

**The Symbolic Aspects of a “Holy” Ritual
in a 21st Century Turkish-Muslim Village in Greece**

**Yunanistan’daki Bir 21. Yüzyıl Türk-Müslüman Köyünde
“Kutsal” Bir Ritüelin Sembolik Yönleri**

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The Symbolic Aspects of a “Holy” Ritual in a 21st Century Turkish-Muslim Village in Greece

Sule Chousein Hasan¹

Abstract

This study explores the symbolic and socio-cultural dimensions of the ‘Tekke Pilavı’ (or ‘Dede’ye Pilavı’) ritual in Galini, a small Turkish-Muslim village in Greek Thrace. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the village, the study examines the historical, religious, and social meanings of the ritual, highlighting its links to Bektashi heterodox practices, Ottoman colonization strategies, and contemporary socio-economic transformations. The ritual, which involves communal food preparation and distribution, embodies cultural continuities and discontinuities from Ottoman Bektashi traditions, as well as symbolic resistance to Sunni orthodoxy and patriarchal structures. Women emerge as the key agents in organizing and sustaining the ritual, despite opposition from religious authorities and growing indifference from younger generations. The ritual’s symbolic meaning has shifted over time, from being a vital mechanism of communal sustenance during periods of economic hardship to a contemporary quest for solidarity and cultural affirmation in the face of isolation induced by agricultural modernization and migration. By employing Clifford Geertz’s “thick description” method, as well as drawing on comparative insights from Robert Darn-ton’s “The Great Cat Massacre” and Hans Sabeen’s studies on village discourse, this research situates the ‘Tekke Pilavı’ within broader debates on cultural reproduction, historical memory, and gendered agency in rural societies. The findings suggest that the ritual is both a reflection of Galini’s multi-layered identity as a Turkish-Muslim minority in Greece and a living site of negotiation between local tradition, religious orthodoxy, and modernity.

Keywords: Turkish-Muslim minority in Greece, Bektashi tradition, symbolic anthropology, village ethnography, Geertzian analysis

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Yunanistan'daki Bir 21. Yüzyıl Türk-Müslüman Köyünde “Kutsal” Bir Ritüelin Sembolik Yönleri

Öz

Bu çalışma, Yunanistan'ın Batı Trakya bölgesinde yer alan küçük bir Türk-Müslüman köyü olan Galini (Yalanca)'daki 'Tekke Pilavı' (veya 'Dede'ye Pilavı') ritüelinin sembolik ve sosyo-kültürel boyutlarını incelemektedir. Köyde yapılan etnografik saha çalışmasına dayanarak, ritüelin tarihsel, dini ve toplumsal anlamları ele alınmış; bu anlamların Bektaşî heterodoks uygulamaları, Osmanlı koloni stratejileri ve günümüzdeki sosyo-ekonomik dönüşümlerle bağlantıları vurgulanmıştır. Toplu yiyecek hazırlama ve dağıtımını içeren bu ritüel, Osmanlı Bektaşî geleneklerinden gelen kültürel süreklilikleri ve kopuşları yansıtmakta; ayrıca, Sünni ortodoksluğa ve ataerkil yapılara karşı sembolik bir direnci temsil etmektedir. Ritüelin organizasyonu ve sürdürülmesinde temel aktörler olarak kadınlar öne çıkmaktadır; bu durum dini otoritelerin muhalefetine ve genç kuşakların artan ilgisizliğine rağmen devam etmektedir. Ritüelin sembolik anlamı, ekonomik zorluk dönemlerinde toplumsal dayanışmanın temel bir mekanizması olmaktan, tarım modernizasyonu ve göçün yol açtığı yalnızlık karşısında dayanışma ve kültürel onay arayışına dönüşmüştür. Clifford Geertz'in "kalın betimleme" yöntemi ile Robert Darnton'un "Büyük Kedi Katliamı" ve Hans Sabean'ın köy söylemi üzerine yaptığı çalışmalarından elde edilen karşılaştırmalı bilgilerden yararlanan bu araştırma, 'Tekke Pilavı'nı kültürel yeniden üretim, tarihsel bellek ve köysel topluluklarda toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri üzerine daha geniş tartışmalarla ilişkili bir bağlama yerleştirmektedir. Bulgular, ritüelin Yalanca'nın Yunanistan'daki Türk-Müslüman azınlığının çok katmanlı kimliğinin bir yansıması ve yerel gelenek, dini ortodoksluk ve modernite arasındaki bir müzakere alanı olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yunanistan'daki Türk-Müslüman azınlık, Bektaşî geleneği, sembolik antropoloji, köy etnografisi, Geertzci analiz

