Christian Heretical Participation in the Rebellion of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin – Reappraising the Evidence

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

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

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

The outbreak, course and suppressions of the rebellions of Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin in 1416 still pose some of the most intricate religious and historiographic problems of the early Ottoman era in the Balkans and Anatolia. The uprisings broke out in the aftermath of the turbulent period of the Ottoman interregnum and civil war (1402–1413) which came in the wake of the defeat of Bayezid I’s Ottoman forces (reinforced with his vassals) by Timur’s Mongol army at Ankara in 1402. While the study of this period has lately enjoyed
various promising advances of research\textsuperscript{1}, the current state of evidence still does not allow a satisfying and detailed reconstruction of the provenance and exact chronology of these uprisings. Further close study needs to widen further the exploration of the source base for the principal instigators, leadership, organisation and justification of the rebellions, as well as for the main social groups which came to comprise the two Balkan and Anatolian trends of the rebellious movement.

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

Progress in research on the religious climate of the early Ottoman empire (before the eventual more thorough Sunnization of Ottoman ruling establishments and what has been described as the parallel Shi‘itization of the Anatolian Kızılbaş communities in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century) increasingly shows that it was characterized by fluidity and diversity. Shi‘ite-Sunni religious and spiritual borders in particular were often fluctuating and permeable rather than fixed\textsuperscript{2}. Hence early Ottoman Islam seems to have been a more heterogeneous phenomenon, with pronounced syncretistic, antinomian and Shi‘ite-related/leaning trends, which could provoke religious ferment and religio-political opposition and movements against the centralizing policies of the emerging empire. Among other important developments, during this period the main currents of Anatolian Sufism were evolving, either in their formative phases or already in a transition towards their eventual institutionalization and further growth in the early and mid-Ottoman era\textsuperscript{3}.

\textsuperscript{1} See, for example, the recent reconstruction of the political and military developments of the period and its specific political culture in D. Kastritis, \textit{The Sons of Bayezid. Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413}, Leiden–Boston 2007 [= OEH, 38].


\textsuperscript{3} The process of the migration and re-settlement of Sufi groups into Anatolia proceeded with various intensity from the beginning of the twelfth century onwards – see the wide-ranging reassessment of the extant evidence and recent scholarship in A. Karamustafa, \textit{Ḳalenders, Abdâls, Hayderîs:}
Other promising avenues for research which have been increasingly and successfully exploited in the last few decades concern the processes of Christian-Islamic syncretisms in the Ottoman era, including the involvement of the dervish orders in these long-term developments. The evolving study of the inter-relations and cross-fertilization between the different local varieties of Christianity and Islam has particularly expanded in the sphere of shared sanctuaries, saints and feasts or some superstitious and quasi-magic beliefs and practices. This accumulated evidence shows that ordinary and mostly illiterate Christians and Muslims (especially those inhabiting rural Balkan and Anatolian areas of the Ottoman empire could blend their respective beliefs and cultic practices much more easily than their corresponding intellectual and religious elites.

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


4 The collection and preliminary analysis of much valuable material on this phenomenon by Frederick William Hasluck (1878–1920): F.W. HASLUCK, Christianity and Islam under the Sultans, vol. I–II, Oxford 1929, has been followed by a succession of studies and publications of further evidence of these syncretistic phenomena or reappraising Hasluck’s earlier assembled data and conclusions – cf., for example, the various contributions in Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia. The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck, 1878–1920, vol. I–III, ed. D. Shankland, Istanbul 2004–2013 [= AI.OTS, 2].
allies or vassals. All this accumulation of new material and explanatory models has led to more nuanced understanding of the various social, tribal and religious groups and networks of the characteristic western Anatolian frontier societies from which emerged the expansive Ottoman emirate.

