

Introduction

This book is a history of the Shiite community of what is today Lebanon in the early modern period. It traces the rise and fall of the Hamadas, Harfushes and other Shiite notable families as *mukataacıs*, agents invested by the Ottoman state to tax and police the rural highland districts of Tripoli, Damascus and Sidon that were not otherwise amenable to government control. Their co-optation by the authorities of the nominally Sunni empire beginning in the sixteenth century, and their displacement through other sectarian groups by the late eighteenth century, raise a number of important questions about Shiism in both Ottoman and Lebanese history.

From the standpoint of Ottoman Islamic law, Shiites were seen as *Rafizis* or heretics. The consolidation of imperial rule and the systematization of both *shari'a* and imperial administrative (*kanun*) jurisprudence in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the revolt by heterodox Kızılbaş tribesmen in Anatolia against this same process of state centralization, resulted in a legal position on Shiism that legitimized the killing of sectarians as Rafizis or Kızılbaş and thereby provided an official basis for the proscription of non-Sunni enemies both within and outside the Empire. The Ottoman chancery would in fact apply this vocabulary against refractory Shiites in Lebanon and elsewhere into the nineteenth century, denouncing them as 'accursed Kızılbaş whose elimination is a religious duty' whenever they ran foul of the state authorities.

The campaigns against Anatolian and other 'Kızılbaş' and the persecution of individual scholars and deviant sufis are well documented and provide a dramatic, but essentially one-sided picture of heterodoxy in the Ottoman Empire. The following attempts to complement and nuance this picture with a more long-term, socio-political examination of a Shiite community under Ottoman rule. Historians of the state's central institutions have tended to ignore the day-to-day experience of Ottoman administrative practice – especially in the Arab provinces which are often apposed to the so-called 'core provinces' of the Empire. Yet the Shi'a of Lebanon, abundantly cited not only in state archival sources but also in a wealth of local chronicles and foreign reports, was probably the best documented of any heterodox population in Ottoman history. The fact that these Shiites, in particular their tribal leaderships, could be integrated into the structures of Ottoman



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provincial government, but became progressively marginalized in the competition with other feudal lords in an era of imperial administrative reforms, suggests that long-term processes of state rationalization and modernization were more central to the fate of heterodox minorities in the Ottoman Empire than timeless religious or legal ideologies.

If tax farming, tribal control and administrative reform set the general parameters of the Shiites' range of action under Ottoman rule, how families such as the Hamadas and Harfushes managed to establish themselves and exercise authority within these parameters must ultimately be explained in terms of local society and politics. The principal aim of this study is therefore to resituate the Shiites with respect to the emerging polity of Lebanon. Nationalist historians have traditionally traced Lebanon's origins back to the 'Druze emirate', the feudal rule of the Ma'n and Shihabi families in the province of Sidon which gradually also encompassed the Maronite community in Tripoli and which has therefore stood as a model of inter-confessional cooperation in the face of Ottoman Turkish tyranny. This romanticized vision of the country's roots, however, ignores the fact that the expansion and consolidation of the Druze emirs' power by the end of the eighteenth century occurred primarily at the expense of the region's Shiite feudatories; these have in effect been written out of the national narrative. The problem this study attempts to address is thus not one of simply reinserting a community that has always been a little under-represented into the overall story of Lebanese nationhood, but of using its specific evolution to question the very foundations on which this story has been written.

Sources

The basic premise of this book is that the conventional sources for the history of 'Lebanon' in the Ottoman period (for the most part Maronite narrative chronicles and nineteenth-century positivist histories that project Lebanese autonomy back into earlier times) inherently served to legitimize the rule of Druze feudal lords and must therefore be supplemented with other sources in order to gain a more complete understanding of the local realities of Ottoman rule. The principal source used in the following study are Ottoman administrative documents pertaining to the provinces of Syria (Tripoli, Damascus, Sidon) between the late sixteenth and the late eighteenth century. These records can be divided into three broad categories: executive, fiscal and judicial. The first consists of extraordinary decrees (sing. hüküm) issued by the Sublime Porte to the provincial authorities in reaction to specific petitions or reports of fiscal abuse, banditry or rebellion. The largest corpus of these decrees is that comprised in the Mühimme Defterleri (MD; 'registers of important state affairs') at the Başbakanlık Archives in Istanbul, which on account of the insight they afford into both local conditions in the provinces and the central government's response are among the best known and most popular Ottoman archival materials. Several collections of selected Mühimme documents pertaining to heterodox Shiism in the Empire and to the Ottoman administration of Syria have