I. Context

The rite I will describe is performed in a small Turkish-Muslim lowland village (Galini) in Greek Thrace. The region is geographically situated in the Western section of Thrace; its northern portion lies within Bulgaria; the eastern section is part of Türkiye. Western Thrace is the northeastern territory of Greece, encompassing the provinces of Evros (Dedeağaç), Komotini (Gümülcine) and Ksanthi (İskeçe). This region

hosts the Turkish-Muslim minority exempted from the 1924 Population Exchange and the Greek Orthodox of Istanbul, Imbroz and Tenedos. Today, the 100,000-minority population is predominantly in the provinces of Komotini and Ksanthi and some in the Rhodope mountains. The minority consists of Turks, the prominent component, Pomaks and Muslim Roma. Sunni Islam is the predominant creed, except for a few homogeneous Bektashi villages in the Rhodope Mountains of Evros province. Designated on religious criterion as ‘Muslim’ in the Treaty of Lausanne and in Greece, the predominant language spoken by all three components is Turkish. Pomak is a Slavic/Bulgarian dialect spoken by Pomaks, usually concentrated in the mountainous region of Ksanthi.

Galini is a tiny agricultural village founded on a lower plain area. It consists of about a hundred households and about three hundred inhabitants, almost half of whom live and work in Germany, and a few in Türkiye. The rate of population growth is very low. The average age profile is above 40, and the young families on average have one or two children. The inhabitants depend on agriculture except for a few artisans and professionals such lawyers, teachers, carpenters and mechanics. The peasants are small to medium landowners. The large landowners, the Beys vanished in the 1970s due to land reforms and immigration to Turkey. The village has a mosque and a minority primary school which was closed due to insufficient number of pupils. The villagers are Muslim Turks of the Sunni sect; however, some religious/ cultural practices including this rite are of a heterodox nature, incorporating motifs of Bektashism.

While there is a certain homogeneity in terms of religion (Sunni Muslim), and language (Turkish with a Thracian accent²), the village population reflects the multiethnic Ottoman society. There are a few families of Pomak background, now evident only in the family name (Pomak Hasanlar), otherwise fully subsumed within the Turkish-Muslim culture, a few families with Arab origins, a few others presumably with Tatar origins, and two families with African origins, though the last African-looking people passed away a few years ago. However, Arab, Macedonian, Turkish and Pomak origins in fact can be traced in the roots of almost every family including mine. There is also a separate neighborhood on the exit of the village dominated by the Muslim Roma. This group of people represents the unluckiest group as they are excluded both by the minority and the majority. In their everyday life and cultural practices, they are no different than the mainstream Muslim Turks, except that they have darker skin,

2 The Turkish accent is almost the same with the Turkish spoken by the Eastern Thracians in Turkey and the northern Thracians in Bulgaria.

and are generally poorer and often organize wedding parties with music and dance. The relations between the village inhabitants and the Greek Orthodox in the neighboring villages and counties are usually friendly but limited to work-related issues. Intermarriage is very rare- and takes place, if ever, in larger towns.

II. The Setting

The name of the rite held every year is called either ‘tekke pilavı’ or ‘dede’ye pilav.’ Every year, it is organized by the village women in the spring, when the crocus (yellow flowers) appears on the Dede’s tomb, in the mosque yard. A group of women come together and cook a meal of rice (pilav), bulgur, chickpeas, beans, chicken, butter, and in recent years, meat. The foodstuff is collected from the inhabitants; each family contributes whatever they can or want. When it comes to the collection of food materials, usually the older kids visit the households, or the neighbors bring the stuff to the mosque yard.

The collected materials are cooked in cauldrons on a wood fire. Meat, chicken, rice, and bulgur or beans are cooked in separate pots, but later combined while serving on large trays. Groups of people sit on carpets (kilims) and say ‘Bismillah’ (In the name of God) and sometimes recite the *Fatiha* altogether and eat. No other prayer is cited. Each person uses the spoon brought from home. The most important contributors are usually the ones who had previously promised an offering to this organization. The offerings are made for healing diseases, accidents, or other wishes such as marriage or childbearing. It is usually a sheep, or a calf sacrificed for the ‘Dede’ or ‘Tekke’, two terms used interchangeably.

This ritual altogether looks like a Bektashi ritual. Above all, dede’ and ‘tekke’ are Bektashi concepts. Dede is the counterpart of Imam, and tekke is the place where the Dede, together with his disciples and the ordinary people come together to worship. It is the Bektashi tradition to make an offering for Dede in return for his intercession for the realization of some wishes, particularly for healing.³ According to the Sunni tradition, animals can only be sacrificed for the God (Allah), and not for saints or anyone else. Moreover, this ritual is opposed by the village Imam, educated in the Sunni *medrese*, the Sunni preachers who frequent the village mosque in the holy months of Ramadan. Yet the villagers continue to perform this ritual.

