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RELIGIOUS AND SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF THE KAZALBASHI COMMUNITY IN BULGARIA

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Abstract. *In the paper the Kazalbash community is regarded to be an ethnoreligious community pertaining to the Shiite division of islam. Its native language is Turkish. The religious creed represents a message addressed to the community. The basic tenets of the doctrine are analyzed and compared to the Sunni confession. The organization of the Kazalbash religious community (the jam) is briefly described. The discussion is based on the conception that consciousness (in the case religious consciousness) is an ontological component of social reality. Both the holiday and the everyday dimension of Kazalbash social life are closely connected to their religious doctrine. For this reason the religious and sociocultural dimensions of the community interpenetrate to form a syncretic whole. What is more, the holiday and everyday life provide the specific characteristics of the culture. Hence the definition of the characteristics of the Kazalbash community's sociocultural model is possible only in the context of the knowledge of the principles and prescriptions of the religious doctrine that determines the structure of this community.*

Key words: *The Kazalbash community, Shiite division of Islam*

The ethnonyms "Kazalbashis", "Alians", "Alawis" and "Baktashis" are applied to one and the same group of people. From the historical and linguistic viewpoint the most satisfactory term is "Alawi", symbolizing the connection with Ali, the first imam, the prophet Mohammed's son-in-law. The common term in Bulgarian literature is "Alians". The four names are used below synonymously.

1. ORTHODOXY OR A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF ALIAN RELIGIOUS DOGMATICS

The main tenets of the Kazalbashi religious creed are based on the Shi'ite division of Islam. They include: 1. The cult of the prophet Mohammed's family: Ali, his wife Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, their sons Hasan and Hussein. 2. Belief in the trinity - Allah, Mohammed, Ali. 3. An intense love for the Imam Ali. 4. Belief in the 12 imams, direct successors of the Prophet. The last of the imams is concealed and will return to establish the reign of justice. 5. The principle of prudent concealment of religious loyalty. 6. The belief in the secret, inner meaning of the Koran, attainable only by allegoric interpretation.

The Alawis profess a Shi'ism that goes as far as deifying Ali: Ali is God, Allah manifests Himself to mankind in the image of Ali. This cult has caused them to be accused of heresy by more moderate Shi'ites. Besides holding a belief in Heaven and Hell, the Kazalbashis believe in the transmigration of souls after death - the soul can be reincarnated in people, animals, stones.

The Kazalbashis hold the Koran sacred above all religious books, the Koran as Allah's word, transmitted to the Prophet Mohammed. Shi'ites do not believe in the Sunnite tradition concerning Mohammed's life and practices, they have their own traditions (the Shi'ite hadiths which imams base their judgements and teaching on) that they hold to be authoritative. Shi'ites reject the Sunna version of the Koran prepared under the caliph Osman; they believe it departs from the true tradition on the Prophet's family, but use it for lack of any other. The Kazalbashis also venerate the collections of rules entitled "Imam Jafar Beyruk" written by the Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, and "Sheikh Sefi Beyruk", a widely used manual of everyday rules of behaviour, written by the founder of the Sefevie order sheikh Sefi. Also revered are lives of Shi'ite saints such as Otman Baba, Demir Baba, Hadji Baktash Veli etc. and many other writings of Shi'ite theologians.

The Kazalbashis' greatest veneration is to Mohammed, Ali, Fatima (daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali), the imam Hussein (the third in order of the imams). They also have a cult of the saints, as we shall see.

According to their creed, God is connected with the eternally existing Ali and is manifest through the prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and through the imams and saints. Particles of Ali are dispersed everywhere in nature. Ali will be reincarnated in the concealed twelfth imam as the Mahdi of Judgement day.

2. SOME HISTORY

The name Kazalbashi (red-head), comes from the 12 red bands that they rolled around their turbans when entering battle, in honour of the 12 imams. The name appears in the 15th cent. under the sheikh Haidar. The two branches of Kazalbashis in Bulgaria are named after the two Sufi mystic orders, the Baktashis and the Baba'is. Baktashis are named after the semilegendary Hadji Baktash Veli, who lived in the 13th cent. in Nishapur (the Khorasan region of Iran) and founded the Anadolian order; he later became the spiritual patron of the Janissary corps., while for the Kazalbashis he was a Turkic saint, a Shi'ite. The name babai comes from Baba Iliaz Khorasani, a Jew converted to Islam, leader of a rebellion against the Seljuk state, and teacher of Hadji Baktash Veli.

