exact

²⁷ Cf., for example, T. KRSTIĆ, *Contested Conversions to Islam. Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, Stanford, CA 2011, p. 50–75.

²⁸ H. LOWRY, *Fourteenth Century Ottoman Realities. (In Search of Hacı-Gazi Evrenos)*, Istanbul 2012; M. KIPROVSKA, *The Mihaloğlu Family: Gazi Warriors and Patrons of Dervish Hospices*, OArA 32, 2008, p. 173–202; EADEM, *Byzantine Renegade and Holy Warrior: Reassessing the Character of Köse Mihal, a Hero of the Byzantino-Ottoman Borderland*, JTUS 40, 2013 (= *Defterology. Festschrift in Honour of Heath Lowry*, ed. S. KURU, B. TEZCAN), p. 245–269.

²⁹ HALİL BIN İSMÂİL, *Sınavna Kadıoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*.

³⁰ Cf. respectively F. BABINGER, *Scheich Bedr ed-Din, der Sohn des Richters von Simāw*, DI 11, 1921, p. 1–106 (for analysis of the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin-related material in the Ottoman chronicles) and H.J. KISSLING, *Das Menâqıbnâme Scheich Bedr ed-Din's, des Sohnes des Richters von Samāvna*, ZDMG 100, 1950, p. 112–176 (for analysis of the *Menakıbnâme*).

³¹ Cf., for example, V. TİMURÖĞLU, *Varıdat*, Ankara 1979; İ.Z. EYUBOĞLU, *Şeyh Bedreddin ve Varıdat*, Istanbul 1980, and the contributions in *Şeyh Bedreddin (1358?–1420)*, ed. A.H. KÖKER, Kayseri 1996.

³² HALİL BIN İSMÂİL, *Sınavna Kadıoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, p. 5–7.

³³ İBN 'ARABŞAH, *al-'Uqūd al-naşîha*, trans. A. GÖLPINARLI, *Sınavna Kadıoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin*, Istanbul 1966, p. X.

³⁴ HALİL BIN İSMÂİL, *Sınavna Kadıoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, p. 5–7; on the validity of this claim and Shaykh Bedreddin's quest for political legitimacy, cf. H. İNALCIK, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age, 1300–1600*, London 1973, p.188–189; A.Y. OCAK, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler Yahut Dairenin Dışına Çıkanlar (15.–17. Yüzyıllar)*, Istanbul 2013, p. 170.

nature of his encounter with the Orthodox clerics at Chios)³⁵ or contradict other sources (like the rejection of the tradition of his claim to the sultanate attributed to him in the Ottoman chronicles³⁶).

Though it is tempting to approach Shaykh Bedreddin as a “martyr for the co-existence between Christianity and Islam”³⁷ in the evolution of Anatolian heterodoxy and inter-religious tolerance³⁸, the contradictory nature of the sources makes it difficult to piece together his actual aspiration and designs. Exploring the Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa movements in the wider context of comparable trends in the contemporary Islamic world³⁹ would undoubtedly provide some crucial clues to their possible religious provenance. Such clues may be sought in the extensive trajectories of Sheikh Bedreddin’s travels and their potential relations with the wide-ranging and active mystical-millenarian networks, some of which were opposed to centralized Timurid rule at that time⁴⁰. Sheikh Bedreddin’s attested involvement with Hurufi networks, both in their cradle-lands and their extensions in areas under Ottoman control also seem with increasing certainty to be of potentially great importance⁴¹ for the reconstruction of his religio-political vision and utopianism. Significantly enough, Hurufism’s emphatic focus on prophetology⁴², messianism and apocalypticism drew on Christian apocalyptic works⁴³ in creating the complex and eclectic Hurufi belief system.

³⁵ HALİL BİN İSMÂİL, *Simavna Kadısıoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı*, p. 92. On this episode cf. M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 58–63; D. KASTRITSIS, *The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin...*, p. 230; S. SALGIRLI, *The Rebellion of 1416...*, p. 52 (S. Salgırlı considers elements of the narrative a “hagiographical trope”, intended “to adorn the sheikh with a saintly influence that extends even to Christians”).

³⁶ AŞIKPAŞAZADE, *Osmanoğulları’nın Tarih*, p. 427; NEŞRİ, *Kitab-ı Cihan-numa: Neşri Tarihi*, vol. II, p. 546.

³⁷ H. COTSONIS, *Aus der Endzeit von Byzanz: Bürklüdsche Mustafa. Ein Märtyrer für die Koexistenz Zwischen Islam und Christentum*, BZ 50.2, 1958, p. 397–404.

³⁸ M. KESKIN, *Der Aufstand Scheich Bedreddin Mahmud Isra’ils und die Toleranzidee in der anatolischen Heterodoxie*, Berlin 2003.