3 F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans, 1879–1920*, ed. Margarat M. Hasluck (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 257.

On the other hand, they continue to fulfill different requirements of the Sunni sect. They fast in the holy month of Ramadan. Usually, the elderly and some middle-aged people pray regularly five times a day. The older women wear headscarves and the *feraces* (the black, long, loose dress without a collar worn as a cloak outside the home by women). The males attend the Friday prayers. The women only go to the mosque to pray the *tarawih* during Ramadan, or when a preacher comes to deliver a sermon. In the mosque, the place for women is separate (upstairs). The funerals are performed entirely according to the Sunni tradition where the Imam cites prayers from the Koran. Women are not allowed to come to the graveyard during the burial. Taking this into consideration, the rite is an anomaly.

Another anomaly to the Sunni belief was the lighting of candles in the tiny grooves in the mosque's front wall surrounding Dede's tomb, because candles in the sanctuary are a typical Bektashi tradition. It was common practice to make an offering to the Dede (Saint), and when it was realized, candles were lit in the grooves. It was fun for children especially; I remember how I enjoyed myself while lighting candles for the realized wishes of my maternal grandmother. Yet she was (is still) a devout Sunni praying five times daily, reciting the Koran frequently...etc. This ritual continued for years despite the contentions of the village Imam and the primary school teacher, himself a minority member who graduated from a Teaching College in Turkey.

As narrated by one of my informants, one day, the teacher, Yusuf Hoja, in the late 1950s, had them closed without informing the villagers. However, a few days later, one of the women who had migrated to Turkey (Keşan), called her family and neighbors in the village, saying that she saw the Dede in her dream, and he ordered the grooves to be immediately opened. Consequently, they were re-opened. Another similar attempt to close them was made by the teacher Reşit Hoja in the late 1970s. A few days later, the son of a family had a traffic accident, and the doctors were concerned he might be disabled. Rumors quickly spread in the village that Dede was punishing the villagers, starting with the family's son who lived closest to the mosque. Consequently, they were reopened by the injured man's father. Soon afterwards, the son recovered.

Eventually, this ritual was terminated one day after the burning candles fell on the arid plants and grass over Dede's tomb and a small fire broke out. Immediately noticed by the Imam and the by-passers, it was put out. The villagers were only then convinced of the dangers of lighting candles and the Imam's recommendation to donate light bulbs to the mosque instead of lighting candles.

III. Village Public Opinion About The Tekke Pilavi

Depending on the fieldwork I conducted in the village between 22nd and 25th April 2008 that included 14 inhabitants, the majority women, I found out that there is profound ambiguity and discrepancy in the perception of the *dede* and *tekke* concepts as well as the meaning of the *tekke pilavi* for people. Except for the Imam, all the informants confused the concepts of *dede* and *tekke* and used them interchangeably. This is also evident in naming the ritual, which they call either ‘*dede*’ye pilav’ or ‘*tekke pilavi*’. According to them, *tekke* and *dede* have the same meaning, denoting the tomb in the mosque yard. On the other hand, no one knows who the tomb belongs to, and even more interesting is that no one cares about who lies there. Two years ago, when the villagers eventually got permission from the authorities to repair the mosque and build a taller minaret, during the construction work, the tomb was partly evacuated and was noticed that contrary to the Sunni rules for burial, the head of the skeleton – the corpse was not buried in the direction of the Kible (Mecca).

As there is no script on the tomb or any written document relating to the identity of the corpse, surprised and puzzled, people began to make up theories about his identity. Suddenly they attributed it to an alien character; maybe it was an Albanian peddler, or a Greek (Rum) or Armenian traveler who accidentally died while passing by the village. The reasons for these different ethnic connotations could be explained by the multicultural characteristics of the society. This creates a paradox in rhetoric, as they claim the ritual is for the *tekke* or *dede*. Then they exhibit an indifferent and alienated attitude towards the tomb’s owner. This came even more as a surprise to me, because during my childhood in the village, (1980-1985), I remember perfectly well that we showed our respects to the *Dede*, as we cited *Fatiha* whenever we passed by the mosque.

