

## **5 Real and Imagined Intersections**

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**Summary** 5.1 Premodern Symmetries and Derivations. – 5.2 European Masons and Muslims. – 5.3 Freemasons and Bektashi.

### **5.1 Premodern Symmetries and Derivations**

In the first part of this study I traced the origins and the paths followed by those esoteric elements which would converge in Freemasonry, pointing out specific features, highlighting how references to the Orient which define mythopoieses (and in some Rites, such as the Misraïm-Memphis, also structure the initiatory architecture) cannot be reduced to mere narrative stratagems. The overall picture, in its essential features, has provided the time and measure in which Greek science and philosophy in the first place, and especially Hellenistic doctrines (Neoplatonic, Pythagorean, Hermetic, Gnostic) became the shared pool from which – directly or indirectly – the Islamic Orient and the Christian West would draw their esoteric and scientific ideas. Especially, in Europe, the Middle Ages appeared as a crucial step along the road of transmission of mysteries of various kinds and origin, through the filter of Islamic culture and, in part, of Sephardic Jewish culture; a passage which would lie at the origin of long-term affinities and parallels for the esoteric traditions of both civilisations.

There is no doubt that Europe, the Middle East and North Africa found themselves with much material, which they then reworked each within their own social, cultural and political structures, irreducibly different and differently monitored by antagonistic theologies. They could not be assimilated to each other – not even on more symbolic and interpretative levels of speculation – and this would play a prima-

ry role in the long-term outcome of both approaches. However, analogies emerge in the heterodox substance of the respective teachings and especially in the consequences of those specific itineraries. It is no coincidence that in both cases heterodox contributions converge in orders with an esoteric-initiatory character, often on the verge of heresy; in their free spiritual and intellectual expression, many Sufis and Muslim philosophers, like many Christian spiritual personalities and thinkers, would meet with condemnation by official religious institutions: some centuries in advance, the Persian mystic al-Hallāj (d. 922), of Zoroastrian origin, shared with Giordano Bruno a tragic fate at the stake,<sup>1</sup> while in 1195, in Cordoba, Averroes (Ibn Rushd) saw his works thrown in a bonfire by the caliph Yaquub al-Mansur, and himself driven into exile; in Baghdad, in 1150, the caliph al-Mustanjid burned and censored *The Letters of the Brethren of Purity* and, in a similar manner, moved by the same reactionary spirit (preventing the spread of ideas which could potentially destabilise the existing authority), in Rome, in 1738, Pope Clement XII condemned Freemasonry, excommunicating its initiates.<sup>2</sup>

The cultural, political and religious dimensions in which the esoteric universes which had arisen in the Islamic and Christian areas had defined their features was certainly irreducible. Yet contagion among the same sources, after repeated contaminations over the centuries, led to syntheses which often evolved on at least parallel levels. It is no surprise that affinities occasionally arose: affinities which, by their very nature and origin, do not however allow us to deduce direct transmission or overlapping. Considering the actual documentary evidence, some theses appear to be creative musings. For example, in 1849, Hammer-Purgstall<sup>3</sup> suggested that European chivalry derived from Arab chivalry, in what Robert Irving called “a barmy essay in which he not only identified futuwwa as an Oriental institution corresponding to Western chivalry but also linked the drinking cup of futuwwa initiation with the Holy Grail”.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that European chivalry preceded Arab chivalry. However, the latter could have influenced the former, as appears from evident analogies

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**1** This is not to suggest of course any symmetry between the mysticism of al-Hallāj and the ideas of Bruno, who developed their thinking on totally different levels and with totally different metaphysical solutions.

**2** The condemnation was repeated by later popes and would cease to operate only with Paul VI, in the 1970s.

**3** Hammer-Purgstall, *Sur la chevalerie des Arabes*.

**4** Irvin, *Futuwwa*, 161.

noticed by Wacyf Boutros Ghali,<sup>5</sup> Henry Corbin<sup>6</sup> and Paul Du Breuil.<sup>7</sup>

