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On the Variability of Texts as Seen in Bektashi Nefes

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Abstract: The religious hymns as preserved by the members of the Bektashi community in Thrace are interwoven with the folklore tradition and the local dialect belonging to that area. Three hymns were chosen to demonstrate this statement. Each of them has numerous variants just like folksongs have anywhere around the world.

Key words: Bektashi, religious hymn, folklore tradition, variant

On our research

We visited the Bektashi dervishes in Thrace for the first time in November 1999 together with my ethnomusicologist husband J. Sipos. Straight after the international congress held in Istanbul and the devastating earthquake on the last day started we out to take part on the annual meeting of Bektashi leaders held in *Çorlu* that year.

Since then I have carried out five field-works among them and managed to record several hundreds of ceremonial songs on video mainly.

Slowly I understood that there is a very strong mutual effect of religious songs and folksongs known to Bektashi communities. No wonder the same people endeavour in preserving both traditions as much as other heritage belonging to them. The mutual effect results in many different ways, among which I am going to deal with the variability of text in religious songs.

The influence of the vernacular can be clearly seen¹ in the hand written texts contained by the so called *cönk-defter*.

¹A similar observation was made by the German archaeologist Le Coq (1911: 66) in connection with his field work research in Western Turkestan.

On ceremonial songs

The most important characteristic of them is the teaching or testimony they contain concerning philosophy. This is obvious in the attractive and engaging mode they offer their educational method. They have a unique rhythm that is felt when we read them aloud or when they sing them. They flow with minor changes in every occurrence. There is a repetition in almost every stanza enabling the newcomers to join and offering time for the main singer to improvise. The looseness of structure makes it also possible to improvise. Rhyming can be a thought-rhyming as well. Whenever the singer comes to a word unknown to him, he will find a word containing the same number of syllables that might fit there² both rhythmically and from the point of view of rhyme and content.

Due to traditional continuity one can observe several layers of motifs in religious songs. These are the healing character, the mystic usage of numbers, meditations on the temporary world, ancient secret mystic spells that spread widely in Byzantium, the lyric elements, the symbol of light, the symbolic usage of language, etc. resulting in a syncretism.

This complexity can also be observed in archaic folklore prayers preserved among Christians in the Caucasus, the Middle East, throughout the Balkans, etc.

There is no stipulation as for where and when to say them. The overwhelming majority of them were not meant exclusively for liturgical use; on the contrary, they were prayed or sung according to an inner claim of anyone. Due to a kind of popular sagacity each verse is repeated while sung, therefore anyone can join who is willing to do so. This was the only way how these precious pieces of literature could have been preserved in oral tradition by illiterate people for centuries.

One of my old sources explained to me how she had shared her ceremonial songs with her newly married husband while going to the meadow, or working on the fields from early morning till dark without much food or drink yet unwearied. In exchange for it, her husband taught her all the *nefes* he had known before. They drew strength from this, in the same time they felt devoted all their activities and life to God. They

²The word *kılavuz* is replaced in example 2. see below.

considered this singing of ceremonial songs an endless source of heavenly happiness.

There are limitations of course: special ceremonial songs are preserved for mourning the Bektashi martyr saints only.

According to J. Sipos their music has been borrowed from folksongs whereas the texts of the holly hymns belong to well known poets, but they vary similarly to the texts of folksongs. Yet there exists a certain musical layer of ceremonial songs that is definitely discerned from any form of folk music.

On the structure of text in nefes

Earlier tradition preferred seven syllabic lines, while later stanzas utilized that of eleven or more syllables. The majority of ceremonial songs consist of five-six verses containing four lines each. A ceremonial song has no title in general, and the last verse contains its author's name.

The Bektashis believed in the provisional character of the earthly life, therefore it was of no significance for them to sign their poems, instead they preferred to insert the name of one of the beloved and reckoned poets in order to assure their verse this way a longer life.

In order to make the verse known to newcomers or to deepen their message each line is repeated when sung, sometimes even four times with minor changes. Like in the *nefes Hakk'ı zikreden kardaşlar* recorded by myself in Yeni Bedir in December 2002.

<i>Böyle bir Allah'ımız var,</i>	We have got an Allah like this
<i>Şöyle bir Sultanımız var.</i>	We have got such a Sultan like that...