The same paradox emerges in the definition of the ‘*dede*’. As mentioned previously, according to the informants, it is either described as the owner of the tomb, used interchangeably with ‘*tekke*’- or the holy figure in the human shape of a ‘grandfather’ seen in dreams by some women, or as seen in real life by some people, and the informant *Saliha Hala*, a sixty-year-old lady who pioneers in the organization of the *tekke pilavi* every year. According to the latter, he is a human prototype; very short, with a beard, wearing a green turban (*sarık*), a *caftan*, a typical Ottoman male dress before modernization. His extremely short height with extraordinary powers; he sometimes shows himself as a shadow or only his sound is heard. Most of my female and male informants said they believed in his existence although they did not see him with their

eyes.

Dede resurfaces in many of the old stories told by villagers; usually it is a sound without a physical appearance or an old man with white hair and beard that appears in the dreams and recommends people what to do in times of trouble. Two of such stories narrated to me are about two families whose babies used to die a few months after they were born in the early 1940s. The Dede told one such family that their babies were killed by the weasels and recommended one of the families to adopt a snake and feed it. The family followed the advice and had three babies who lived. To the second family, whose three babies had died, the Dede advised the pregnant mother to give birth to her next baby in a neighbor's house. The woman followed the advice, and her baby (a son) lived. So, the 'dede' as a mystical, holy, intangible figure has a lot of weight in the village history and everyday life.

As regards offerings, majority of my informants said that they make a vow in cases of illnesses, either of themselves or of family members and for some wishes like building a new house, or for the marriage of their sons and daughters. The offerings are usually *mevlids*, donations to the poor, or a calf or sheep for the next year's tekke pilavı. Yet, the final format of the offering is spelled only by three of my informants, all elderly women. In all three cases, the offerings were made to cure disease. For example, in an incident narrated by Saliha Hala, when her one-year-old granddaughter was very ill and sent by helicopter to the hospital in Thessaloniki, she was very upset.

Neighbors gathered in her house to soothe her that night. While she was weeping, she made a promise to God that she would organize a mevlid if her granddaughter recovered. Suddenly, she heard a voice saying, 'The child will recover if you organize a pilav feast for the tekke'. Instantly she shouted, 'I will.' It was only heard by her, and allegedly by the neighbor woman sitting next to her. When the rest of the people asked why she shouted, she said nothing, and decided to keep it a secret until the next day, when she and her husband, with the help of some neighbors, organized the pilav. During the cooking stage, they got the news that the operation was successful, and the child was fine. She said finally that she had another dream about the tekke pilavı. It was the spring period at the time of the interview, and there were some crocuses on the Dede's tomb.

The sign for the tekke pilavı is not only the blooming of yellow flowers on the Dede's tomb. It is often accompanied by another sign: the dede appearing in dreams and telling people to organize the feast. Again, women see the dreams. According to the

informants, in the past, usually it was the very poor and the widows with kids who saw the dream and the next day would tell other women- usually friends and neighbors and together would set the date. But within years, the women's profile-although still it is the women- have considerably changed. After those widows passed away, the dream was inherited by the ordinary married women. Not only has the profile changed, but also the economic situation in the village.

According to my informants, the economic situation began to improve with the modernization in agriculture, introduction of new machines and irrigation systems in the early 1960s, and the concomitant old age and sickness pensions. The social benefits culminated with the EU membership especially in the post 1990, whereas the income from agriculture diminished and the peasants became dependent on subsidies. For sure, the EU membership has not brought about a significant increase in the income but diminished the socio-economic discrepancies between the poor and the relatively better off in the village.

Consequently, the women who see 'the dream' today are relatively well off and married, but like previously, are the elderly, at least over 50-60 years old. One of my informants, Naide Hala, a seventy-year-old lady, said she had seen the dream last year. She said that she did not see the Dede but the pilav feast; people gathered around the mosque, eating pilav. Soon the preparations started. Nonetheless, again, it is interesting that the dreamer is an old lady, living with her husband- her kids away in Germany- and suffering from a mental disease.

Majority of my informants said that they did not believe in the holiness of this ritual, yet they continued to contribute because it would be impolite to act otherwise, reiterating that although it is done by few it is meant for all. Some informants said ironically that the tekke pilavı 'is the job of some women', implying the pioneer- Saliha Hala and her neighbors. They also contended that it was a superstition and against the Sunni belief, referring to the discussions in religious TV programs and the sermons delivered by the preachers who occasionally come to the mosque. Nonetheless, they said that they accept it as a tradition and they had no objection to its practice. Some of the informants said that they found the occasion kind of entertaining as they witnessed women usually having disputes in the organization of the event and later the gossips on who took home too much rice and meat and who was given very little and whether the pilav that year was cooked well or not. A few of them said the disputes during the organization and the gossip afterward perverted and harmed the holiness of the ritual, and that they had better stop doing it because they were actually sinning

this way. Almost all of my middle-aged informants (women, spouses and mothers, aged between 30 and 40) said they were not interested in the occasion although they contributed.