Superficial affinities are not necessarily evidence of substantial ones. However, different kinds of contamination, even due to the study of Arab-Islamic texts for polemical purposes, do appear convincing in certain circumstances. For example, some Arab-Muslim sources are well known to have influenced Dante's Divine Comedy,<sup>8</sup> and Muslim eschatological and theological themes were certainly widespread in medieval Europe in literary and philosophical, erudite and popular writings. These emerged clearly in the theological debates in the great universities between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Naples, Salerno, where such erudite Arabs as Mash'allah (Mā sha' Allāh), Albumasar (Abū Ma'shar), Rhazes (al-Rāzī), Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), Averroes (Ibn Rushd) were frequently quoted by scholars of the times. Some say that in 1245, Albertus Magnus presented himself at the university of Paris to hold a speech on Aristotle, dressed in Arab clothing - according to Baltrušaitis, to render a symbolic homage to Islam.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of Islam has also been noticed in the Dominican order, Thomas Aquinas, Raymond Martini, Ramon Llull, who fought the *infidels* through theological confrontation, but ended up by incurring their influence.<sup>10</sup> Especially, Llull - who was able to write and speak fluently in Arabic - in his polemical writings against erudite Muslims had taken on a certain Sufi form in the manner of arguing,<sup>11</sup> and the method of the Jewish Kabbalah, applied to the Latin alphabet, lay at the base of the techniques for combining letters and was the foundation of the dignity of God as expressed in Llull's works; especially, all his Art is based on the names and attributes of God, fundamental in Judaism and Islam. Llull, whose mission was to convert Muslims and Jews, dreamed of no religious syncretism, but in some ways, his work reveals its fulfil-

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5 Ghali, *La tradition chevaleresque*.

6 Corbin, *Introduction analytique aux Traités*.

7 Du Breuil, *La chevalerie et l'Orient*.

8 Among the various texts which describe Muhammad's ascent to Heaven - the *mi'rāj* - Dante probably knew the *Book of the Ascension* in a French or Latin translation which came to him through his master Brunetto Latini, and it is generally acknowledged that the concept of travel of the soul in celestial kingdoms as an initiatory voyage, Dante's cosmography and the role of the accompanying angel were taken from Arabic texts. Cf. Asin Palacios, *La Escatologia Musulmana*; Saccone, *Il Libro della scala*; Cerulli, *Dante e l'Islam*.

9 Baltrušaitis, *Medioevo fantastico*, 105.

10 Nallino, *Civiltà musulmana*, 303-4.

11 In his works, Llull often expressed himself in dialogues, speaking in the first person with his reader, a literary form alien to the West.

ment (and it is no surprise that many in his day saw him as a heretic).<sup>12</sup>

Among the forerunners of modern Masonry, one finds correspondences in two documents already mentioned, each fundamental in its context: the *Cooke Manuscript*, compiled in England and dated between 1410 and 1440 (which in the United Kingdom would inspire later documents, up to *Anderson's Constitutions*), and the *Kitāb al-Futuwwa*, first evidence of the mystic *futuwwa*, drawn up by al-Sulamī in the tenth century, between Nishapur and Jerusalem. Both documents were paradigms for later ones, and define codes of behaviour within their brotherhoods, preceded by introductions which set out their origins. Comparison of the two introductions shows a symmetry of mythical narratives which legitimate their purpose.

Geometry (the Art *par excellence*) in the *Cooke Manuscript*, and *futuwwa* for al-Sulamī (“path to Truth [...] which leads to the beautiful form of the fulfillment of our duties to Him”)<sup>13</sup> were transmitted by God to the first man, Adam, and from him to his progeny and to the other prophets of Mankind. Al-Sulamī tells how the teaching was transmitted through the most important figures mentioned in the Qur’an, the Biblical prophets, followed by the actual Islamic tradition and the first caliphs, in the following order: Abel, Seth, Idris (Enoch), Noah, ‘Ād, Hud, Salih, Abraham, Ishmael, Lot, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, Dhū al-Kifl, Shu‘ayb, Moses, the Companions of the Cave, ar-Raqīm, David, Solomon, Jonah, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Muhammad, Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Alī. In the *Cooke Manuscript* the most detailed chain of transmission follows a similar sequence, in the Biblical tradition, putting together prophets and the main masters of the Craft: from Adam, the science passed to Lameth, to Jabal and Jubal, from Cain to Enoch, Noah, Pythagoras, Hermes, Cam, Nimrod, Abraham, Euclid, who was one of the inventors of Geometry and taught the science to the Egyptians; then the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt where they learned the mason’s craft and passed on their teachings to David and Solomon. From Jerusalem, the Craft was taken to France and other regions: it was passed on from King Charles to Saint Adhabel, to Saint Alban and finally to King Æthelstan.<sup>14</sup>

