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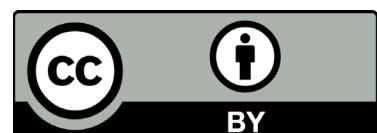
A Muslim Holy Man to Convert Christians in a Transottoman Setting.

Approaches to Sarı Saltuk from the Late
Middle Ages to the Present

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A Muslim Holy Man to Convert Christians in a Transottoman Setting.

Approaches to Sarı Saltuk from the Late Middle Ages to the Present

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ABSTRACT Interpretations of texts on Sarı Saltuk may serve as a central example of the entanglement of Muslim and Christian contexts in (south-)eastern Europe and the Near East. Analyzing the fifteenth-century *Saltuk-nâme* and reports by Evliya Çelebi from the seventeenth century, a wide extension of the area concerned, as far as Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy and Sweden, can be observed. With the change of the contents of reports from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an increasing interest in Christians participating in the veneration of sites connected to Sarı Saltuk can be remarked. Yet descriptions of a veneration of Sarı Saltuk in a non-Muslim setting remain firmly embedded in Christian contexts, complicating a transreligious interpretation of them. In today's Turkish perspective, though, Sarı Saltuk is no longer contextualized in a manner encompassing Russia and Poland, too, but much more in a context focusing on and affirming national Turkish Anatolian or nationalized post-Ottoman contents in the Balkans.

KEY WORDS Muslim-Christian saint cult; common veneration; culture of memory; Sarı Saltuk; Central Asia; Anatolia; South Eastern Europe; Poland-Lithuania; Russia; Transottoman space

Introduction

This contribution deals with the Turkic Saint Sarı Saltuk and his veneration, which developed in southeast Europe. The analysis is based on the compilation called *Saltuk-name* (which contains popular legends and was compiled between 1473 and 1480, but the oldest manuscript is from 1591) and relevant passages in Evliya Çelebi's text. Moreover, research and sources on the twentieth century and contemporary veneration are discussed.

To some degree, new and inclusive approaches to Ottoman-European history between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, taking into account considerations of general early modern studies (Helmedach et al. 2014), can be pursued particularly based on the example of the saint cults: several saints in southeast Europe and Anatolia

were venerated by both Christians and Muslims. Not only were St. Michael (Elsie 2002a, 218–19) and St. Petka or St. Venera (Çabej 1935, 568) revered by both Catholic and Orthodox Christians as well as by Muslims, but also—at least according to Serbian accounts—St. Sava (Rohdewald 2009). Moreover, the veneration contexts of Clement and Naum, two students of Cyril and Methodius, and in particular the veneration of the monastery dedicated to Naum at Lake Ohrid, have not been limited to Orthodoxy since the late Middle Ages (Naum) or since the twentieth century (Clement) (Rohdewald 2014, 366): The monastery church was said to be one of the tombs of the Muslim religious warrior Sarı Saltuk, who originated from Central Asia and who shall be the centre of focus here. In this article, I shall attempt to provide insight into the functions and interpretations of this cross-regional *lieu de mémoire* of Sarı Saltuk from the late Middle Ages up to the twenty-first century. In the discussion about the status of research as part of the culture of memory, I will at the same time present the various directions the interpretations of Sarı Saltuk have taken in academic discourse. Transliterations of Arabic or Ottoman terms appear in this contribution according to the quoted sources and, with few exemptions, have not been homogenized.

Since the fifteenth century, Sarı Saltuk (Entries in Encyclopedias: Babinger 1927; Kiel 2007; Leiser n.d.), who died in 1297/98 (697), has been considered the most popular of all the personages of the Bektashi Order of Dervishes (cf. Norris 2006, 57; Norris 1993; Norton 2001). However, Sunnis also attempted to appropriate the religious capital associated with him: According to the *Saltuk-nâme* compiled by Ebü'l-Hayr-ı Rûmî around 1480, Sarı Saltuk was a Sunni of the Hanefi legal school (Kaleshi 1971, 816). Many narratives were superimposed on him and conflated over several centuries and within a very large geographic region, which extended from Central Asia and Anatolia to southeast Europe, Russia and Asia Minor. These narratives ranged from depicting him as a shaman and religious warrior to depicting him as a saint (Norris 2006, 54). Nearly all aspects of his life are legendary and are present in quite varied traditions, the great majority of which are not contemporary. Possible clues to his “real” life disappear entirely in the background of these narrative reproductions of the tales, which are often limited to certain social situations and areas or places, but which at the same time refer to other geographic regions. He therefore appears as a supra-regional “religious figure of remembrance” (cf. Bahlcke, Rohdewald, and Wünsch 2013, especially xv–xxxiv for a methodological discussion) of the first order: Figures of remembrance, which are usually synonymous with places of remembrance, are metaphorically to be understood as discourses produced by the social group conveying them and thereby were also respectively altered (François and Schulze 2001, 18). “Figures of remembrance,” in the sense of Jan Assmann, have a “concrete reference to time and space” as well as to a social group and are (re)produced anew in concrete practices (Assmann 2002, 38).