Anyway, no one said it was a sinful ritual against the Sunni belief and should definitely be abandoned, except for the newly hired Imam (from a remote village), whose contentions against the ritual were not taken into consideration. Thereupon he left the village on that day to protest. Even the old Imam, who implicitly called the pioneer and supporters of the rite as ‘witches’, and the rite as ‘superstition’, said in the end of our conversation, that the pilav and meat cooked last year’s ritual was not delicious at all.

Yet what surprised me was when I learnt from my informants that most people (mostly women) come and take a plate of rice and meat and bring it home to eat it. ‘It is better to eat it at home alone’, said two elderly widows, where you can sit at your table alone and enjoy ayran or a nice salad with it’. In the past, however, people used to sit cross-legged in groups of five-six around a tablecloth put on the kilim and ate from the same tray.

IV. The Interpretation of the ‘Tekke Pilavi’- A Journey Back To Time

The practice of culture might change partially or entirely in parallel with the changing historical, social and economic circumstances. This tekke pilavi ritual reflects a partial, though not a complete change in the local Turkish-Muslim cultural traditions. In this section, I intend to present the historical contexts this ritual was most probably born and how it was modified and yet prevailed in today’s context.

To begin with, the village is situated within the wider Via Egnatia (Sol Kol) route demarcated geographically by the Dardanelles and the Saros Gulf in the south, Didymotichos (Dimetoka) in the north, Pherrai in the west, and Kesan (in Turkey) in the east.⁴ Cutting the Balkan Peninsula horizontally, linking the West and the East, the Adriatic, the Aegean and the Dardanelles, it served as the bridge between Rome and the Byzantine Empire, particularly Constantinople. The Via Egnatia route was

4 Irene Beldicenu-Steherr, “Osmanlı Tahrir Defterlerinde Seyyid Ali Sultan: Heterodoks İslam’ın Trakya’ya Yerleşmesi,” in *Sol Kol: Osmanlı Egemenliğinde Via Egnatia (1380–1699)*, ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou, trans. Özden Arıkan, Ela Güntekin, and Tülin Altınova (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), 50.

a vital route for commercial and military purposes and the dissemination of heterodox Islam, the Bektashi sect.⁵ Ottoman construction works began on the Via Egnatia route right after the conquest of Eastern and Western Thrace in 1360s. The Western Thrace region was already conquered by Gazi Evrenos Pasha in 1361. Several vakıfs (charitable organizations) were built along the route along with tekkes and lodges (zaviyeler) for the security and maintenance of the route, which became the centre for disseminating heterodox Islamic beliefs.⁶

The tekkes had vital functions in the spread of Islam and for Ottoman colonization. They were sent by the Sultan's order to the regions to be conquered beforehand to disseminate Islam. This was the most common method of Ottoman expansionism in the Balkans.⁷ The tekkes were built in the rural areas, mainly villages and had significant social functions.⁸ The dervishes or dedes came and settled in villages and small towns, or vacant areas usually before the army and provided them with shelter, food and guidance the conquest. They were joined later by their followers. They engaged in agriculture or stockbreeding and contributed to the socio-economic development of the villages also by providing educational services. Moreover, they offered the bypassing travelers, particularly the poor ones, food and shelter.⁹

The Bektashi order is a much softer version of Orthodox Islam, incorporating elements from Christianity and from ancient shamanist Turkish beliefs. It is of a mystic and largely tolerant nature. The Bektashi priests (the sheikh, dervish, or dede) allowed wine, ignored religious differences, provided a great deal of freedom for women in their dress codes and social status. The nomadic tribes of Yuruk and Turcoman in Balkans (Dobruja, Deliorman in Bulgaria, the Rhodopean mountains of Thrace bordering Bulgaria and Greece, southern Macedonia and Thessaly in Greece)¹⁰ and in Anatolia were not fully Islamized. A softer version of Islam offered by the Bektashi,

5 Beldicenau-Steinherr, "Osmanlı Tahrir Defterlerinde Seyyid Ali Sultan," 50.

6 Irene Melikoff, "14.-15. Yüzyıllarda İslam Heterodoksluğunun Trakya'ya ve Balkanlar'a Yerleşme Yolları," in *Sol Kol: Osmanlı Egemenliğinde Via Egnatia (1380–1699)*, ed. Elizabeth Zachariadou, trans. Özden Arıkan, Ela Güntekin, and Tülin Altınova (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), 178-190.