³⁹ An example of such survey may be found in A.Y. OCAK, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler*, Istanbul 1998, p. 136–202; cf. C. IMBER, *The Ottoman Empire: 1300–1481*, Istanbul 1990, p. 83–84.

⁴⁰ Cf. now I.E. BINBAŞ, *Intellectual Networks in Timurid Iran Sharaf al-Dīn ‘Alī Yazdī and the Islamic Republic of Letters*, Cambridge 2016.

⁴¹ Cf. M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 42, 51, 54, 108–110; A.Y. OCAK, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar...*, p. 158, 198; D. KASTRITSIS, *The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin...*, p. 225–226, 227, 231, 238; N. SINOSSOĞLOU, *Sect and Utopia...*, p. 44, 51–52. On the historical geography of Hurufi networks in the fifteenth century, cf. C.H. FLEISCHER, *Ancient Wisdom and New Sciences: Prophecies at the Ottoman Court in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries*, [in:] *Falnama. The Book of Omens*, ed. M. FARHAD, S. BAĞCI, Washington, D.C. 2009, p. 232–243; cf. I. MÉLIKOFF, *Hadji Bektach: un mythe et ses avatars. Genèse et évolution du soufisme populaire en Turquie*, Leiden 1998 [= IHC, 20], p. 175f, 237f.

⁴² Cf. now O. MIR-KASIMOV, *Ummis versus Imams in the Hurufi Prophetology: an Attempt at a Sunni/Shi’i Synthesis*, [in:] *Unity in Diversity. Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam*, ed. IDEM, Leiden 2013 [= IHC, 105], p. 221–247.

⁴³ O. MIR-KASIMOV, *Words of Power. Hurufi Teachings between Shi’ism and Sufism in Medieval Islam. The Original Doctrine of Fad Allāh Astarābādī*, London 2015, p. 427–434.

All these Islamic (and Islamic-Christian) eclectic contexts are also of considerable importance for a better understanding of the continuous reappraisals of and attitudes to the spiritual and ideological legacy of Sheikh Bedreddin in Ottoman and post-Ottoman cultures, religiosities and Sufi traditions⁴⁴. They could also shed new light on the historical and symbolic afterlife of the Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa movements in the fifteenth century and in later contexts of religious dissent, non-conformism and sectarianism. The later contexts include the self-identity of some Balkan Alevi groups which have retained foundational narratives focused on Sheikh Bedreddin⁴⁵. Given the foundational role of Sheikh Bedreddin in these Balkan Alevi group identities, there have been attempts to integrate his uprising and its agendas within the ideological models of Slavo-Turkic continuities and imaginaries which have been advanced since the nineteenth century to explain the Islamicisation and Turkification processes in the Balkans⁴⁶.

Early and more recent reiterations of these Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginaries as a rule draw on a general preconceived model of a medieval Eastern Christian dualist (Bogomil and Paulician) core layers in Alevism. However, the proposed claims for a Bogomil and Paulician Christian dualist formative impact on Alevism in areas like organizational hierarchy, socio-political stances, angelology, diabolology, visionary mysticism and eschatology are on the whole either anachronistic or historically flawed and untenable⁴⁷. Their more recent formulations in South-East Europe and Turkey have been further compromised by their application of dubious methodologies and strategies which have included the drastic falsification of primary source material to implement obvious ideological and ethno-confessional agendas⁴⁸. In the case of Sheikh Bedreddin the allegations of his doctrinal transgressions did not include accusations of anything approaching theological dualism, while his own writings remain emphatic about the tenet of the “Oneness of Being”. Hence claims for socio-religious continuity between Christian dualist

⁴⁴ Cf. the preliminary analysis in A. GÖLPINARLI, *Simavna Kadısoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin*, Istanbul 1966, p. 42–48; N. FILIPOVIĆ, *Princ Musa...*, ch. 11; M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, ch. 3.

⁴⁵ On these groups, cf. H. ГАВРИЛОВА, *Движението на шейх Бедреддин Махмуд и неговите последователи*, [in:] *Българският петнадесети век. Сборник с доклади за българската обща и културна история през XV век, София, 19–21. X. 1992*, ed. A. МИНЧЕВА, Б. РАЙКОВ, К. ИВАНОВА, София 1993, p. 93–107; F. DE JONG, *Problems concerning the Origins of the Qizilbaş in Bulgaria: Remnants of the Safaviyya?*, [in:] *Convegno sul tema. La Shiʿa nell'Impero Ottomano (Roma, 15 Aprile 1991)*, Rome 1993, p. 203–216, at p. 205; T. ZARCONI, *Nouvelles perspectives dans les recherches sur les Kızılbaş – Alévis et les Bektachis de la Dobroudja, de Deli Orman et de la Thrace orientale*, AMO 4, 1992, p. 1–11; M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 96–99, 108–111.