In both cases, the chains of transmission move on from Biblical to historical times without any break, conferring a sense of eternity and universality to the teachings. The introduction to the *Cooke Manuscript* is followed by a regulatory part which concerns the eth-

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lullo, *Il Libro dell'Ordine della Cavalleria*; Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 173-198; Yates, *The occult philosophy*, 9-15; Bonner, *The Art and Logic of Ramon Llull*; Fidora, Rubio, *Raimundus Lullus*; Muzzi, *Raimondo Lullo*; Zambelli, *L'apprendista stregone*.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Sulamī, *The Way of Sufi Chivalry*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> It is curious to note that Jesus is mentioned by al-Sulamī but not in the *Cooke Manuscript*.

ics of the craft, while in the *Kitāb al-Futuwwa*, the introduction is followed by a description of the principles of the initiatory Way. The definitions of *futuwwa* given by al-Sulamī, as: “above all, be generous”; “care for your brethren more than you care for your own family”, “be truthful”; “keep your word and what is entrusted to your life”; “seek a humble life and poverty, and be content and happy with it”; “in this education you must learn to feel joy in the privilege of serving your master”, would not come as a surprise in the best known documents of guilds.<sup>15</sup>

In a paper presented at an international Orientalist conference in 1882, the Consular officer Ilyās Abduh Qudsi, member of the Italian Lodge *Siria* in Damascus, draw attention to analogies between local guilds and Masonry (as assemblies, secrets, rituals) wondering:

First, are there any historical connections between the rank and ritual of the Damascene craft organizations and Freemasonry? If so, then is desirable to establish the period and circumstances in which such took place. Secondly, if no such ties existed, then why is approximately the same kind of organization preserved in the crafts as is found in free Masonry? Is this mere coincidence or did the ritual and organization of Masonry develop and grow up in these parts?<sup>16</sup>

Specific affinities can especially be found between European operative Freemasonry and the brotherhood of Istanbul weavers associated with the Melamiyya – spoken of before. The weavers not only tied manual practice to spiritual practice, reciting the *dhikr* as they wove; they also kept their Melami affiliation secret and used secret signs of recognition between masters and disciples, reminiscent of those of the *compagnonnage*.<sup>17</sup> Analogies between *compagnonnage*, Masonry, *futuwwa* and the Akhi were also pointed out by the French scholar Louis Massignon and the Turkish scholar Abdūlbaki Gölpınarlı, who stressed secrecy, passwords and signs of recognition.<sup>18</sup> Other similarities have also been highlighted between Freemasonry and Ismailites sects and in particular with the Druses.<sup>19</sup>

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**15** For example, the *Cologne Charter* of 1535 states: “The introductory laws guiding our actions, and all our efforts, into whatever channel they may be directed, are expressed in the two following precepts: Love and cherish all men as you do your brother, and your blood relations [...] The secrets and mysteries, which conceal our purposes, are only with this one view: to do good unostentatiously and to carry out our resolutions to the very minutest details”. Bonvicini, *Massoneria Antica*, 180.

**16** McChesney, *Ilyas Qudsi*, 103.

**17** Zarcone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 161-2.

**18** Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 306.

**19** Smith, *The Druses of Syria*; Springett, *Secret sects of Syria*; Aractingi, Lochon, *Secrets initiatiques en Islam; Islam et franc-maçonnerie*. The plausibility of the hypothe-

It has been noticed how the *Cooke Manuscript*, unlike other regulatory documents issued by pre-modern masons' guild,<sup>20</sup> places the roots of the Craft in the Orient and in Egypt (mentioned seven times); however, the pre-modern order which located the origins of its Craft in the Orient was that of the Rosicrucians, with their manifesto *Fama Fraternitas*, where it is told how the mythical founder of the order, Christian Rosenkreuz, born in 1378, was alleged to have travelled and lived a long time in the Levant; in Damascus, where he learned Arabic, in Arabia, in Egypt and finally in Fez in Morocco, where he learned magic and the Kabbalah, before coming back to Europe through Spain.<sup>21</sup> The tale is no less fictitious than other masonic mythologies, but it does express a debt to the Orient (in this case, an explicitly Islamic Orient) which is quite real.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, when in the eighteenth century, but especially in the nineteenth century, Freemasonry spread through the Near East, acknowledgement of a common background shared by Freemasonry and Islamic esotericism was not something to take for granted.