Considering the geographical breadth the tales on Sarı Saltuk encompass, he is being considered here, too, as contributing to what might be called a Transottoman space of remembrance (cf. our German Research Foundation (DFG)-financed research priority program Transottomanica [www.transottomanica.de] and Rohdewald, Conermann, and Fuess 2019).¹

Sarı Saltuk: A Cunning Warrior-Saint in Anatolia, the Balkans and the Danube Delta Region

According to extensive and numerous veneration texts, Sarı Saltuk, a native of Central Asia, played an important role in the spread of the Islamic faith and rule north and west of Constantinople and in southeast Europe in the thirteenth century. In particular, the warrior-saint is regarded to be responsible for the spread of Islam among the Tatars, led by Nogay, that took place beginning in 1260, on the south eastern borderlands of Rus' (Norris 2006, 57). Tales about and practices referring to Sarı Saltuk are thus to be interpreted as an exemplary *lieu de mémoire* in the multiple Byzantine-Frankish-Seljuk-Ottoman contact zone in the eastern Mediterranean, which began to take form with the expansion of Catholic traders and crusaders as well as of Islam under the Seljuqs and the Rum-Seljuqs into Asia Minor, the Black Sea and, beginning in the thirteenth century, into southeast Europe in a stricter sense (Rohdewald 2011, 2014, 149f.). In exactly this context Sarı Saltuk is seen as having played a "mediating role" between Muslims and Christians when he led followers of 'Izz al-Dīn Kaykā'ūs, the Rumi-Seljuk sultan who took refuge with the Byzantines (Smith 1982, 225). Kaykā'ūs and other Rumi-Seljuk rulers of this time, who often had Byzantine wives or mothers who remained Christians, are described today as probably having had a double identity, Muslim and Christian, in a larger setting of Persian-Byzantine intermingling, especially at the courts of the ruling families (Shukurov 2012).

One of the oldest Arabic hagiographic texts about Sarı Saltuk is the work *Tuffāḥ al-arwāḥ*, completed in 715/1315 by Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad as-Sarāj al-Rifā'ī (Norris 2006, 58). The main source for this text is said to be Bahram Şah al-Haydarî, who belonged to the small Sufi order of the Haydars, which, however, was widespread geographically in the late medieval period. The report thus appears older and more accurate than the famous and, of course, rather fictive travelogue by Ibn Battūta, created in the 1350s and describing the world, seen from an Arabic center, from Morocco to India, Central Asia and as far as Malaysia and China (Elger 2010; Kiel 2005,

1 For a general approach to aspects of the topic of this article, see Rohdewald 2017.

286f.). According to *Tuffāḥ al-arwāḥ*, Saltuk was described as a warrior-saint. As leader of up to a thousand followers who attacked infidels, Saltuk appeared here as a figure who tore off his garments in a trance and who, in a second physical manifestation, fought against infidels and performed impressive deeds. For example, he caused the waters to disappear so that fish could be collected, as was told in tales recounted among Sufi disciples. He also freed one of the (Orthodox) Christians captured by the Catholic Franks—under the condition that he and his brother would become Muslims (Norris 2006, 59f.). Miracles that at first implicitly referred to Moses and Jesus, without being explicitly associated with them, were part of a conversion narrative in this text. According to the source, “Saltuk at-Turki was a miracle-working Dervish and lived in the city of İsakça in the country of Qıpçak. He died in 697 [1297/98] and was buried at the mountain where he had lived, some distance from İsakçe. His followers built a *zaviye* [small tekke, S.R.] around his tomb” (b. Isma’îl an-Nabhânî 1974, 100 f., quoted according to Kiel 2005, 286). The city of İsakçe, (in Romanian: Isaccea) was located west of Ak Kirman, according to the source. Kiel identified the mountain mentioned here as “Baba Mountain” (in Turkish: Babadağ). İsakçe is therefore probably the Bulgarian city of Oblučica during the Middle Ages, located on the lower Danube. İsakçe served Nogay Khan as a base for campaigns against the Bulgarian capital of Tărnovo. His conversion and that of his fellow combatants to Islam is attributed to Sarı Saltuk. These contexts of veneration and their connections to urban history have been studied thoroughly (Kiel 2005, 289).

Similar arguments were made in the *Saltuk-name*, compiled according to comparable epic tales in Ottoman and Persian around 1480: In this work, too, the theme of crossing religious boundaries was given great significance. Apparently, the hero was supposed to have been successful in the deception and persuasion in favour of Islam even in Constantinople: Sarı Saltuk travelled through Rumelia, disguised as a priest; toward Christians he pretended to be a traveller from Serbia and later an envoy of the Messiah. He gave a sermon in a church before the Christian prince, his lords and a prince of the Church (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 35; cf. Krstić 2011: 69f.). The New Testament that he preached, however, was not the text known to the Christians but the “original, unchanged” text, which predicted another prophet after Jesus—as was customary in the Muslim, anti-Christian depiction: this text allegedly was older than the Christian text and falsified by it (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 69f.; cf. Krstić 2011, 71f.). According to Tijana Krstić, this interpretation changed from “a potentially syncretic theme into an explicitly anti-syncretic one” (2011, 70). The missionary intention of the text exemplified the awareness of a distinct boundary to Christianity characteristic of that time.