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already been edited or translated. However, as the choice of documents that were included or not included in these collections already betrays a certain editorial position (and as the translations are not always entirely correct), we have referred only to the original registers for this study. A unique *Mühimme* register found to contain the earliest known Ottoman reference to the Hamadas (see chapter 3) was consulted at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek in Dresden. Further collections of executive decrees, most notably the Cevdet and Ali Emiri classifications, were researched using the Başbakanlık's printed and computer catalogues; the extraordinarily rich series of *Şikayet Defterleri* (ŞD; 'complaints registers') remains uncatalogued and only a small sample has been used here. Individual decrees in Ottoman Turkish are also interspersed between the Arabic-language proceedings of the Islamic court in Tripoli or Sidon (see below). Interestingly, none of these match exactly the orders copied in the imperial chancery registers.

While executive decrees can provide important and sometimes colourful detail on salient political events, the fiscal records preserved by the accountancy division (*Maliyeden Müdevver*; MM) offer a more structural, long-term picture of revenue raising in the provinces. Ottoman tax cadastres (*Tahrir Defterleri*; TD), which exist mainly for the sixteenth century, have been taken in the past as comprehensive economic and demographic statistics; both types of document, however, are closely tied to specific revenue sources and in fact provide little usable information on actual government or local society. Individual documents and registers from these collections have been used here only when they make explicit reference to villages or persons relevant to the Shi'a.

The third category of documents to be used are *shari'a* court records from the provincial capitals Tripoli and Sidon. Court documents constitute one of the premier sources for Ottoman social history and have proved particularly useful for recovering individual stories of peasants, women, non-Muslims and other reputedly voiceless minorities. Their value for our purposes lies in their presentation not of contingent government directives or of anonymous fiscal structures, but of regular, institutionalized contacts and negotiations between local Shiite notables and the Ottoman state. Copies of Tripoli's court records, which are extant from 1666 onward, are preserved at the Lebanese University as well as by the Municipality of Tripoli and have been used in numerous studies of the province's history in the Ottoman period.² The following draws especially on *iltizam* (tax

Ahmet Refik, Onaltıncı Asirda Râfizîlik ve Bektaşîlik, new edn by Mehmet Yaman (Istanbul: Ufuk Matbaası, 1994); Baki Öz, ed., Alevilik ile ilgili Osmanlı Belgeleri (Istanbul: Can Yayınları, 1995); Cemal Şener, ed., Osmanlı Belgelerinde Aleviler-Bektaşiler (Istanbul: Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği, 2002); Cemal Şener and Ahmet Hezarfen, eds., Osmanlı Arşivi 'nde Mühimme ve İrade Defterlerinde Aleviler-Bektaşiler (Istanbul: Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği, 2002); Uriel Heyd, Ottoman Documents on Palestine, 1552–1615: A Study of the Firman according to the Mühimme Defteri (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, The View from Istanbul: Ottoman Lebanon and the Druze Emirate (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

² A series of unpublished Lebanese University (Tripoli) Master's theses supervised by Khalid Ziyada in the 1980s provide indices to some of the early registers; for a partial listing see *Cahiers du CERMOC* 11 (1995), 78–9.



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concession) contracts awarded to the Hamada family in Mt Lebanon as well as on sales deeds, lawsuits and other notarial documents. For the province of Sidon, a single original register from 1699–1703 as well as a fragment from 1763, only recently discovered and salvaged by Talal Majdhub,³ were consulted at the city's Sunni Shari'a Court. This material does not appear to have been used elsewhere and still awaits a thorough examination. Several single documents from the court registers of Damascus and Hama, preserved at the Centre for Historic Documents in Damascus, have also been used where they pertain to the Lebanese Shiites.