7 Halil İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300–1600*, 2nd ed. (UK: Butler & Tanner Ltd, 1989), 198; Melikoff, "14.-15. Yüzyıllarda İslam Heterodoksluğunun," 180.

8 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 255.

9 Ziya Kazıcı, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Toplum Yapısı* (İstanbul: Bilge Yayıncılık, December 2003), 119–123.

10 İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 194.

incorporating some of their shamanist beliefs and rituals was easier for them. Therefore, Bektashism was first welcomed and adopted by the Turcoman tribes and later it became the order of Janissary Corps.¹¹

The nomadic tribe of Yuruks believed and worshipped a sky God [Gök Tanrı] and the spirits of earth and water. They did not have a priest class but valued their ancestors greatly. That is why they used ‘dede’ [grandfather] to refer to any holy place including trees, bushes, mountains, high places where they worshipped the Sky-God, especially for rain.¹² Their own Beys administered them until the modernization reforms of the early 19th century.¹³ The obvious commonalities of the several Yuruk tribes were their hospitality, the high statue assigned to women. Moreover, in Southern Asia Minor, they treated the Sunni Imams with great hospitality but also offered them money and gifts not to interfere in their beliefs.¹⁴

It was equally easier for the Christian natives to adopt as it also incorporated several elements from Christianity. Outstanding among them is the choice of churches, sanctuaries, and graves considered holy by the native Christians and attributing them to Muslims, to Bektashi saints in the region of Balkans.¹⁵ The transference of the holy places in rural areas was not ordered by the authorities or the representatives of the official religion but by the Bektashi dervishes.¹⁶ The Christian saint was identified with the Muslim successor by the ambiguous ideas of ‘metempsychosis’.¹⁷ Accordingly, for example, saint Elias and Khidr were believed to be the same person, reincarnated at different periods.¹⁸

Hasluck narrates a significant number of such cases in Anatolia, Thrace and Greece depending on his extensive visits in the then Ottoman lands between 1899 and 1916

11 İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 194.

12 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 133-134.

13 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 133-134.

14 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 133-134.

15 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 9.

16 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 57.

17 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 58.

18 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 73.

as an archeologist. Later these shrines would be frequented both by Christians and Muslims. For example, the church of Saint Demetrius in Salonika would be renamed Kasimiye, after the 6th Imam of the Bektashis. It remained as a place of pilgrimage for Christians even after conversion.¹⁹ Furthermore, what attracted both Muslims and Christians to a sanctuary was its reputation for miracles for healing rather than the religion it represented.²⁰ For the Bektashi, the religion of the saints was of complete insignificance because they were meant for the entire world.²¹

The dervishes and dedes, according to Hasluck, were ‘the most conciliatory to Christianity.’²² The tekke is the usual place of worship and is open to both women and men where they say their prayers together. They do not discriminate between religions and non-Muslims are welcome to the tekke. Saint worshipping constitutes a significant part of Bektashi order. Thus, instead of Mecca, their places of pilgrimage are usually tombs of saints who are believed to have the power of intercession, which is strictly forbidden in the Sunni order. The rituals at the saint tomb include reciting the Fatiha for his soul, lighting candles on their tombs, and sacrifices for the Saint.²³ Sacrifice is usually vowed during sickness, in times of epidemics, in times of danger and the end of a dangerous situation.²⁴ Although held separate from others, the Bektashi sect later came to dominate Alevism (Kızılbaş), Babaism, etc.²⁵ According to Melikoff, the dedes and tekkes played a key role in the success of Ottoman conquests in dealing with the multiethnic and multi-religious natives.²⁶

In the Bektashi/Alevi belief, every year on the 13th day of Muharram, a sheep or calf is sacrificed for a saint. The entire village community shares the expenses, and it marks the first of the meetings. It is intended to encourage unity and fraternity among

19 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 16.

20 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 69.

21 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 72.

22 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 57.

23 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 160-166.

24 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 259.

25 İnalçık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 200.