The geographic range of activities reported on in this collection was already extraordinarily wide, encompassing Central Asia, mentioning hubs like Kashgar on

the Silk road (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 2: 13) and Asia Minor, Mesopotamia as well as the Rus', Poland and Andalusia: The text starts with a passage about Cingis Khan, the conquest of Baghdad and the intention of the Seljuks to conquer Constantinople, i.e. (Eastern) Rome (Rûm: Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 1f.). But not only Byzantium and Iraq, but also the “Franks”, Rus' and Poland appeared here in an entanglement of competition and conflict: According to the narrative, Sarı Saltuk rode his horse “to the lands of Rus' ('Umlâk-i Rûsî)” until reaching Poland. In this context it is mentioned how he stamped on the tents of “Romans, the Rus', and the Franks” (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 20). Shortly before dying, Sarı Saltuk reportedly commanded to send each ruler a coffin, each wishing to have Sarı Saltuk's corpse. Twelve of them were to be sent to Tuna Baba (Babadağ), Yılan Baba (Kaliakra), Edirne, Eski Baba (Babaeski), the steppe of the Kipchaks, Wallachia, Moldova, Rus', Hungary, Poland, Bohemia and Andalusia (cf. Anetshofer 2012, 303 and Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 3: 299–302. Slightly different readings: Smith 1982, 219; Akalın 1998, 13; cf. Karamustafa 2012). This obviously fictive tale imagined a spatial expansion of the influence of the veneration of Sarı Saltuk into distant Christian and Muslim, Ottoman and non-Ottoman territories alike. Sites known later for the veneration of Sarı Saltuk in the Western Balkans, such as the monastery of Saint Naum, are missing in this and similar enumerations, however. Yet the compilation mentions the Balkans or south eastern Europe, as it reports on “the Serbs”, “Bosnia (Bosna mülkine)”, “Kosovo” and “Morea” (i.e. the Peloponnes)” (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 80, 142f., 2: 144f., 3: 364). Moreover, Anatolia played a role in this compilation—e.g. Amasya (Harcenevan) and Sivas are mentioned (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 59, 93)—as well as Syria (Aleppo, Hamah, Damascus), Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina or Egypt (50–52, 94). Besides “infidels (Kâfirler)” or “Nazarenes (Nasrânîler)” (i.e. Christians), “Turks (Türkler)”, “Jews (Yahûdî)” and Armenians are mentioned in missionary disputes on the true religion (64, 83). The veneration of Constantine the Great “from Rome, the city of Constantine (Rûm'dan Kostantîn şehrinden, Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 92)” is also part of the text as a fictional trip of Sarı Saltuk to France (“Fırance diyârına”), “Milan”, Spain (“Espan”) or Genoa (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 99; cf. Aydoğan 2012, 110). The “Frankish stronghold” and later Genoese city of Caffa on Crimea, its closeness to the Rus' and, then, the Khanate of the Tatars were also incorporated into the broad geographical space of the narrative (Saltuk-Nâme 1988–1990, 1: 156), corroborating the cross-regional relevance of Crimea (Klein 2012).

This wide, imagined space of action gave the hero of the tale a crossregional or—for the late Middle Ages—a universal arena of veneration in a (post-)Byzantine, Ottoman or European setting. Heroic narratives on other fighters for Islam, as known in other Vilayet-Nâme (Anetshofer 2012, 292), contain passages on Sarı Saltuk told with different details—concerning the geographical extension of the mind map, as

well: for instance, the *Hacı Bektaş Velî Vilayet-Nâme* explains how Sarı Saltuk went from Mount Arafat near Mecca to Sinope at the Northern Anatolian Black Sea Coast and from there to Georgia and then to Rum, i.e. Keliğra, setting him in the core Muslim region, and expanded into the Caucasus and the Black Sea hinterlands at the Danube (Manâkib-ı Hacı Bektâş-ı Veli 2005, 62–65). Therefore, with the narrative about Sarı Saltuk we arguably have access to descriptions of a very large, transcontinental and interreligious, yet beyond any doubt Muslim-dominated Ottoman mental map, which was reproduced by readers and listeners of the relevant tales.