⁴⁶ Y. STOYANOV, *Modern and Post-Secular Alevi and Bektāšī Religiosities and the Slavo-Turkic Heretical Imaginary*, [in:] *The Experience of Faith in Slavic Cultures and Literatures in the Context of Postsecular Thought*, ed. D. SOSNOWSKA, E. DRZEWIECKA, Warsaw 2018, p. 128–144.

⁴⁷ Analysis and critique in Y. STOYANOV, *Early and Recent Formulations of Theories for a Formative Christian Heterodox Impact on Alevism*, BJMES 37.3, 2010, p. 261–272.

⁴⁸ Y. STOYANOV, *Early and Recent Formulations...*, p. 271–272; H. AKSUT, H. HARMANCI, Ü. ÖZTÜRK, *Alevi Tarih Yazmında Skandal*, Istanbul 2010.

Bogomilism and Sheikh Bedreddin's movement in the Balkans⁴⁹ still lack any theological and doctrinal data which could support conjectures of Christian dualist (Bogomil and/or Paulician) participation in his insurrection and support for his broader agendas and goals.

The communal use of property, collectivism and egalitarianism preached during the Börklüce Mustafa's rebellion invite obvious parallels with earlier Islamic socio-religious movements such as the tenth-century Qarmatians⁵⁰ though without any evidence of historical connections bridging the four-century gap between the two movements. Some earlier trends in the study of Bogomilism and Paulicianism attributed similar teachings to their medieval communities and drawing on such often ideologized reconstructions, attempts have been made to integrate them into the social base of the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin movements⁵¹ but without offering any concrete evidence of the social nature and features of these communities in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It seems quite plausible that Borkluce Mustafa's teaching of the communal use of property (as reported in the Doukas account of the rebellion) reflects Islamic apocalyptic traditions on the sharing of wealth and abolishing of poverty in the end times⁵². It is also worth noting that as the physical location of the "Seven Churches of Asia" in Revelation 2–3, the Western Anatolian and the Aegean coastal area played a continuous role in medieval Christian apocalyptic lore. Smyrna and Philadelphia appear, moreover, in medieval Christian polemical literature as prominent centres of Christian dissent, heterodoxy and heresy. Important communities or "churches" of the early medieval Paulician movement in Anatolia at the height of its influence and high medieval Eastern Christian dualism were located in the region⁵³. As in the case of other Balkan and Anatolian areas, this again raises the inevitable question as to whether there may have been actual historical links and continuity between the earlier outbreaks of Christian dissent and heterodoxy and the later instances of Islamic heterodox and antinomian movements which spread and challenged Ottoman authorities in the same or adjacent areas⁵⁴.

⁴⁹ For such claims and theories, cf. H.Z. ÜLKEN, *İslâm düşüncesi*, Istanbul 1946, p. 188–198; П. ПАРУШЕВ, *Шейх Бедредин еретика*, София 1982 [repr. in: *Трима радетели за мюсюлмано-християнско единение през XV век*, ed. В. ГЮЗЕЛЕВ, София 2012, p. 142–232, at p. 159, 185, 228]; D. АВСЛОĞЛУ, *Türklerin tarihi*, Istanbul 1978, p. 11, 816–818; П. КОНСТАТИНОВ, *История на България*, София 1992, p. 42; M. DAŞ, *Bizans'ta Sosyal-Dini İçerikli Bir Halk Hareketi: Bogomiller*, [in:] *International Börklüce Mustafa Symposium...*, p. 293–298.

⁵⁰ M. BALIVET, *Islam mystique et révolution armée...*, p. 78.

⁵¹ See note 37 above.

⁵² A. GÖLPINARLI, *Simavna Kadısoğlu...*, p. 9.

⁵³ Cf. B. HAMILTON, *The Cathars and the Seven Churches of Asia*, [in:] IDEM, *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places*, Aldershot 1999, p. 269–295 [repr.]; Y. STOYANOV, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*, London–New Haven 2000, p. 127–131, 195–202.

⁵⁴ Cf. A.Y. ОСАК, *Un aperçu général sur l'hétérodoxie musulmane en Turquie: réflexions sur les origines et les caractéristiques du Kizilbachisme (Alévisme) dans la perspective de l'histoire*, [in:] *Syncretistic*

Throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth century the Aegean coastal area remained a rather active contact zone of shifting coalitions, frontlines and geopolitics involving the extant regional Byzantine aristocratic and military elites, Muslim and Christian frontier warriors, early Ottomans and their Christian allies, Turkish maritime emirates and the various central and peripheral political or trade players active at that stage in the East Mediterranean and Black Sea areas. This was also a period of intense cross-cultural and cross-religious encounters and interchange for the region which are of undoubted importance for understanding the religious dynamic of the late Byzantine and early Ottoman era in western Anatolia and the southern Balkans.