Ottoman administrative documents of course present an ideal, normative picture of the state's government and are not inherently more 'objective' than the local narrative chronicles. Every effort has therefore been made to understand both types of text in the historical context in which they were written and to cross and compare them with other available sources, including a number of imperial histories, Ottoman religious treatises, oriental and European travel accounts, and published Maronite Church documents. In particular, this study draws heavily on French consular reports sent from Tripoli and Sidon in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, which despite France's stated interest in protecting the Maronite Catholic community provide detailed and surprisingly equitable appreciations of different aspects of local society. Selections from this correspondence were published in the 1970s (see chapter 5); the documents used in the present work were researched at the Archives Nationales (Affaires Étrangères; AE) in Paris.

This study cannot pretend to have exhausted all the possible sources on Lebanon's Shiites in the Ottoman period; future ones may profit especially from British or other European consular correspondence and Vatican and Roman Catholic missionary sources, neither of which we were able to examine in the scope of the present work. A key source which has not been used here but which likely contains numerous references to Shiite feudal lords are the private archives of Maronite churches or monasteries preserved both in Lebanon and abroad. A number of such documents are looked at in Sa'dun Hamada's recent contribution to the *History of the Shi'a in Lebanon*; many more may still come to light in private collections. If the present work has focused especially on previously untapped archival sources, it is hoped that this will also significantly help widen the documentary basis for future discussion and debate on the subject.

Argument

This book comprises six chapters. The first examines the Ottoman state's 'policy' on Shiism, contrasting the legal position defined by jurists such as Ebu's-Suud Efendi with the pragmatism of Ottoman rule in Shiite-inhabited regions. The

³ Talal Majdhub, 'Masadir Tarikh Lubnan fi'l-Qarn al-Thamin 'Ashar' in *Lubnan fi'l-Qarn al-Thamin* 'Ashar: al-Mu'tamar al-Awwal li'l-Jam'iyya al-Lubnaniyya li'l-Dirasat al-'Uthmaniyya (Beirut: Dar al-Muntakhab al-'Arabi, 1996), 23–41.

⁴ Sa'dun Hamada, *Tarikh al-Shi'a fi Lubnan* (Beirut: Dar al-Khayyal, 2008).



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second looks at the Ottoman administration of western Syria beginning in the sixteenth century, and shows that Shiite notables such as the Harfush emirs of Baalbek were among the most sought-after local intermediaries of the state. Chapter 3 traces the rise of the Hamadas, who exercised control over multiple tax farms in the rural hinterland of Tripoli in the seventeenth century through a complex matrix of rapports with both the Ottoman state authorities and the local non-Shiite communities. The fourth chapter shows how this system began to break down in the social and political crisis that engulfed the Empire at the end of the seventeenth century, leading to an unprecedented punitive campaign against the Hamadas and the Harfushes and leaving them increasingly dependent on the Druze emirs of Sidon and on their own Maronite subjects. Chapter 5 turns the focus on the Shiite community of Jabal 'Amil, as they struggle to maintain their autonomy visà-vis the burgeoning Shihabi emirate in the new context of decentralized rule in the eighteenth century. The final chapter returns to the Hamadas and Harfushes, the former being eliminated by the Shihabi-Maronite condominium and the latter being reduced to a mere subsidiary of what by the end of the eighteenth century has indeed taken on the form of a single pan-Lebanese feudal regime.