Sarı Saltuk as a “Christian Ascetic”: Sunni Orthodoxy vs the Historicisation of Heterodoxy in the Early Modern Period

It was not until after 1500 that the notion of Islamic orthodoxy changed in the Ottoman Empire and heresies were defined. According to Krstić, this is embedded in an overarching process of confessional consolidation, which took place in the early modern period both in Christianity and Islam (2011, 20). Krstić does not see any dichotomous division in the discussion of the confessionalisation thesis regarding the rivalling Christian and Islamic conversion narratives. Rather, in her research she found a close proximity and a high degree of interconnection in confessional homogenisation discourses: Ottoman texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarding conversions resembled Catholic narratives of the same period, but the polemic rhetoric used in these advocated the supremacy of Islam (Krstić 2011, 166; 2008). Primarily as a direct polemic demarcation from the Shia Islam of the Safavids, the Sunni “orthodoxy was invented” (Dressler 2005, 155). The policy of strengthening Sunni Islam and the “social disciplinary” measures of Süleyman I were represented textually by the harmonisation of the imperial legal system, as was advocated by Ebussuud Efendi, i.e. to conflate the secular common law with Islamic law (Krstić 2011, 168; Imber 2009).

Not least, the practices commemorating Sarı Saltuk can be regarded at the core of this development: Like Sultan Bayezid II before him, Sultan Süleyman visited Babadağ in 1538 (Kaleshi 1971, 827). But unlike Bayezid, who established new endowments and thus institutionalized the veneration practices, Süleyman felt prompted by the tales about Sarı Saltuk to demand an expert opinion by Şeyhülislam Ebussuud, which was supposed to determine the orthodoxy of Sarı Saltuk, now appearing rather doubtful. The elements which appeared to be Christian in the already introduced conversion narratives apparently provoked doubt about this and also about the outcome of the legal opinion by Ebussuud, in which he stated that Sarı Saltuk was to be regarded as a

“Christian ascetic” (“bir keşişdir”, quoted from the fetva as in Okiç 1952, 56). Although it has been argued the fetva was a later forgery (Okiç 1952), the contrary is supported by better arguments (Yörükân 1952). Ebussuud consequently delegitimized the veneration of Sarı Saltuk as not orthodox Sunni but Christian, using the term “keşiş”, which was commonly used only for Christian contexts. He denounced the intermingling comparable to the denominational, oldest meaning of ‘syncretic’: This term was first used in confessional polemic debates to condemn allegedly illegitimate entanglements.

Sarı Saltuk in the Seventeenth Century: Evliya’s Rhetoric Insistence on Poland, Bohemia and Russia

Despite this new demarcation between a consolidated orthodoxy and heresy, Sarı Saltuk remained revered locally, at least as depicted in passages from the extensive, outstanding travelogue by Evliya Çelebi of around 1660. Evliya, who was by far the most important Ottoman travel writer of the seventeenth century (Tezcan, Tezcan, and Dankoff 2012), attempted to put Sarı Saltuk in a Sunni context: According to him, the “spiritual masters” in the convent near “Keliğra” or Kaliakra, where “the wooden sword of the saint” and other relics were kept, were orthodox Sunnis: “All are strict Sunnis, believers and monotheists, who perform the five daily prayers in their mosque” (quoted as in the translation by Dankoff and Kim 2010, 51. Cf. Hammer’s English translation: Evliya 1850, 2: 72; original Ottoman text: Evliyâ 1896, 2: 138; modern Turkish translation: Evliyâ 2005, 2, part 1: 162f.). In fact, Evliya tried to revise the judgement by Ebussuud by disclaiming several times that Sarı Saltuk was “a priest named Saltık” (Anetshofer 2012, 293).

Several obviously fictive passages in the tale by Evliya are of central importance, both for a trans-religious interpretation as well as for an interpretation which recognizes an actually missionizing intention and only a pretension of the tale to be interreligious. This also concerns the revised, expanded geographic dimension of the imagination of Sarı Saltuk depicted in the text. Here, the convent in Babadağ was attributed to Sarı Saltuk under the subtitle “explanation of the Tekke of Keliğra Sultan or Sarı Saltık”. On this occasion, Sarı Saltuk was introduced and his influence was elaborated directly in the context of successor of Hacı Bektaş Velî and Keliğra Sultan, who was, after having allegedly killed a patriarch of Danzig, identified as Sarı Saltık:

...after the conquest of the country of Rum [i.e. Anatolia],...Hacı Bektaş Velî and Keliğra Sultan went with 70 poor people into Muscovy and Poland, Bohemia and

Dobruca...Hacı Bektaş gave Keliğra Sultan a wooden sword, a carpet, a drum, a banner, a flag, a kettle-drum and a trumpet.