Or in the same week in Kılavuzlu I recorded the following one from F.T. (1939):

<i>Söyle canım bülbül söyle</i>	Tell me my dear nightingale,
<i>Söyle garip bülbül söyle</i>	Tell me poor nightingale

Example No 1.

Der "Silbenzählende" Vers (pp. 195-255)

On 5th December 2002 B. E. (1920) sang the following nefes in the dergah of Çeşmekolu.

2002 3b-27.

Men³ yürürüm yane yane,
Aşk boyadı meni kane.
Ne deliyim, ne divane,
Al, gör beni, aşk neyledi,
Gel, gör beni, beni aşk neyledi
Derde giriftar eyledi

Kah eserim yeller gibi,
Kah çağlarım seller gibi.
Kah tozarım yollar gibi,
Gel, gör beni, beni aşk neyledi
Derde giriftar eyledi,

Biçareyim baştan ayağı
Ben Yonuz'um biçareyim
Baştan ayağa yarayım
Ne deliyim, ne divaneyim
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi
Derde giriftar eyledi.
(Doerfer 1996: 224)

Bän yürüräm yana yana
'ışq boyadı bāni qana
nä 'āqılām nä dīvānā
gäl gör bāni 'ışq näylädi
gäh äsäräm yällär gibi
gäh tozaram yollar gibi
gäh aqaram sellär gibi
gäl gör bāni 'ışq näylädi...

Miskīn Yūnus bīčārāyām
Başdan ayaya yārayam
Dost ālindān āvārāyām
Gäl gör bāni 'ışq näylädi

I am walking burning burning
Love painted me with blood
Neither fool nor idiotic
Take a look at me, what love caused to me
Come, see what love caused to me
It caused trouble, ruined me.

I am blowing like the wind
I am swelling like flood
Or else I'm flying like dust
Come, see what love caused to me
It caused trouble, ruined me.

I have been helpless from the very beginning
I'm Yunus, miserable
Full of wounds from tip to toe
Neither fool nor idiotic
Come, see what love caused to me
It caused trouble, ruined me.

Ich wandere brennend brennend,
Die Liebe hat mich mit Blut gefärbt;
Ich bin weder vernünftig noch verrückt.
Komm, sieh, was die Liebe aus mir gemacht hat!

Bald wehe ich wie die Winde,
bald staube ich wie die Wege,
bald flinge ich wie die Sturzbäche.
Komm, sieh, was die Liebe aus mir gemacht hat!

Ich, der arme Yunus, bin hilflos,
Bin von Kopf bis Fuß verwundet,
Aus Liebe zum "Freund" (Gott) bin ich heimatlos.
Komm, sieh, was die Liebe aus mir gemacht hat!

³The initial *m*- is secondary in Turkic.

There are further variants to be found in Kaplan (1991: 213) and Tanses (1997: 90):

Ben yürürüm yane yane	I am walking burning [with ardent love]
Aşk boyadı beni kane	That has painted me with blood
Ne akılem ne divane	I'm neither wise nor mad
Aşk boyadı beni kane	Love painted me with blood
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi	See what love has done to me
Aşkın beni mesteyledi	Your love enchanted me
Öldürmeye kasdeyledi	I intend to kill [for you]
Aldı gönlüm hasteyledi	Took my heart made me sick
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi	See what love has done to me
Gah eserim yeller gibi	Now I am blowing as winds
Gah coşarım seller gibi	Now I am rising as floods
Gah tozarım yollar gibi	Now I am raising as dust from roads
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi	See what love has done to me
Ben Yunusu [sic!] biçareyim	I am Yunus without help
Aşk elinden avareyim	I am wandering because of love
Başdan ayağa yareyim	Full of wounds from tip to toe
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi	See what love has done to me
Ben ağlarım yane yane	I am crying burning burning
Aşk boyadı beni kane	Love painted me with blood
Ne akılem ne divane	I'm neither wise nor mad
Refr.:	Refr.:
Gel gör beni aşk neyledi	See what love has done to me
Derde giriftar eyledi	I'm a victim of suffering
Gah eserim yeller gibi	Now I am blowing as winds
Gah tozarım yollar gibi	Now I am raising as dust from roads
Gah akarım seller gibi	Now I am flowing as floods
Refr.:	Refr.:
Ben Yunus'u biçareyim	I am Yunus without help
Aşk elinden avareyim	I am wandering because of love
Baştan ayağa yareyim	Full of wounds from tip to toe
Refr.:	Refr.:

At first glance the latter is the longest of all yet there is no difference in meaning, i.e. one can see it immediately, that the above four texts are variants. They justly represent almost any of the nefes variations.