## 5.2 European Masons and Muslims

As was pointed out at the beginning of this study, when freemasons arrived in the Middle East – first in the eighteenth but especially in the nineteenth century – an imagination was reawoken which identified symmetries between Oriental and European esotericists. Some Brothers fantasised about remote initiatory transmissions, leading the origins of Freemasonry back to the days of Solomon and the ancient Egyptians, or associating it with some minority sects, such as the Druze or the Ismailites. However, in general – with a few exceptions like the British ambassador Henry Bulwer or the American diplomat John Porter Brown (who wrote a history of the dervishes)<sup>23</sup> – French, English, Italian masons failed to immediately identify in the present, in the local sufi orders, their possible partners. Different factors made mutual acknowledgement between initiates on both sides of the Mediterranean difficult. One was the ignorance and self-as-

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ses of direct derivation of Freemasonry from Ismailites sects will be examined in the last chapter of this essay.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the most significant documents in Bonvicini, *Massoneria Antica* and Langlet, *Les textes fondateurs*. The *Cooke Manuscript* is preceded chronologically by the *Regius Poem* (or *Halliwell Manuscript*) of 1390, a much more concise document, which only names Euclid and says that the Craft was born in Egypt.

<sup>21</sup> *The Rosicrucian Manifestos*, 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Willard, *The Strange Journey*.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *The Darvishes*.

suredness with which Europeans interacted with the inhabitants of those regions. Anderson's *Constitutions* made Masonry a universal order, potentially open to every creed,<sup>24</sup> but the gap between ideals and their application could be wide.

With few exceptions, Europeans in general (and masons no less than others) who in the nineteenth century moved in large numbers to the Near East and North Africa, especially from France, England and Italy, crossed the Mediterranean in absolute ignorance of the cultures with which they would live for so long, including their spiritual and esoteric dimensions. Xavier Yacono's studies on Freemasonry in Algeria show how masons were not even aware of the existence of Sufi orders. In 1867, the brother Madaule, who played an important role in Algerian Freemasonry, though he made an "intéressante découverte", identifying a "rite musulman dont Abd al-Kader fait partie et auquel je crois devoir donner le nom de rite libre de Mauritanie".<sup>25</sup> Clearly, he was referring to the Qādiriyya order. Speaking of the 'thousand of souls' who inhabited the steppes of the Sahara, Madaule wrote: "Toutes pratiquent les naïves croyances de l'islamisme. Ce culte, le plus tolérant de tous, est aussi celui qui embrasse nos principes avec le plus d'enthousiasme".<sup>26</sup>

The masonic affiliation of the Sufi Emir 'Abd al-Qādir - of which more will be said in the following chapter - is especially significant in this sense. I can only agree with Bruno Etienne's comment on the correspondence between 'Abd al-Qādir and the brethren of the Lodge Henri IV who invited him to become a member:

Les interprétations des Frères, non pas au niveau de la traduction mais du sens 'ésotérique' de la réponse de l'Emir, sont pour le moins surprenants à la fois par leur... absence et par la méconnaissance de la culture arabe dont elles sont la preuve.<sup>27</sup>

For the French, the initiation of the Emir was above all a political opportunity; the meeting with the Algerian Sufi was never seen as a way to connect Freemasonry with an esoteric Islamic dimension felt to be sim-

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**24** "But though in ancient Times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that Country or Nation, whatever it was, yet 'tis now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that Religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular Opinions to themselves; that is to be *good Men and true*, or Men of Honour and Honefly, by whatever Denominations of Persuasions they may distinguish'd; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Union and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain'd ay perpetual Distance", Paillard, *Reproduction of the Constitutions*, 50 of the original document.