The increasing awareness of the Byzantine/Christian contribution (apart from the Seljuk and Ilkhanid impact) to the inclusive socio-political “syncretism” of the early Ottoman state’s political and military administration\(^5\) have also led to some searching questions as to whether a corresponding syncretism also developed in the religious and cultural spheres. All the more that the steady progress of the study of the preceding Seljuk era in Anatolia (1077–1308) has extended beyond the written word into areas of material culture such as art, architecture, inscriptions, coinage and battlefield and conquest archaeology. Hence the chronology and nature of Christian-Muslim co-existence, interaction and symbioses during this period can now be explored in greater depth\(^6\). Symptomatically, much of this valuable material remains outside the scope and concerns of the contemporaneous and later historical chronicles and official documents, predominantly focused as they are on the grand narratives of military conquests, political events and deeds of rulers, high clerics and warrior chieftains.

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

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

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

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

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


11 DOUKAS, Historia Turko-Bizantina, ed. et trans. V. Grecu, Istoria Turco-Bizantina, Bucharest 1958; for the account of Börklüce Mustafa’s revolt, cf. ch. 21.11–14, 149–153. Translations in DOUKAS,
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communal property, voluntary poverty and Christian-Muslim equality advocated by the rebels, as well as its messianic and prophetic aspects. The history of the study of the Börklüce Mustafa’s insurrection displays an obvious tendency to project modern political and social concerns and/or agendas on the motives and goals of the insurrection. This is especially visible in cases where Börklüce Mustafa’s movement is regarded as entirely or predominantly a manifestation of a violent peasant, anti-feudal protest, triggered by socio-economic conditions and socio-political conflicts or shifts during the early Ottoman conquests and the Ottoman interregnum period. This approach has been most forcefully and consistently advanced in the Eastern Block’s institutionalized Marxist historiographies of the Ottoman empire during the Cold War period12 (or in some contemporary politicized leftist ideological schemas).

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


may indeed reflect several political programs\textsuperscript{14}. There a number of indications that Sheikh Bedreddin’s rebellion was related with the simultaneous revolt of the Ottoman Prince Mustafa Düzme (the False)\textsuperscript{15} and that Sheikh Bedreddin’s Anatolian travels and designs represented an endeavour to form an anti-Ottoman political alliance with the lord of Smyrna (Izmir), Cünayd\textsuperscript{16}, and the Anatolian emirates of Karaman\textsuperscript{17} and Germiyan\textsuperscript{18}. This network of anti-Ottoman alliances clearly possessed some kind of a coherent political programme which underpinned the rebellion from its onset. The reports of the announcement of the Balkan insurrection in the sources\textsuperscript{19} suggest strong links between the political agendas of the Balkan and Anatolian rebellions. The important role of the (formerly) enfeied and disaffected cavalry in Sheikh Bedreddin’s revolt and its downfall indicates another military-political power base for his movement, with its specific socio-economic interests\textsuperscript{20}. At the same time, the evidence of Börklüce Mustafa’s leadership of the Anatolian revolt demonstrates some of the obvious traits of charismatic leadership (prophetic claims, miracle-making\textsuperscript{21}, etc.) that find analogies both in contemporary Europe and in earlier oppositional (especially Shi’ite) movements.

\textsuperscript{14} N. Antov, The Ottoman “Wild West”..., p. 104.


\textsuperscript{21} Doukas, Historia Turko-Bizantina, p. 149–150.
in the Islamic world. These analogies do not diminish the social dimension of the Börklüce Mustafa uprising but indicate that it is hardly possible to isolate its social from its religious and political features22.

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

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

22 Cf. D. Kastritsis’s comments on the impossibility of studying Sheikh Bedreddin’s rebellion as “purely social, political or religious phenomenon” as it represented a combination of these characteristics, D. KASTRITSIS, The Revolt of Şeykh Bedreddin…, p. 238.
23 See the up-to-date analysis of these social, economic and political developments in S. SALTIRLI, The Rebellion of 1416…
26 Cf., for example, M. BALIVET, Deux partisans…, passim; IDEM, Islam mystique…, chs. 1–2.
anti-syncretism)\textsuperscript{27}. The same applies to new studies of the fourteenth and fifteenth century fortunes of those major (originally) Christian families and figures who took an active and crucial part in the early Ottoman conquests and power struggles, including those of the interregnum period\textsuperscript{28}.