The main arguments of this study can be summarized as follows: that the Ottoman state, contrary to conventional assumptions, was ideologically too heterogeneous and politically too pragmatic to follow an actual policy against Shiism; that instances of persecution by state authorities must be seen in their specific temporal and political context rather than assumed to be part of a universal anti-Shiite impulse; that the designation of individual Druze or Shiite tribal leaders in the Syrian coastal highlands as 'emirs' must be seen in the context of sixteenthcentury imperial reforms, primarily the monetarization of the provincial administration, rather than as an expression of timeless Lebanese particularism; that the sectarian, tribal and mercenary character of certain Shiites not only posed no obstacle, but virtually recommended them as government tax farmers over the local population; that the very unfavourable picture of Shiites in contemporary historiography and popular lore reflects not an objective truth, but derives in part from their status as taxlords over the central institutions of the Maronite Church and their embroilment in secular conflicts within the powerful Lebanese Order of monks; that French sponsorship of the Maronite Church and a rising Maronite landed elite in the eighteenth century, allied with the Druze 'princes' of southern Lebanon, caused the more traditional Shiite leaderships to become less viable as state tax agents; that Ottoman social engineering measures, in particular a major tribal settlement initiative around the turn of the eighteenth century, further reduced the autonomy once enjoyed by Shiite feudalists; and that the elimination of the Shiite tax concessionaries in the north and the subjugation of those in the south and the Bekaa Valley under the Druze emirate in the late eighteenth century can hardly be made the starting moment of a single, pan-confessional Lebanese national identity in the modern period.

The story of the Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman rule is not one of essential religious or national characteristics but on the contrary one of co-optation, social



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process, political struggle, reform and adaptation over nearly three centuries of profound change throughout the region. It challenges the linear view that the expansion of Shihabi-Maronite rule over what would only be defined retrospectively as 'Lebanon' somehow corresponded to the aspirations of the victims of this expansion, and it suggests, in taking not only the documents but also the institutions and practices of Ottoman government seriously, a new reading of Lebanese history per se. The Shiites form the largest and in many ways the most activist sectarian community in Lebanon today, yet their rapport with the myths and emblems of Lebanese nationhood has always been problematic. Serious reflection on modern-day questions of identity, sovereignty, political confessionalism or communitarianism in Lebanon cannot begin without also coming to terms more seriously with the Shiites' place in this history.



CHAPTER 1

Shiism in the Ottoman Empire: between confessional ambiguity and administrative pragmatism

The history of Lebanon's Twelver Shiites under Ottoman imperial rule remains for the most part unknown, subject to narrow sectarian perspectives or subsumed under the general mythology of Lebanese particularism. Whereas the Shiite tradition of southern Lebanon (Jabal 'Amil) has preserved the memory of the persecution or exile of a handful of Shiite scholars in the sixteenth century as emblematic of the community's fate under the Ottomans as a whole, modern nationalist historiography, where it remembers the Shiites at all, sees them only as seconding the Druze' and Maronites' creation of a quasi-independent 'Lebanese' emirate. Both share a vision of the Ottoman Empire as something inextricably hostile and alien, over the four centuries of its dominion, to local heterodox society, and neither has made much effort to accept the Ottomans' authority and institutions, their language and chronicles and archives, as valid parameters for the writing of Lebanese Shiite history.

To come to a new understanding of Lebanon's Shiite confessional community in the early modern period, both in terms of its internal dynamics and as an organic constituent of what would later become the Lebanese republic, it is first necessary to consider it not as a unique local phenomenon but within the religious and administrative evolution of the Ottoman Empire as a whole. What was the Ottoman state's position vis-à-vis the non-Sunni Muslim minorities on its territory? Were they subject to discrimination or to toleration, to benign or hostile indifference, on the part of the authorities? Did the imperial bureaucracy defend a particular religious ideology, and did it change over time? And are our conceptions of state and ideology, tolerance and persecution even applicable in a setting such as that of the Ottoman Empire, or are they to some extent modern anachronisms?

Students of Ottoman history have long noted the seeming paradoxes in the definition of its official ideology: on the one hand, the state laid claim to holy war (gaza), Hanefi Islamic law and universal Sunni caliphate as its governing principles; on the other, high court officials and even sultans could dabble in astrology or millenarianism and patronized a wide spectrum of antinomian sufi mystics. In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire pursued a fierce sectarian war against the Shiite shahs of Iran and their presumed supporters in Anatolia. Yet the expression of 'Alid loyalties remained an integral part of Ottoman religious culture, shared in by Istanbul's intellectual elite, the urban-based seyyid class (descendants of the



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Prophet), and countless rural communities from the Balkans to the Yemen. The historical experience of the Shiite feudalists of Lebanon, alternately harassed as 'Kızılbaş' heretics and then reinstated as emirs or *mukataacı* taxlords by the state, epitomizes the ambiguities and contradictions in the Ottomans' position vis-à-vis religious heterodoxy and the heterodox communities of the Empire.