**25** Yacono, *Un siècle de franc-maçonnerie algérienne*, 250-1.

**26** Yacono, *Un siècle de franc-maçonnerie algérienne*, 250.

**27** Étienne, *Abd el-Kader et la franc-maçonnerie*, 20.

ilar. The invitation to 'orientalise' Masonry was understood as an 'awakening' of the Orient, as can be seen from the speech held in Paris in the Lodge Henri IV, on June 18, 1864, to celebrate the illustrious affiliation:

Ce que nous avons vu par-dessus tout dans cette initiation, mes Frères, c'est d'arriver par l'Emir à constituer dans l'Orient des loges indigènes, Nous désirons que la maçonnerie *s'orientalise* en quelque sorte, quelle reporte aux lieux qui furent son berceau tous les bienfaits dont elle est susceptible, qu'elle déchire le bandeau de l'ignorance, qu'elle brise à jamais le glaive du fanatisme et ramène enfin ces nations dévoyées, au Grand Temple de l'humanité par les doux chemins de l'amour et de la fraternité.<sup>28</sup>

To understand the attitude of masons towards the local population (indifferently, Muslims, Christians and Jews) one need only to read the minutes of the inter-masonic meetings held in Cairo and Alexandria in January 1867 and 1868,<sup>29</sup> where representatives of lodges of various obediences discussed the suitability of initiating Egyptians, and where those favourable or at least open to thinking this over clashed with others who had a clearly racist attitude. The general tone however shows a feeling of superiority over the natives, and in the best cases a form of paternalism.<sup>30</sup>

John Porter Brown, Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Turkey, struck a different note in his speech in 1870:

La franc-maçonnerie, comme nous le savons tous, tire ses origines de l'Orient et je suis confiant dans le fait qu'elle sera mieux appréciée dans sa terre d'origine, lorsqu'elle sera comprise et connue, ainsi qu'elle mérite.<sup>31</sup>

However, a one-way view appears again when Brown claims that "the Dervishes of *Bektâshee* order consider themselves quite the same as the Freemasons, and are disposed to fraternize with them".<sup>32</sup> If dervishes considered themselves to be almost masons, one does not hear that nineteenth century masons claimed to be almost dervishes.

Of course, Middle Eastern culture in the nineteenth century, even in its marginal esoteric dimension, was very far from positivist European culture, which probably had in Freemasonry its most progressive expression. As was noticed before, when different lodges began

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<sup>28</sup> Étienne, *Abd el-Kader et la franc-maçonnerie*, 36. Italics added.

<sup>29</sup> *Compte-rendu de l'Assemblée Maçonnique; Compte-rendu de la deuxième Assemblée.*

<sup>30</sup> De Poli, *La massoneria in Egitto*, 56-64.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in French translation by Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *The Darvishes*, 59.



to settle permanently in the Middle East and North Africa, in the mid-nineteenth century, a great variety of mystic orders were an element in the everyday life of Muslims, but their public manifestations featured the most eccentric practices – so much so that Lane spoke of them in his chapter on ‘Superstitions’. Sufi ritual thus became confused with folk beliefs, which continued the astrological, alchemical and magic practices associated with ancient cults. Europeans, but also orthodox and conservative Muslims as well as the most modernised Middle East intellectuals, saw these traditions as the remains of a dark past, or practices tied to superstition and to an archaic and heterodox folk religiosity. In the Ottoman Empire, and especially in Anatolia, Sufism (also because of its political orientation)<sup>33</sup> was active in the most progressive milieux – such as the Young Turks – but in other modernist and cosmopolitan contexts, it was less appreciated. For example, the Egyptian mason, James Sanua (a Jew whose father came from Livorno in Italy and mother from Cairo), with a profound knowledge of Islam, disciple and friend of another well-known masonic intellectual, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, in a lecture held in 1883 in a lodge of the French Grand Orient in Paris, stated that Sufi orders merited greater attention, since: “leurs agissements sont de plus intéressants à voir pour un maçon en raison de leur paranté avec les notres”.<sup>34</sup>

As in all relations between colonisers and colonised in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the masonic milieu, relations between Europeans and Muslims (and here Sanua is definitely on the European side) are not on an even footing. While masons generally ignored the brotherhoods and their nature,<sup>35</sup> the Sufi (in Anatolia, but

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**33** Bektāshiyya, for example, strongly opposed the authoritarian regime of Abdülmeccid II; also, being doctrinally indifferent, if not refractory, to application of the shari‘ah, they appreciated the process of secularisation promoted by the *tanzimāt*. Reza Tevfik, a Bektāshi and Grand Master of the Ottoman Grand Orient from 1918 to 1921, described the Sufi order as characterised by “une bonne disposition d’esprit pour accueillir toute révolution d’ordre politique qui favoriserait une totale liberté de croyance et une administration de la Turquie plus acceptable”, while another Turkish writer claimed that among the Muslims, the Bektāshi personified “l’esprit de démocratie chez les Européens, alors que les imam n’ont cessé de se montrer les serviles agents du despotisme”. Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 117, 313.