The first word is starting with an *m-* that is a secondary phoneme in Turkic in initial position. The verb is *yürü-* in present day Turkish, but it is not present day Turkish, Bektashis preserved in ceremonial songs.

Example No 2.

In November 1999 we recorded the following nefes sung by A. O. B. (1953) and İ. D. (1956) in Musulca. I have its printed variant (Kaya 1999: 88), and also further examples written by hand in R.E.'s, O.B.'s and B. K.'s *cönk-defter*.

1999 2a-6+ nefes Musulca

Yine dosttan haber geldi	Got news from the Friend
Dalgalandı coştı gönül	My heart leapt for joy
Bir doğru can yola vardı,	A good soul found the path
Katarlandı coştı gönül	My heart leapt for joy
Kılavuzum Şah-ı Merdan	Caliph Ali, my guide
Çevresi dopdolu nurdan	Is surrounded by light,
Bunda her cahil dosttan,	All the ignorant friends
Neylersin vazgeçti gönül.	Were abandoned, what can we do?
Sır Ali'nin sırrı idi	The mystery belonged to Ali
Seyrederdi sever idi	He took a look around with pleasure,
Şunda bir avcı var idi	There was a hunter there,
Vardı ağa düştü gönül	My heart fell into his net.
Açıldı bahçenin gülü	Roses of the garden blossomed
Öter içinde bülbülü	There sings the nightingale
Dost elinden dolu dolu	Abundant came the drinks from the Friend
Sarhoş oldu içti gönül	My heart became delighted.
Pir Sultan'ın zülfü nider	What is Pir Sultan's lock good for?
Şah Sultan'ın zülfü nider	What is Shah Sultan's lock good for?
Er olan ikrarın güder	Real man never retracts his confession
Cesed bunda seyran eder	The idea is taking a walk around
Çün Hakka ulaştı gönül	Since the heart reached God.

The second example differs from the first ones. Even though there is no difference in length, there are major differences in meaning. I happened to record the same nefes again three years later in Kılavuzlu:

Yine dosttan haber geldi Dalgalandı coştı gönül Yar elinden kevser geldi, Derya gibi coştı gönül	Got news from the Friend again My heart leapt for joy Got a drink from my sweetheart My heart leapt for joy like the ocean.
Kulavuzum Şah-ı Merdan Her yanı dopdolu nurdan Şurda her biri bir candan, Neylersin vazgeçti gönül.	Hero of heroes, my guide Is surrounded by light, All those present shared one soul The heart gave it up, what can we do?
Sır Ali'nin sırrı idim Sır edeni sever idim Men kuluyum kemteriyim Pir aşkına düştü gönül	The mystery belonged to Ali I used to like the one telling a secret, I am his humble slave, My heart fell in love with the spiritual teacher.
Açıldı bahçenin gülü Öter içinde bülbülü Dost elinden dolu dolu Serhoş oldu işte gönül	Roses of the garden blossomed There sings the nightingale Abundant came the drinks from the Friend My heart became drunken.
Pir Sultan'ım dolu dolu Er olan ikrarı duru Ceset bundan seyrân eder Can aşkına düştü gönül	My Pir Sultan is absolutely full of Real saint man never retracts his confession The corps is taking a walk around The heart fell in love with my dear.

The examples offered are not rare; I could easily cite dozens of them. Yet my intention was to underline the variability of text in *nefes* and illustrate its nature.

On many occasions we find a different number/order of stanzas, a different name in the last stanza to be considered the author of the *nefes*, a different refrain, a change in the order of the lines, etc. It is also possible in some cases that the melody of the *nefes* is altered, but the latter is comparatively rare. Sometimes the whole stanza is different yet the meaning remains very close to the “original” one.

Example No. 3:

The following example (2003k 1b-6) was collected in Thrace, than I found its variant in a book written on the traditions of the Tahtaci people living in the Taurus Mountains (Çıblak 2005: 236).