Keliğra Sultan went, playing these instruments,

from Rum to Crimea, and from there to the people of Heşdek in Muscovy and Lipka in Poland. In the port of Danzig (Daniska) in Poland he conversed with the patriarch Saint Nicholas, who was named Sarı Saltuk. Sarı Saltuk [i.e. Keliğra Sultan, S.R.] killed him, hid his body and went out of the church saying: 'I am Sarı Saltuk' and by this undercover means converted many thousands to Islam. Thus he travelled many years under the name of Sarı Saltuk, and being himself yellow-coloured (as Sarı Saltuk was) he obtained from Ahmed Yesevî the name of the yellow one."² (Translation by S.R., cf. the original Ottoman text: Evliyâ 1998, 71 and Evliyâ 1896, 2: 133f.; the modern Turkish translation: Evliyâ 2005, 2, part 1: 158f.; cf. Hammer's old English translation: Evliya 1850, 2: 70)

Thus, Keliğra Sultan not only seemingly went to Russia, Poland-Lithuania and Bohemia, but also allegedly spoke with St. Nicholas, called Sarı Saltuk, in Danzig and killed him, adopting his name Sarı Saltuk. While this tale is easily recognisable as totally fictitious, the people of Heşdek in Muscovy and Lipka in Poland mentioned in the passage have a background in reality. Since the fourteenth century, Tatars (Kulwicka-Kamińska and Łapicz 2013; cf. Kappeler 1988) had been in the service of Lithuania and, at the latest with the conquest of the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, also partly in the service of Moscow: "Lipka" in Kipchak-Turkish means "Lithuania" (Kołodziejczyk 2011, 9).

But let's return to Evliya's narrative: Through deeds and miracles, Sarı Saltuk then succeeded in making the subjects of the King of the Dobruca convert to Islam. Shortly after this great success, Sarı Saltuk died, according to Evliya (Evliyâ 1998, 72).

Then, the travel writer used the apparently well-established framework of the narrative about Sarı Saltuk and broadened this geographically and fundamentally with respect to religion, even further than before, again obviously as fiction: Accordingly, in his last will Sarı Saltuk "ordered that seven coffins were to be prepared, because seven kings would lay claim to his body". Thus it supposedly happened—the "King of Muscovy" sent a coffin which was then sent back to Moscow with the body of Sarı Saltuk to be venerated in a "great türbe and a tekke". The same happened with the "King of Poland", who sent a coffin which was then sepulchered and venerated as "great

2 As "sarı" means yellow.

türbe with a tekke” in Danzig. The “King of Bohemia” did the same and this third coffin was then displayed with the (third) body of Sarı Saltuk “great türbe with a tekke” in Pızovniçe [Pilsen?, S. R.]. More coffins came from the King of Sweden and the “King of Adrianople” as well as from and the “King of Moldova” and the ruler of Dobruca, and all of them brought back the coffin with a body of Sarı Saltuk, who was then venerated in a “great türbe and a tekke” at all these seven places. About the last place, Babadağ, Evliya added the information that this town entirely belonged to the endowments of Sarı Saltuk. Here Evliya constructed a space of religious memory extending far beyond the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire as a network of various coffins and tombs, of which “only three were located in the Empire”. He expressly stated, finally, that Sarı Saltuk was revered “by Christians”: “in Christian countries he is generally called St. Nicholas. All Christian nations venerate him greatly” (cf. the original Ottoman text: Evliyâ 1998, 73; Evliyâ 1896, 2: 136f.; the modern Turkish translation: Evliyâ 2005, 2, part 1: 161f.; Hammer’s old English translation: Evliya 1850, 2: 71f.). Eventually, the author conceded that the conversion of Christians had not been completely successful; he was satisfied with describing an alleged subversion of their faith, which in his view became syncretic and partly Muslim or could be attributed to be under the roof of Islam by means of the veneration of Sarı Saltuk disguised or mistaken for St. Nicholas.

The widening and further elaboration of the older, shorter, already discussed narratives on Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania reflect the densification of the transregional or Transottoman communication of the Ottoman Empire, Poland-Lithuania and Muscovy as well as of the Crimean Khanate: All three major states and the Khanate were competing and intertwined through extensive, mutually claimed borderlands. The emphasis on the “Lipka Tatars” illustrates the awareness of a mutually intertwined history (Rohdewald 2016; Fisher 1998; Klein 2012), even if it is unknown whether Evliya knew about concrete texts, such as the *risale-i tatar-i leh* written in 1558 (Cf. Połczyński 2015). Frederick Hasluck holds that Nicholas was incorporated into this discourse because of his strong veneration among Bulgars and Russians (1929, II, 431). Moreover, Evliya seems to have adopted heroic narratives on other fighters for Islam as known in other Vilayet-Nâme, while having remained without knowledge of the Saltukname (Anetshofer 2012, 292).

Sarı Saltuk as St. Naum: Albania and Macedonia as Areas of Expansion of Saltuk's Veneration since the Nineteenth Century

According to Nathalie Clayer, only the veneration of Sarı Saltuks in Krujë can be dated back to the sixteenth century (2007, 97). Already, Evliya mentioned (only) for Gjirokastër/Ergiri that followers of Ali, who all read Persian, venerated the feast of Sarı Saltuk (Evliya Çelebi 2000, 84f.). Thus, it was not until sometime after the spread of the alleged veneration of Sarı Saltuk to Muscovy, Poland-Lithuania, Bohemia and Sweden that the western regions of the “lands of Rum” were also elaborated on more extensively in the narrative.