**34** Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 302.

**35** In the foundation narrative currently visible on the website of the Sovrano Santuario italiano dell’Antico e Primitivo Rito di Memphis e Misraim, transmission of the mysteries through the Islamic world is ruled out, while credit is given to transmission through the Copts, seen as the natural heirs to the ancient Egyptians: “It is generally accepted that [...] Napoleon was initiated into the ‘Isis’ Lodge, presided over by General Kléber. Concerning the Egyptian Grand Lodge before Napoleon’s campaign, we may say, in brief, that its legendary existence was preserved and developed, with great discretion, within Egyptian communities of the Coptic religion, certainly not of Muslim religion, because, as is well known, the Copts may be considered the natural successors to the ancient Egyptians. On the contrary, today’s Egyptians, being of Arab origin, [...] were always very distant from, and in certain times even hostile towards the his-

also elsewhere) frequently took an interest in Freemasonry. However, 'orientalisation' of the Royal Art as undertaken by Muslims will take a different aspect from what Europeans expected. Lodges built their success in the Middle East mainly in political and cultural terms, and were an effective vehicle for spreading Western modernist ideas; but on the esoteric side, Masonry was actually 'tariqicised': the masonic discourse was assimilated to the symbolic universe of local heterodox mysticism, and Masonry was incorporated as but one of its many expressions, as an organism comparable to the *futuwwa* and to Sufi orders.<sup>36</sup> Masonry was often called a *tariqa*, a term also used to identify its rites and commonly employed to indicate the various 'schools' of Sufism. In the same way, especially in Ottoman Turkish, the terminology of the *futuwwa* would be used to indicate the various degrees of Masonry: apprentice, companion and master, *çırak*, *kalfa*, *usta* (*mubtadā*, *sani*, or *rafīq*, *ustādh* in Arabic). Zarccone also notes how in some documents, the masonic apron was called *peştemal*, a reminiscence of the mystic Melāmi weavers of Istanbul.<sup>37</sup>

However, the order which showed the most symmetries with Masonry and which most successfully paired up with it, was the Bektashi.

### 5.3 Freemasons and Bektashi

The most surprising, practical and well documented symmetries are to be found in Anatolia between modern Freemasonry and the *tariqa* Bektashiyya, the main features of which have been described above.<sup>38</sup> If the initiatory nature of the two orders and spiritual research were general elements which Masonry also shared with other Sufi orders, Zarccone shows how there were much more specific commonalities with the Bektashiyya. The first element in common was secrecy. As was already said, the 'unspeakable secret', tied to the spiritual quest of each initiate, was part and parcel of all Sufi doctrines and rituals, but hiding the association itself and its rituals was a peculiarity of the Bektashiyya, which differed in this from the other orders, but converged with Masonry. There is a particular similarity with Bektashi ritual in the masonic initiation as rebirth and passage from

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tory, culture and religion of ancient Egypt". Antico e Primitivo Rito di Memphis e Misraim, *Storia del rito di Memphis*. URL <http://www.misraimmemphis.org/storia.asp>.

**36** Zarccone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 36.

**37** Zarccone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 107-12.

**38** The political influence of Carboneria and Masonry (especially Italian) on the movement first of the Young Ottomans and then on that of the Young Turks, and the role played by Masonry in the proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 and the preparation of the Young Turk revolution of 1908, are historically ascertained facts, which one need not go into here. Cf. Zarccone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 29-35; 81-8.

darkness to light, when, to become a master, the candidate relives the murder and resurrection of the architect Hiram. The candidate, symbolically murdered by three evil companions who wish to extort from him the master's secret, is laid out in the centre of the lodge, covered by a sheet. Among the Bektashi too, the initiate lies down on the ground, covered with a white sheet to signify his death to profane life, a ceremony known as 'dying before death'.<sup>39</sup>