The aim of this chapter is to situate the history of western Syria's or Lebanon's Shiites in the context of the Ottoman Empire's more general experience with Islamic heterodoxy and Shiite sectarianism. It will briefly develop three arguments which, though to some extent already established in modern Ottomanist research, will bear directly on our discussion of the Ottomans' attitude towards the Harfush, Hamada and other Shiite feudal families in the later chapters. First, that the state's very equivocal stance towards Shiites and Shiite heterodoxy is deeply ingrained in Ottoman history, in some ways a necessary by-product of the Empire's development. Second, that religious persecution, or persecution in the name of any formal ideology, was part and parcel of the centralization, consolidation and institutionalization of Ottoman authority, particularly in the sixteenth century. And third, that despite this intensification of state control, there continued to be a considerable amount of ambivalence and leeway about Shiism and Shiites in Ottoman culture, Ottoman learned discussion and Ottoman administrative practice. If the Empire, having formally espoused Sunni Islam, could not explicitly tolerate religious dissidence, the pragmatism sometimes shown in accommodating and indeed integrating deviant groups and individuals is no less a defining feature of its history.

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Was the Ottoman Empire fundamentally anti-Shiite? In the first half of the sixteenth century, around the time of their conquest of Syria, Egypt, the Hijaz and Iraq and largely in the context of their ideological and political struggle against Safavid Iran, the Ottomans began to assert their right to rule more pronouncedly in terms of religious conservatism, as caliphs and custodians of the Holy Cities, as champions of Sunni legal orthodoxy and as patrons of Islamicate arts and learning. Yet they also remained heirs to a long tradition of confessional liberalism, if not outright heterodox deviance and 'Alid loyalties, that had inspired the Turkmen adventurers and mystics from Central Asia when they first began to penetrate into and colonize Anatolia more than four centuries beforehand. The heritage of this confessional liberalism remained evident in the Ottoman Turks' reverence for the Imams of the Shiite tradition, in their embrace of Bektaşism, in their respect for the holy cities in Iraq and countless other 'Alid shrines across the Balkans and in Anatolia, or in their observance (of course with many local variations) of the mourning ritual of *Ashura*, and necessarily tempered the state's attitude towards the Lebanese and other Shiites well into modern times.

'Shiism' or partisanship for 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) and the succession of Twelve Imams is as old as Islam itself. From the very beginning and throughout Islamic history, an important minority of Muslims has maintained that 'Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, father of his only grandsons Hasan



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and Husayn, was also his spiritual successor and should have been his only political heir. The forms this partisanship took, however, could vary widely, from outright rebellion against those seeking to organize and rule the Islamic community according to the Prophet's example and traditions (Sunnism), to quiet acquiescence while awaiting the return of a messiah-like Imam to deliver the world from iniquity. With time, Shiism became both the ideology of the disenfranchised, an intra-Islamic opposition ever ready to channel social protest against the powerful, and a religious sect or church in its own right, with a scholastic and legal tradition every bit as institutionalized as that of the rival Sunni majority.

In rural and tribal-dominated areas such as Khorasan (north-eastern Iran), where the Turkmen of Central Asia first came into contact with Islamic civilization, these differences remained largely academic. Here, 'Shiism' above all entailed a popular devotion to 'Ali and Husayn as the warrior champions and tragic heroes of early Islam. Along with Abu Muslim, who in 749 CE led the revolution from Khorasan that would install the Abbasids in Baghdad, only to be betrayed and murdered by them, and al-Hallaj, the Turko-Iranian sufi philosopher who was executed by the same dynasty for his alleged pantheism in 927, the Shiite martyrs exemplified the valour, moral rectitude and free-spiritedness so highly regarded by the Turkmen tribes. Their conversion to Islam in this period was achieved largely through the efforts not of textual scholars (ulema) expounding the finer points of Koranic exegesis and shari'a law, but by charismatic sufi dervishes whose cult of Muslim saint worship, mystical divination and millenarianism spoke more directly to the steppe mindset. In this context, Shiite inclinations (tashayyu') and 'Alid loyalties were not an express negation of Sunni orthodoxy but rather the natural mode of a non-literate, non-sectarian folk Islam. The Turkmen whose westward migration in the medieval period would so change the course of world history could very well be formally Sunni and affectively Shiite at the same time.