26 Melikoff, “14.-15. Yüzyıllarda İslam Heterodoksluğunun,” 181.

the inhabitants.²⁷ Furthermore, in the Bektashi belief, it is a common ritual for a sick person or a relative or friend of a sick person to come to the Dede, visit the tomb of the holy saint buried in the yard and make vows.²⁸ According to the Sunni belief, the mosque is not a place of burial. This was strictly forbidden by Muhammed himself, to prevent the tomb from becoming ‘an object of idolatrous adoration’.²⁹ In some cases, the tomb (the turbe), where the founder of the mosque is buried, is a separate place in the mosque yard, and is meant for his soul to receive the prayers in the mosque.³⁰

In light of these arguments, it is very highly likely that the previous inhabitants of the village were Bektashi, who later converted to the Sunni sect, particularly upon the anti- Bektashi movement of 1826.³¹ The mosque was constructed between 1666 and 1676 as I was told by the village Imam. Consequently, the tomb likely belongs to a Bektashi *Dede*. It can also be inferred that the village inhabitants were previously a Yuruk or Turkoman tribe that settled in the area and founded the village. The possibility of an autochthonous Orthodox Greek converts to Islam is not very high for the village because no one speaks any other language than Turkish- or spoke another language before (at least until early 1900s)– except for some Pomak speakers who initially came from the Rhodopean mountains.

The fact that this is not known or even presumed in the village can be considered a serious rupture in the village’s history. It might be that the village population was too much mixed due to the population movements of the late Ottoman period, when massive influx of Muslims came from Crimea, Circassia, and later from Bulgaria and Greek Macedonia during the Balkan Wars.³² It is also likely that their conversion to Sunni sect took place massively during the late 1600s and later that it was forgotten in the past three-four centuries. Furthermore, the date of the rite- early spring- might have a connotation with the Turkish tradition of celebrating the advent of spring.

27 İbrahim Arslanoğlu, “Alevilikte Temel İnanç Unsurları ve Pratikler,” accessed May 31, 2009, <http://w3.gazi.edu.tr/~iarslan/alevilikteinanc.pdf>.

28 İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire*, 199.

29 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 8.

30 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 8.

31 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under The Sultans*, 419.

32 Kemal Karpat, “Population Movements in the Ottoman State in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 25.

Like the mainstream Sunni, the villagers usually regard Bektashism and Alevism heretical. The Sunni prejudices against Alevism prevail among the inhabitants. I remember as a child whenever I wore a short skirt, my great-grandmother would condemn it and say ‘Take it off. Are you a Kızılbash?’ As compared to little more conservative dress codes of a decade ago, currently young women and teenagers alike have an entirely Western style so much that it is not possible to differentiate a Muslim from a Christian.

Furthermore, religious radicalism or even conservatism never developed in the village. The elderly still preserve their dress code; the headscarf and the ferace within the village. Some women wear the headscarf in such a style that part of their hair is out and do not wear the ferace. And the men are keen on drinking, although alcoholism is rare. Only a few elderly men go to the mosque for daily prayers, and only the elderly women pray at home five times a day. I was told that the liberal and tolerant attitude towards religion was condemned by the then Mufti of Komotini in the 1970s.

Contrary to the role of Imam in traditional Muslim villages, the Imam is not assigned a leadership role in this village. He has a symbolic role of performing the mainstream religious rituals such as weddings, funerals, singing the Ezan, and reciting the Koran during religious fests. Yet, during the mevlids and Bayram prayers, whenever the Imam prolongs the sermon, he is either told to make it short or the flock just pretends to be listening to him. This is particularly evident during the mevlids, when the Imam begins to give recommendations about the lifestyle; that men should refrain from alcohol and women should avoid abortion, and that they should wear the Islamic dress and at the point when he implicitly threatens about the punishment of the disobedient with hell, the flock begin to mutter against his speech and tell him outright to finish the talk. Imam’s symbolic role is also evident in the tekke pilavi ritual, as no one considers his contentions. This resembles the treatment of Sunni Imams by the Yuruks in Southern Anatolia in the 19th century.

The tekke pilavı had a different function in the early 1950s. As narrated by the informants, primary school education was conducted in the mosque then. An old woman called Münire, who lived in a house just behind the mosque, asked the primary school kids to bring from home some rice, bulgur, butter, peas, beans, whichever they could afford. Every morning, she took the ingredients and cooked it in a cauldron and served the kids as lunch. This lunch was named as ‘tekke pilavı’, as it was cooked in the mosque yard. Considering the entire school day, the pupils needed lunch. Unlike today, the average family had three to four children, with barely enough food to feed

them all. The socio-economic conditions in Greece were very poor due to the Second World War and the subsequent Civil War of 1947-1949³³ and this was deeply felt in the socio-economic status of the village as well. Consequently, the tekke pilavı did serve the purpose of charity in this period.

In the present context, however, the socio-economic situation has largely improved compared to the previous era. Today, women stand out as the active performers despite the opposition of the Imam and the indifference of men. Consequently, it can be considered as a women's reiteration of their role in the society and their resistance to authority and male domination. Yet, with the relative rise in welfare and globalization, the communal rite has acquired an individual dimension. We can see this in the eating style as some people prefer to take the food and eat it at home.