The Ottoman conquests in Anatolia and the Balkans had already triggered the last phase of Byzantine historical apocalypticism and imperial prophecies which were replete with pronounced eschatological expectations⁵⁵ and deepened the increasing sense of major spiritual crises and dilemmas, especially but not only in the rapidly shrinking Byzantine dominions. Recent research has drawn attention to the potential contribution of contemporary Western apocalypticism to the religious ferment of the period in the Aegean coastal region via the import of sectarian and dissident offshoots of the mendicant orders (mainly the Franciscans) who had been subjected to censure and persecution in Italy⁵⁶. Such groups which adopted and fostered extreme forms of Franciscan Joachimism were reportedly establishing missions and colonies in the East Mediterranean, Near East and Caucasus, including the Aegean coastal zone and islands⁵⁷.

Religious Communities in the Near East, ed. K. KEHL-BODROGI et al., Leiden 1997, p. 195–204; IDEM, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar...*, p. 183; Y. STOYANOV, *On Some Parallels between Anatolian and Balkan Islamic Heterodox Traditions and the Problem of their Co-Existence and Interchange with Popular Christianity*, [in:] *Syncretismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seljoukide et ottoman des XII^e–XVIII^e siècles*, ed. G. VEINSTEIN, Paris 2005, p. 75–119, at 99–101.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. PERTUSI, *Fine di Bisanzio e fine del mondo. Significato e ruolo storico delle profezie sulla caduta di Costantinopoli in Oriente e Occidente*, Rome 1988, *passim*; M. BALIVET, *Textes de fin d'Empire, récits de fin du Monde: à propos de quelques thèmes communs aux groupes de la zone byzantino-turque*, [in:] *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople*, ed. B. LELLOUCH, S. YÉRASIMOS, Paris–Montréal 1999, p. 5–19; I. BELDICEANU, *Péchés, calamités et salut par le triomphe de l'Islam. Le discours apocalyptique relatif à l'Anatolie (fin XIII^e – fin XV^e s.)*, [in:] *Les traditions apocalyptiques*, Lellouch–Yérasimos, p. 19–35; P. GURAN, *Eschatology and Political Theology in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, RESEE 45.1, 2007, p. 73–87.

⁵⁶ К. ЖУКОВ, *К истории религиозных движений в восточном средиземноморье в XIV–XV вв.: новая интерпретация восстания Берклюдже Мустафы в Турции (около 1415 г.)*, ППСб 98, 1998, p. 84–98; K. ZHUKOV, *Börklüce Mustafa, Was he Another Mazdak*, [in:] *Syncretismes et hérésies...*, p. 119–129.

⁵⁷ Analysis of the evidence in К. ЖУКОВ, *К истории религиозных движений...*, p. 87–89. On the stay and activities of Angelo da Clareno (1247–1337), the leader of one of the Fraticelli groups, in Greece, cf. D. BURR, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis*, University Park, PA 2001, p. 279–305.

Franciscan Joachimism had emerged under the impact of radical forms of the practice of the Franciscan way of life and evangelical poverty and also developed a vigorous critique of the papacy, accompanied by eschatological and millenarian speculations. Eventually this apocalyptic ferment contributed to the emergence of movements such as the followers of Fra Dolcino (the Dulcinians) in north Italy and the Taborites in Bohemia in which an apocalyptic understanding of history was reinforced by radical programmes of violent opposition to church and state authorities, legitimizing military action and armed rebellion. Indeed some of the tenets of the Dulcinian movement invite close parallels to those of the Börklüce Mustafa rebellion: egalitarianism, collectivism, communal use of property, violent opposition to the contemporary political status quo⁵⁸. The presence and routes of similar offshoots of heterodox Franciscan Joachimism in the fourteenth-century Aegean coastal area (and their potential input in contemporaneous religious and ideological and cultural struggles) thus broadens the context in which eschatological and millenarian ideas spread and operated in the region during this period.

This line of enquiry seems certain to open new possibilities for exploring the provenance of the ideals of communal property and voluntary poverty practiced by the Börklüce Mustafa movement and its possible apocalyptic dimension. With the current state of evidence, conjectures about possible Christian heretical dualist input in the ideology and organization of the rebellions of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin remain unsupported by any direct or circumstantial data. However, there are growing indications that the Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa uprisings were in some way part of a wider wave and networks of dissenting movements, socio-religious agitation, protest and utopianism which extended from parts of Catholic Europe to the Balkans and Anatolia in the late Byzantine and early Ottoman periods.

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⁵⁸ К. Жуков, *К истории религиозных движений...*, p. 92–93.

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