The inter-relations and inter-dependencies between the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin uprisings are repeatedly asserted in the written testimonies and Sheikh Bedreddin is reported to have enjoyed considerable popularity and following in the Smyrna area. The comparative survey of utopian, universalistic, prophetic, messianic and egalitarian ideas in the sources for the Börklüce Mustafa uprising and the teachings of Sheikh Bedreddin thus clearly needs to be further widened. Starting with the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin-related accounts in the Ottoman chronicles, Sheikh Bedreddin’s \textit{Menakıbname} (composed by his grand-son, Halîl bin İsmâil)\textsuperscript{29}, earlier ground-breaking research\textsuperscript{30} has paved the way for a scrutiny of his own writings, lately and with a mixed success for notions anticipating the radical agendas of the 1416 uprisings\textsuperscript{31}.

While critically sifting through the evident agendas of its author, evolving research on the \textit{Menakıbname}, in particular, has made it possible to chart the intellectual and religious evolution of Sheikh Bedreddin during his extensive travels and his eventual and intensive involvement with mysticism, mystical and Sufi milieu\textsuperscript{32} (his proficient scholarship in law and theology is attested also in other sources)\textsuperscript{33}. The \textit{Menakıbname} contains also some useful indications regarding the religious and political networks and alliances he was seeking and establishing. At the same time, other episodes and assertions in the \textit{Menakıbname} need to be treated critically (such as the posited Seljukite ancestry of Sheikh\textsuperscript{34} and the exact

\textsuperscript{27} Cf., for example, T. Krstić, \textit{Contested Conversions to Islam. Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire}, Stanford, CA 2011, p. 50–75.


\textsuperscript{29} Halîl bin İsmâil, \textit{Simavna Kadısoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı}.


\textsuperscript{32} Halîl bin İsmâil, \textit{Simavna Kadısoğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Manâkıbı}, p. 5–7.


nature of his encounter with the Orthodox clerics at Chios)\textsuperscript{35} or contradict other sources (like the rejection of the tradition of his claim to the sultanate attributed to him in the Ottoman chronicles\textsuperscript{36}).

Though it is tempting to approach Shaykh Bedreddin as a “martyr for the co-existence between Christianity and Islam”\textsuperscript{37} in the evolution of Anatolian heterodoxy and inter-religious tolerance\textsuperscript{38}, the contradictory nature of the sources makes it difficult to piece together his actual aspiration and designs. Exploring the Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa movements in the wider context of comparable trends in the contemporary Islamic world\textsuperscript{39} would undoubtedly provide some crucial clues to their possible religious provenance. Such clues may be sought in the extensive trajectories of Sheikh Bedreddin’s travels and their potential relations with the wide-ranging and active mystical-millenarian networks, some of which were opposed to centralized Timurid rule at that time\textsuperscript{40}. Sheikh Bedreddin’s attested involvement with Hurufi networks, both in their cradle-lands and their extensions in areas under Ottoman control also seem with increasing certainty to be of potentially great importance\textsuperscript{41} for the reconstruction of his religio-political vision and utopianism. Significantly enough, Hurufism’s emphatic focus on prophetology\textsuperscript{42}, messianism and apocalypticism drew on Christian apocalyptic works\textsuperscript{43} in creating the complex and eclectic Hurufi belief system.


\textsuperscript{38} M. KEŞKIN, \textit{Der Aufstand Scheich Bedreddin Mahmud Isra'ıls und die Toleranzidee in der anatolischen Heterodoxie}, Berlin 2003.


All these Islamic (and Islamic-Christian) eclectic contexts are also of considerable importance for a better understanding of the continuous re-appraisals of and attitudes to the spiritual and ideological legacy of Sheikh Bedreddin in Ottoman and post-Ottoman cultures, religiosities and Sufi traditions\(^44\). They could also shed new light on the historical and symbolic afterlife of the Sheikh Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa movements in the fifteenth century and in later contexts of religious dissent, non-conformism and sectarianism. The later contexts include the self-identity of some Balkan Alevi groups which have retained foundational narratives focused on Sheikh Bedreddin\(^45\). Given the foundational role of Sheikh Bedreddin in these Balkan Alevi group identities, there have been attempts to integrate his uprising and its agendas within the ideological models of Slavo-Turkic continuities and imaginaries which have been advanced since the nineteenth century to explain the Islamicisation and Turkification processes in the Balkans\(^46\).