Another passage in Bektashi initiation – also to be found in the ancient *futuwwa*, among the Akhi and the Mevlevi – involves binding the neophyte with a rope or belt, reminiscent of the tying of the apron in masonic initiation. Among both Bektashis and freemasons, the ceremony is followed by a shared meal, with a specific ritual, and both brotherhoods give great importance to wine and alcoholic beverages in order to facilitate contemplation. Other important analogies involve the use of candles, the presentation of the initiate with a rope around his neck, a cup with a drink in it (bitter for masons, salted for the Bektashi, and also for the Akhi), the role attributed to the guide of the neophyte during the initiation, the steps, the use of symbolic numbers and other minor details.<sup>40</sup> One difference is that Bektashis admit women, unlike the main masonic orders.<sup>41</sup>

Similarities in doctrine and especially in ritual between Bektashis and freemasons appear disconcerting. Other scholars have noted that in cases where one is able to track down a historical origin, rituals prove to have different sources;<sup>42</sup> however, even excluding contaminations and mutual influence, the symbolic value of both experiences still shows surprising analogies. Zarccone explains:

Nous savons que les ottomans ont *reconnu* dans la Franc-Maçonnerie européenne leurs propres sociabilités confrériques, les *tariikat*, et que cette reconnaissance a facilité d'autant l'implantation de la Franc-Maçonnerie dans l'Empire.<sup>43</sup>

As the French historian – quoting Paul Ricœur – says, *reconnaissance*, 'acknowledgement', does not imply identity:

Dans la notion d'identité il y a seulement l'idée du même; tandis que la reconnaissance est un concept qui intègre directement l'al-

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<sup>39</sup> Zarccone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 308.

<sup>40</sup> Zarccone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 308-12.

<sup>41</sup> Exceptions, due to a recent evolution, involve for example the rites of Misraim Memphis and the Grand Lodge of Italy of Piazza del Gesù.

<sup>42</sup> Birge, *Bektashi order*, 234-5; Zarccone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 312.

<sup>43</sup> Zarccone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 2.

térité, qui permet une dialectique du même et de l'autre.<sup>44</sup>

In the specific case of Anatolia, the peculiar communion between Bektashi and masons probably also favoured political convergence, since the strategic union between the two orders played no small role in the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and hence on the birth of modern Turkey.<sup>45</sup> In 1906, when associations were forbidden under the repressive climate of Sultan Abdülmecid II, the Young Turks organised in the Hall of Lost Steps of the Salonica lodge *Macedonia Risorta* in Boulma Giani Street, a lodge which depended on the Italian Grand Orient. With approval from the Venerable Master Carasso, they used the lodge - which enjoyed immunity as a foreign organisation - as a base for meetings and for the archive of the movement. Between 1901 and 1908, the lodge *Macedonia Risorta* had a total of 188 members, 23 of whom were high level Ottoman army officers; many were also affiliated with Sufi orders, especially the Bektashiyya. As Zarccone points out, "the rule of triple affiliation, 'Young Turk/Freemason/Bektashi', would become a characteristic of the epoch".<sup>46</sup> Clandestine struggle and spiritual background were clearly a common ground uniting Italians and Turks.

This peculiar Ottoman experience shows how affinities which arose in Europe and in the Levant starting from indirect contaminations on the base of remote and partly shared sources, with specific histories of appropriation of these heritages and with a long-term evolution, could casually give rise to quite unexpected convergences. But it also shows how an esoteric and a political dimension could overlap with each other, leading to equally unexpected convergences on other levels. Further examples of a meeting between esotericisms appear from the affiliation to Masonry of some Sufi masters. The affiliation of some important figures can now be taken into consideration: 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Rizā Tevfik. These cases highlight both mutual enrichment on an esoteric level and misunderstandings, but especially they show how relations between Sufis and Freemasons were not founded only on shared values, but were also heavily conditioned - on both sides - by the political, social and cultural climate of that time.

<sup>44</sup> Ricœur, *La Critique*, 96, citato da Zarccone, *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Zarccone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 210-1; *Secret et sociétés secrètes*, 25 ff.; Hamāda, *Al-Adabiyyāt al-māsūniyya*, 320-2; Ferrari, *La Massoneria italiana*, 122 ff.; Iacovella, *Il triangolo e la mezzaluna*.

<sup>46</sup> Zarccone, *Mystiques, philosophes*, 123.