This ritual can also be interpreted as a challenge to the changing pattern of life by the changes in production and consumption. Beginning in the late 1950s, modernization in agriculture has replaced the previous labor-intensive jobs with machines. Therefore, jobs like picking cotton and pounding sunflowers which were done by together with neighbors are now done by machines. Modernization has increased income but decreased the level of social interactions. Another factor contributing to the increase in welfare is migrations to Germany and Türkiye from the 1950s on, a trend which has been reversed since the improvement of state politics against the minority since late 1990s. A third factor in the welfare increase is the sharp fall in the birth rate as a result of which the land per household increased while the number of laborers decreased. Today, the average household has one or two children.

The character of social interactions also changed with the role of the television. Before 1990, the only Turkish TV channel could hardly ever be watched due to the obstacles set by the Greek government. However, afterward, with the satellite system, everyone had access to all Turkish TV channels, frequently watched in every household. This has also reduced interactions among people by reducing the number of visits and conversations during visits. Another change in consumption occurred with the end of three-day long traditional village weddings, which necessitated social interactions during the cooking and serving of the wedding meals. Instead, people emulate the town dwellers, and the weddings take place in the boring halls of the town.

33 Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 124-127.

I interpret the ritual as a quest for women's solidarity, fraternity, and spiritualism. It also creates excitement in the boring, ordinary life of the villagers and is perfect ground for the testing and affirmation of tolerance.

It can be situated within the frame of the articles of Geertz (Thick Description of Culture), Darnton (The Great Cat Massacre), and Sabean (Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in early modern Germany) as the ritual also constitutes partly the village history. It bears characteristics of micro history studies; the ritual pertains to the village; it cannot be generalized, and it focuses on the agency's role.

My text has some converging and diverging points with Geertz's interpretation of culture. Like Geertz, I have tried to present a 'thick description' of the ritual by the use of a semiotic approach. However, I also narrated the context to unravel the meanings of symbols and experiences by historicizing, by sending them back to the time and context they were born. Therefore, I dwelled on three historical contexts: Ottoman Expansionism in the Balkans, the early 1950s, and today. In the first context, I have seen that the Turcoman nomadic tribes and the native Christians of Balkans adopted the Bektashi belief as it was much more compatible with their former beliefs and culture. *Dede*, a hierarchy in the Bektashi priest caste, was already a worshipped mystical figure in the shaman beliefs of the former; it was a category they could replace with ordinary priests for the latter.

The absence of a possible Bektashi background in the village opinion can be considered a rupture in history. This rupture might have been caused by the anti-Bektashi movement of the 1670s and later, especially the reign of Mahmud II, and the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the redrawing of the borders due to which the village remained in Greece. In the 1950s, therefore, the ritual of a commonly held feast for the holy Dede was attributed to another function that arose purely out of the socio-economic conditions of the time.

Today, in the era of relative abundance and prosperity as compared with the 1950s, we see that the ritual has assigned a recalcitrant character against the capitalist transformation, the isolation of the village community members, as well as the religious impositions by the media and the local preachers. It is also a quest for women's solidarity and the affirmation of their roles in the village social life and hierarchy.

On the other hand, there are also several diverging points from the Geertzian interpretation. To begin with, Geertz is synchronic. As an anthropologist, he is interested

in interpreting the specific moment. However, the historians are interested in ‘the diachronic’; the ruptures in historical contexts and seek answers to the questions such as ‘Do cultures change? Under which circumstances do they change?’ In other words, anthropologists like Geertz are not interested in cultural production but the product, whereas for social sciences production is more important. I have adopted the diachronic approach here. I intended to depict the historical context of the ritual. Like Darnton, who assumed continuity between the time of the cat massacre (the 1700s) and cat massacre in medieval ages, I assume continuity between the present day tekke pilavı rite and the tekke pilavı in ancient and medieval age Turkish traditions.

Secondly, unlike Geertz, who claims homogeneity in cultural practices (“Culture is public because meaning is public”³⁴) as in the *Balinese Cockfight*, there is no homogeneity in this ritual; it is preserved and reproduced by a group of women. Finally, Geertz does not mention the role of women in his cultural studies.³⁵ In this rite, however, women have the primary role.

Referring to Darnton’s *Cat Massacre*³⁶, just like the cats classified as liminal characters, the village community is a liminal category as Muslim Turks living in Greece, squeezed in between two oppositional identities (Greek and Turk) and two countries often in a state of dispute.

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34 Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

35 Women are almost nonexistent in the Balinese Cockfight. See, Clifford Geertz, “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 142.

36 Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of Rue Saint-Séverin,” in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes of French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 75-104.

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