Early and more recent reiterations of these Slavo-Turkic heretical imaginaries as a rule draw on a general preconceived model of a medieval Eastern Christian dualist (Bogomil and Paulician) core layers in Alevism. However, the proposed claims for a Bogomil and Paulician Christian dualist formative impact on Alevism in areas like organizational hierarchy, socio-political stances, angelology, visionary mysticism and eschatology are on the whole either anachronistic or historically flawed and untenable\(^47\). Their more recent formulations in South-East Europe and Turkey have been further compromised by their application of dubious methodologies and strategies which have included the drastic falsification of primary source material to implement obvious ideological and ethno-confessional agendas\(^48\). In the case of Sheikh Bedreddin the allegations of his doctrinal transgressions did not include accusations of anything approaching theological dualism, while his own writings remain emphatic about the tenet of the “Oneness of Being”. Hence claims for socio-religious continuity between Christian dualist


Bogomilism and Sheikh Bedreddin’s movement in the Balkans\textsuperscript{49} still lack any theological and doctrinal data which could support conjectures of Christian dualist (Bogomil and/or Paulician) participation in his insurrection and support for his broader agendas and goals.

The communal use of property, collectivism and egalitarianism preached during the Börklüce Mustafa’s rebellion invite obvious parallels with earlier Islamic socio-religious movements such as the tenth-century Qarmatians\textsuperscript{50} though without any evidence of historical connections bridging the four-century gap between the two movements. Some earlier trends in the study of Bogomilism and Paulicianism attributed similar teachings to their medieval communities and drawing on such often ideologized reconstructions, attempts have been made to integrate them into the social base of the Börklüce Mustafa and Sheikh Bedreddin movements\textsuperscript{51} but without offering any concrete evidence of the social nature and features of these communities in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. It seems quite plausible that Borkluce Mustafa’s teaching of the communal use of property (as reported in the Doukas account of the rebellion) reflects Islamic apocalyptic traditions on the sharing of wealth and abolishing of poverty in the end times\textsuperscript{52}. It is also worth noting that as the physical location of the “Seven Churches of Asia” in Revelation 2–3, the Western Anatolian and the Aegean coastal area played a continuous role in medieval Christian apocalyptic lore. Smyrna and Philadelphia appear, moreover, in medieval Christian polemical literature as prominent centres of Christian dissent, heterodoxy and heresy. Important communities or “churches” of the early medieval Paulician movement in Anatolia at the height of its influence and high medieval Eastern Christian dualism were located in the region\textsuperscript{53}. As in the case of other Balkan and Anatolian areas, this again raises the inevitable question as to whether there may have been actual historical links and continuity between the earlier outbreaks of Christian dissent and heterodoxy and the later instances of Islamic heterodox and antinomian movements which spread and challenged Ottoman authorities in the same or adjacent areas\textsuperscript{54}.


\textsuperscript{50} M. Balivet, Islam mystique et révolution armée…, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{51} See note 37 above.

\textsuperscript{52} A. Gölpınarlı, Simavna Kadisoğlu…, p. 9.


\textsuperscript{54} Cf. A.Y. Ocak, Un aperçu général sur l’hétérodoxie musulmane en Turquie: réflexions sur les origines et les caractéristiques du Kızılbaşcılık (Alévisme) dans la perspective de l’histoire, [in:] Syncretistic
Throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth century the Aegean coastal area remained a rather active contact zone of shifting coalitions, frontlines and geopolitics involving the extant regional Byzantine aristocratic and military elites, Muslim and Christian frontier warriors, early Ottomans and their Christian allies, Turkish maritime emirates and the various central and peripheral political or trade players active at that stage in the East Mediterranean and Black Sea areas. This was also a period of intense cross-cultural and cross-religious encounters and interchange for the region which are of undoubted importance for understanding the religious dynamic of the late Byzantine and early Ottoman era in western Anatolia and the southern Balkans.

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

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

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

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