This dualism or 'confessional ambiguity', to use John Woods' term, was nowhere more in evidence than among the great nomad confederations that dominated Iran and western Asia after the great Timurid conquests of the fourteenth century. Timur himself alternately presented himself as a defender of Sunnism and of Shiism; the leaders of the Karakoyunlu Turkmen who controlled the region from Lake Van to Baghdad were decried by contemporaries as *ghulat* (extreme) Shiites but never actually adopted formal Shiite doctrines; the powerful Akkoyunlu confederation, from whose ranks many of the Kızılbaş would later be drawn, patronized both Sunni and militantly Shiite sufi orders, including the Safavids of Ardabil.² Confessional ambiguity was also the norm throughout Anatolia after the Turkmen invasions.

Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion (Prolegomena). Trans. and ed. Gary Leiser (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 3–15; Ahmet Karamustafa, God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994).

Michel Mazzaoui, The Origins of the Safawids: Šī'ism, Şūfism and the Gulāt (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972), 63–6; John Woods, The Aqquyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire (2nd edn, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 3–10, 83.



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Many mid-size artisan and trading towns such as Ankara or Kırşehir were run by the ahi brotherhoods, local craftsman corporations which, much like the medieval Islamic futuwwa guilds on which they were modelled, adhered to a code of moral conduct and urban self-governance that was replete with Shiite symbolism and values without repudiating orthodox religious practice and shari'a law. Among the tribes, the more esoteric (batini) Ismaili form of Shiism, as well as the Kabbalah-like Hurufi sect and any number of nonconformist sufi movements, could fuel the periodic millenarian revolts against the Saljuq dynasty in Konya, which would in retrospect be identified with conventional Sunni Islam.³ 'Maybe the religious history of Anatolian and Balkan Muslims living in the frontier areas of the period from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries should be conceptualized in terms of a metadoxy,' Cemal Kafadar has written in the most fluid synthesis to date of the Ottoman Empire's religious origins, 'a state of being beyond doxies, a combination of being doxy-naive and not being doxy-minded, as well as the absence of a state that was interested in rigorously defining and strictly enforcing an orthodoxy ... It was much later that a debate emerged among Ottoman scholars and statesmen with respect to the correctness of some of the practices of their ancestors. '4

The Ottoman emirate, the Janissaries and Bektaşi sufism

Of all the Turkmen *beğlik*s (principalities) to crop up in Anatolia in the late medieval period, the Ottomans were destined to play a special role by their geographic proximity to the Byzantine capital Constantinople and to Europe beyond. From their home base in Bithynia (whose capital, Izmid, they captured in 1337), the Ottomans were in constant contact with Byzantium, alternately allying or fighting with one or the other of its rival ruling dynasties. This enabled the Ottomans to cross over and begin expanding in Europe, and then to turn against and supplant one by one the remaining Turkmen principalities of Anatolia, ostensibly to be better able to pursue *gaza* or holy war against the Christians. From very early on, the Ottomans thus found themselves in the slightly ambivalent situation of leading an offensive against Christendom which they would justify in the name of Islam, by attracting and employing the sort of tribal adventurers whose allegiance to any form of Islamic or dynastic authority was by nature volatile.

As in Khorasan and western Asia before, the Turkmen who spearheaded the Ottomans' drive into the Balkans and Anatolia were more inspired by a vaguely Shiite folk Islam than by formal religion. Many times, their campaigns were accompanied or guided by Bektaşi dervishes, spiritual heirs of the thirteenth-century sufi 'saint' Hacci Bektaş Veli, himself a native of Khorasan. Little is known of the historical Hacci Bektaş, whose life is the subject of countless popular

³ Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *La révolte de Baba Resul: La formation de l'hétérodoxie musulmane en Anatolie au XIIIe siècle* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989).

⁴ Cemal Kafadar, Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 76.