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Çeke-çeke men bu dertten ölürüm I will die because of this woe,

Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ali'nin yarası yar yarasıdır
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ali'nin yarası yar yarasıdır
 Buna merhem olmaz dil yarasıdır
 Ali'yi sevmeyen Hakk'ın nesidir
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Bu yurt senin değil konar göçersin
 Ali'nin dolusun bir gün içersin
 Körpe kuzulardan nasıl geçersin
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ilgıt ılgıt oldu akıyor kanım
 Kem geldi didara talihim benim
 Benim derdim bana yeter hey canım
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Pir Sultan Abdal'ım deftere yazar
 Şah efendim Haydar deftere yazar
 Hilebaz yar ile olur mu pazar
 Pir merhem çalmazsa yaralar azar
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama

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Mevlam ben bu dertten ölürüm
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ali'nin yoluna serim veririm
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ali'nin yarası yar yarasıdır
 Ona merhem olmaz dil yarasıdır
 Ali'yi sevenler Hakk'ın nesidir
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama
 Ilgıt ılgıt olmuş akıyor kanım
 Kem geldi kadere talihim benim
 Benim derdim bana yeter hey canım
 Seversen Ali'yi değme yarama

Don't touch my wound if you love Ali,
 Ali's wound is my darling's wound,
 Don't touch my wound if you love Ali,
 Ali's wound is my darling's wound,
 There is no remedy on the wound of the tongue.
 Alit nem szerető kije Istennek?
 Don't touch my wound if you love Ali,
 This country is not yours, you will die,
 You will drink Ali's wine once
 How can you leave your little ones?
 Don't touch my wound if you love Ali,
 My blood is flowing slowly,
 The onlooker finds my luck little
 Hey darling, my woe is enough for me
 Don't touch my wound if you love Ali,
 My Pir Sultan Abdal writes into a book
 My Shah Haydar writes into a book,
 Can one bargain with a tricky lover?
 Unless the saint does not apply ointment,
 my wounds become infected,
 Don't touch my wound if you love Ali.

Bu yurt bizim deęil konar göçersin
Ali'nin dolusun bir gün içersin
Körpe kuzulardan nasıl geçersin
Seversen Ali'yi deęme yarama
Pir Sultan Abdal'ım yazdılar yazı
Dilabaz*larıma olur mu bazı
Pir melhem sürmezse yaralar azar
Seversen Ali'yi deęme yarama
*‘iyi konuşan’

Bu yurt senin/bizim deęil there is no real difference from the point of view of message: none of us will be trusted to be responsible for all the earthly problems. Formally both words (*senin, bizim*) have the same syllables therefore they can be replaced by one another.

This kind of difference we owe to a participant in the ceremony with a somewhat loose memory who vaguely remembered the essence. This is a possible way of valid variants to be borne, enriching oral traditions like we have observed in the case of folksongs.

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TATAR-BASHKIR Ö BEFORE Y

(1)

- 1) Tat. böye, Bash. böyö ^{Kaz. biyü} spider, cf. Tat. Bash. böjäk
- 2) Tat. böyel, Bash. böyök "big, high", Kaz. biyik high, tall
- 3) Tat. böyer, Bash. böyöt "kidney" Kaz. biyir side ^{biyrek} side
- 4) Tat. böyeräk id.
- 5) Tat. böyerän bat. меша
- 6) Bash. böyän "duodenum" (Mons. bögen ?)
- 7) " döjöm 'general' " (? M., cf. M. tegä - to collect, gather
- 8) Tat. döjlek - to overthrow, throw
- 9) Tat. Bash. döjä camel, cf. Kaz. tüje < cc töve
- 10) Tat. jöy, Bash. jöy seam & Kaz. ziy frequent, thick, dense
- 11) Tat. Bash. köy motif, melody, tune, Kaz. küy (NK kö)
- 12) köy - to burn, Kaz. küy - id., küy soot
- 13) Tat. köyälän - to grieve, köyän - id.
- 14) köymä "boat, ship; sledge, coach", Bash. köymä "sled coach", Bash. kämä "boat, ship", Tat. dial. kän id., kän Tat. (Räs.) kämä id. Kaz. keme "boat, ship" cf. Kaz. küyme hood of a
- 15) Bash. köyöldö hood, snipe cf. Mong. kiyilen gray
- 16) köyrä - to catch fire; to dry, fade, wither
- 17) köyrä - to go to ruin, collapse