It was not until reports of travellers in the nineteenth century that concrete names of places were mentioned in present-day Albania or in the historical landscape of Macedonia as well as in Bosnia and in Herzegovina, where alleged tombs of other saints were depicted as combined in their veneration with Sarı Saltuk (Hasluck 1914–1916, 85f.; Smith 1982, 223f.; Osmani 2012). It is this veneration which has been seen by leading researches as “syncretic”.³ This allegedly ‘bottom up’ expansion of transreligious or unconsciously syncretic veneration stated by Machiel Kiel is contrasted by the early interpretation of the same phenomenon as a conscious strategy, even “propaganda” by the Bektāşi to claim the sacral and social space of central Christian places and figures and appropriate them in the long term for Islam (Hasluck 1929, II, 437f.). Grace Smith formulated a compromise, combining both approaches in one sentence as possible options: “He was identified with Christian saints (S. Spyridon, S. Nicholas, S. Naum), the identification forced upon the people, if what Hasluck thinks is true, or else made naturally by the people who perceived strong similarities between their original saint and Sarı Saltuk” (Smith 1982, 225).

Unfortunately, we learn more concretely about practices only for the twentieth century, when they were reported about as observed and in use namely by the (Kosovo) Albanian classical Orientalist Hassan Kaleshi. He summarized the rather recent development in 1966 as follows:

The popularity of Sari Saltuk in the Balkans was so great—indeed it spread so intensively—that the number of seven supposed tombs in the original legends has long been surpassed. Besides these seven burial sites that Evliya Çelebi mentions, we must also mention Sari Saltuk's mausoleum in Blagaj, in Herzegovina, as well as a larger number of tombs in Kosovo and Metohija and in Albania, which we have

3 “Zentral in der Verehrung Sarı Saltuks auf dem Balkan ist jedoch der synkretische Charakter des Kults, an dem sich sowohl Muslime als auch Christen beteiligten” (Kiel 2000, 283).

already enumerated, as well as those on Corfu and Sveti Naum. One really has the impression that each city wanted to boast about having a mausoleum of Sari Saltuk. (1971, 828)

Working in an ethnographic manner, too, he recorded and formulated the following information given by a local Muslim interviewee in the 1960s:

About two kilometres from Peć, in Kosovo-Metohija, at a place called 'Fusha e Zejnel Agës', there is a neglected tomb that people say is the tomb of Sari Saltuk (*Vorri i Sari Saltukut*). Here there used to be a mausoleum, the tomb itself was obscured. Under the roof of the mausoleum, there had also been a room which visitors came to and which was inhabited by the tomb keeper. Near this tomb there is also a second tomb, in which, about fifty years ago, the tomb keeper Šaih 'Abdī was interred. These tombs are visited by both Christians and Muslims. The Christians call it the tomb of St. Vasilije, and pilgrims come here and light their candles. They come daily, but on Tuesday there is the highest number of visitors. On the feast day of St. Elijah, the 'Ali Günü', the 2nd of August, large numbers of the population undertake a pilgrimage here. The Rifāī-tekye has taken over the maintenance of the tomb. (Kaleshi 1971, 817⁴)

This quotation may be interpreted as giving evidence of a shared sacred place. But where does the sharing start and end, where does the mixing of religions begin, where is it delimited, and how do the participating people—either the interviewee or the researcher reporting his observation—perceive and contextualise the practices? From the point of view of one of the Christians mentioned, their veneration may probably just be meant for St. Vasilije and his tomb, which possibly would be described by them to be older than Sari Saltuk and in no way connected to him. On the other hand, from the point of view of a Muslim, their veneration might be meant just for Sari Saltuk and his tomb, which would probably be seen by them as not really the tomb of St. Vasilije, but only Sari Saltuk's. The same might apply for St. Eliah (Christian perspective) and Ali (Muslim/Shia/Alevite perspective), respectively. Thus, while the same place is described here as venerated by Christians and Muslims, their reasons to venerate it might be very different, indeed mutually excluding the tale of the other group. The quotation gives actually no hint of a joint, Christian-Muslim faith in a shared narrative, very common to both groups, although both venerated the same grave. Contrariwise, the aim of both competing groups might rather be the appropriation of the sacred place for a

4 Translated from German to English by the author, as the other passages by Kaleshi to come in this contribution

homogenous and exclusive veneration. Only if we knew more about the mentioned phenomena, such as the (jointly Christian-Muslim?) pilgrimage, could we judge in another way. The contribution to research intended by Kaleshi turns out to be open to manifold interpretations and to leave more questions open than answered. Related questions have been discussed with examples other than the practices of veneration of Sarı Saltuk (on “antagonistic tolerance” or “competitive sharing of religious sites”, Hayden 2002, cf. the comments by Bowman 2010; Henig 2015; Albera and Couroucli 2012), who should remain in our focus here: In other passages of the contribution by Kaleshi, too, it is left up to the reader’s imagination whether the interviewee reported by Kaleshi meant Christians and Muslims pilgrimaging to these places for the same reasons or for competing causes:

Since it was assumed that he was buried—some say in the Church of Saint Spyridon on Corfu, others say in the monastery of St. Naum in Ochrid—both Christians and Muslims pilgrimage there as if to a pilgrimage site. But since it is not exactly known which tomb is the right one, there are seven such pilgrimage sites to which people go on pilgrimages, convinced that it is precisely this tomb that is the true tomb of Sarı Saltuk. (1971, 818)

According to Kaleshi, tombs of Sarı Saltuk are moreover at

the Church of the Saint Spyridon on Corfu, and also Nahiye-Has, in the Paštrik Mountains (Bustrik); finally there is a tomb (*türbe*) of Ari Saltuk, and on the day of Ali Günü (i.e. on the feast day of St. Elijah) people undertake pilgrimages from Djakovica, Prizren and the surrounding Nahiyen to go there to be cured of ailments and diseases. Here sacrificial animals are also slaughtered. (Kaleshi 1971, 818)

Besides churches and a monastery, i.e. places claimed by Christians, at least one Muslim tomb called a *türbe* was mentioned, which initially must have been Muslim but was then secondarily also revered by Christians. The motivation of the visits, however, was to be cured, irrespective of religious affiliation. A known derivation of the name of Sarı Saltuk is associated with a cure from yellow fever, as Kaleshi mentions. What is decisive for the attractiveness of a saint’s cult for believers, irrespective of their religion, was and is the prospect of benefitting from its healing power (Hasluck 1929, I, 68f.; cf. Duijzings 1993, 85), its ‘sacred capital’. The veneration of grave sites appears to be oriented on the meagre basis of such reports on recovery or relief from everyday problems.

One of the miracles supposedly wrought by Sarı Saltuk facilitated the plowing of a field, as the legends concerning Sarı Saltuk reveal, which were obtained from interviewees and recorded by Jean Deny around the year 1914. According to him, he was called “Chendaoun” in Albanian (by dissimilation for Chen Naum or Sveti Naoum; Deny 1920, 18f.). Also in this text, religious boundaries were crossed, and his worshippers were described as “everyone”: “Tout le monde—chrétiens et musulmans—sont admis à le visiter et reçoivent l’hospitalité du monastère dont les revenus sont assurés par les ‘vaquoufs’ de Trpezica et Lyobanichta” (Deny, 1920, 18f.). His veneration in this rendering seemed monotheistic, without separating the Christian from the Muslim, as part of a single unified religion under a common roof of Islam and Christianity. This reception by a West European traveller and researcher also took place outside the control and steering of the Sufi fraternities, who acted in their self-perception as missionaries within the framework of the older texts that were still in use.

Ger van Duijzings mentions—initially independently of Sarı Saltuk—examples of religious veneration by Serbs and “Gypsy pilgrims” in the Gračanica monastery during the 1980s and 1990s, which apparently followed a similar, implicitly trans-religious logic (2000, 67–85). In contrast to the interpretation that (all) Muslims deliberately attempted to appropriate Christian sites, an interpretation which Duijzings shares in the context of the veneration of Sarı Saltuk (2000, 81), in my opinion the religious and political leaders who thought quite strategically should be highlighted. “Ordinary believers,” however, who may not have been familiar with religious matters in detail, put the practical benefits—healing and problem solving as well as sociability—in the foreground (Duijzings 2000, 79). In a general framework, without reference to Sarı Saltuk, Duijzings is actually suggesting this interpretation: “Muslims and Christians of different ethno-religious backgrounds have visited each other’s shrines, shared the veneration of certain saints and have often disregarded their priests’ objections to the transgression of religious boundaries.” (2000, 79, 84f., cf. 79f.)

The reading of the site at the monastery Saint Naum as a shared or mixed sacred place is correct in so far as Christians perceive it as a Christian site and Muslims perceive the same site as a Muslim site. But I did not find immediate or primary sources confirming the *mixture* of both faiths or a *transreligious*, monotheistic practice *beyond* the affirmation of one of them.

The interpretation of a fresque in the Church as showing Sarı Saltuk is common (only) among Muslims, too:

The large number of Muslim visitors to this shrine, especially at the tomb of Saint Naum, is due to their belief that the face of Saint Naum in the painting entitled ‘Saint Naum Reins in a Bear Instead of an Ox’ actually belongs to the Bektashi saint,

Sar' Salt'k. The two-wheeled chariot in which St Naum sits is pulled by a deer and a lion, which are traditional Bektashi animal symbols. (Filipova 2014, 7)

Moreover, the closeness of this and other legends on Sarı Saltuk to those about Hızır, a helping immortal personage, are stressed (Filipova 2014, 7; cf. Döğüş 2015).

Yet from a Christian point of view, the cart drawn by an ox and a bear instead of by two oxen, exclusively represents one of the Christian legends about Saint Naum as known from other places in the region, and certainly not Sarı Saltuk, who remains unmentioned in this text ("Predanija" 2017).

Thus, in relation to this and similar examples it is not adequate—and a wrong reading of Babinger's short entry on Sarı Saltuk in the Encyclopedia of Islam, quoted as source of this claim—to pronounce that he was

(...) strongly venerated by the Christians in the region. Especially the Macedonian and the Bulgarian people, being Orthodox Christians, venerated [him] as Saint Nicholas, Saint Spiridon, Saint Naum and later (...) added Saint Georges, Saint Elyah, and [set him] in place of Saint Simeon and Saint Koncolos [?].⁵ (Hodža 2015, 12)

Although Babinger made the point that one may see Sarı Saltuk as a "one of the most remarkable features in the mingling of Muslim and Christian beliefs", he mentioned just Muslim texts and contexts of veneration, but no Christian examples (1927, 173).

The interest in connecting St. Naum's monastery or Clement to Sarı Saltuk and, thus, Islam, was just another expression of the large attraction of their 'sacral capital' in the context of competing discourses on the appropriation of the historical region of Macedonia these sites represented. In Serbian (referring to the region as South Serbia), Bulgarian (describing the region as Western Bulgaria or Bulgarian Macedonia) and later Macedonian national projects, the history of orthodox Christianity and especially these local saints played an absolutely pivotal role as *lieux de mémoire* used for the consolidation and featuring of nationalised religious and historical narratives (extensively: Rohdewald 2014).

In today's Turkish perspective, Sarı Saltuk is no longer contextualized in a manner encompassing Russia and Poland but much more in a context focusing on and affirming national Turkish Anatolian (Döğüş 2015) or nationalized post-Ottoman contents in the Balkans (Akalin 1998). As part of this development, the inclusion of Christian narrative elements into the tales and their analysis decreased to a large extent. According to an

5 English translation by author.

anonymous Turkish visitor to the place (with a photograph of the tomb in question) in 2015, visits by Muslims have seemingly decreased today, as he writes on an internet blog, due to their emigration after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The same—obviously casual—visitor actually denounced the Muslim perspective and narratives about the grave of Sarı Saltuk being in the Monastery, as the latter is, in his eyes, an exclusively Christian place, without any hints which might possibly be interpreted as Muslim: “If it remains to me to judge, I think the tale that here was a grave of Sarı Saltuk is an exemplary legend, as inside the church I could not see anything hinting at something belonging to a Muslim grave.” (“Balkanlarda“ 2015)⁶

Conclusion

Interpretations of texts on Sarı Saltuk may serve as a central example of the entanglement of Muslim and Christian contexts in (south-)eastern Europe, Central Asia and Anatolia: The narratives related to Sarı Saltuk show the extension of a ‘Transottoman’ context expanding across a vast geographical space encompassing Arabia, Anatolia, Georgia, Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy, Sweden and the Balkans. The identification of Sarı Saltuk with St. Nicholas, which was already observed in the passages by Evliya regarding the veneration in the Danube delta region, was taken up in the context of the Balkans and transferred into new geographic regions.

Setting these examples together as a spacial network, the tales on Sarı Saltuk trace a Transottoman map, clearly expanding beyond the Ottoman Empire itself. The mixing of “Christian elements” into the Muslim texts was read as a contamination of Islam in the sixteenth century, given that the logic of the texts aimed at convincing Christians to converse to Islam—with the fatwa by Ebussuud Efendi, which meant it to be syncretic in the old, denominational sense. Modern researchers, then, described it as religious propaganda (Hasluck 1929) or syncretism from below (Kiel 2000, 283).

With the change of the contents and contexts of reports and more details observed regarding concrete sites since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, an increasing observation of Christians participating in the veneration of sites connected to Sarı Saltuk, too, can be remarked. Yet available contemporary descriptions of a veneration of these sites in a non-Muslim setting remain firmly embedded in Christian contexts, omitting Sarı Saltuk, not allowing a transreligious interpretation of them. Thus, the reading of the analyzed examples as shared or mixed sacred practices or sites is in so far correct as Muslims (authors and/or other participants) see the presented context

6 Author’s translation from Turkish.

as Muslim while Christians (authors and/or other participants) see the same context as Christian. The examples about Sarı Saltuk discussed here, however, do not allow or confirm the observation of *mixture* of both faiths or a *transreligious*, monotheistic phenomenon *beyond* the affirmation of one of them.

Finally, a nationalization of Sarı Saltuk can be observed: In today's Turkish perspective, Sarı Saltuk is no longer contextualized in a manner encompassing Russia and Poland, but much more in a context focusing on and affirming national Turkish Anatolian or nationalized post-Ottoman contents in the Balkans.

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