The Alians originated in the 7th century when, at the death of the Prophet, Islam

became divided. They hold that the imam, that is the leader of the Muslim community, should not be elected, but be hereditary and that the successors of the Prophet are his son-in-law Ali and Ali's descendents. The name of this division is hence "shiat Ali" (the Ali Party), and its adherents are called Shi'ites. The Sufi mystic orders were formed in the 12-13 centuries. The Baba'i order existed since the 13th cent., but was later destroyed. Hadji Baktash Veli lived in the 13th century, but the order's organizational life began in the late 15th cent. and early 16th century. The Kazalbashi community was founded by the sheikh Sefi among the local Turkic tribes in early 14th cent. Azerbaijan. During the 15th century the Sefeve state conquered Iran and the head of the order, shah Ismail I, declared Shi'ism the official state religion and opposed the Sunnite Ottoman Empire.

The most numerous Kazalbashi community is that of Turkey, probably numbering about 20 million. This religious confession is also present in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece. In Armenia the groups called "Kazalbashi" are Armenians and Turks, as well as Kurds. The Kazalbashi, after being subjected to brutal massacre, were exiled to Bulgaria by the Ottoman sultans Selim I and Suleiman I during the 16th century. Today they live in a number of villages in North East Bulgaria - in the regions of Silistra, Razgrad, Dobrich, Varna, and in Southern Bulgaria - the regions of Kardgali and Haskovo, and more rarely in the Stara Zagora region, in two villages of Sevlievo and two villages of Kazanluk. The Baktashi order, which recruited members of all nationalities, spread in cities such as Silistra, Russe, Razgrad, Nikopol until the 19th cent., and afterwards was banished to Turkey.

3. ORTHOPRAXY OR SOME FEATURES OF THE ALIAN CULT AND RITUAL PRACTICE

It is forbidden to divulge the Kazalbashi doctrine, the creed should remain concealed. Elderly people of their communities argue whether ethnographers and researchers should be given information. For centuries they have been true to the principle "rather part with your head than with your faith". This poses a great obstacle to research on the community. In the regions where the Kazalbashi are a minority they do not make public their affiliation, do not display their religious feelings. For instance the Kazalbashi of North East Bulgaria, and of other regions of the former Ottoman state, assign a lookout to stand on guard while they hold their secret religious ceremonies, making sure no outside people come in during the ritual. The lookout has a high status in the scale of the social and religious hierarchy, since he provides for the safety of the rituals.

The cult of saints is widely practiced among the Kazalbashis/Baktashis. They venerate saints such as imam Hasan, imam Husein and other Shi'ite imams, upholders of the faith who perished in the battle of Kerbelia. The foremost among these saints is the imam Husein (son of Ali), who died in the battle of Kerbelia in the struggle against Yezid ibn Muatavia. The grief for Husein is a main theme in their songs:

*"In mourning and sorrow came the day Matem, great with sorrow it grew.
Cry you, mine eyes, for love of imam Husein,
Such is the balm for our pain,
Cry, all eyes, for love of imam Husein."*

One of the important holidays in the calendar is Ashure bayram. It commemorates the

brutal murder of the imam Husein by the Yezids (the armies of Yezid inb Mutavia). The Alawites keep 9 days of mourning and on the 10th they honour Husein. This holiday was forbidden by the authorities and by Sunnite Islam. The Kazalbashi celebrated it in secret. In the 9 days of fasting they abstain from drinking water. Also forbidden are drinking alcoholic beverages, shaving, looking in the mirror, bathing and washing the feet. sexual intercourse, leaving the limits of the village, weddings, entertainments.

Another much revered saint is Hadji Baktash Veli. While there are no special cult practices in his honour, he is praised in many songs, and honoured in prayers: The Kazalbashis from various regions have their local saints, sheikhs and dervishes, noted for religious zeal: for instance, Demir baba in the Ludogorie region, Ak Yazili baba in the area of Balchik, Sari Saltik baba in Northern Dobrudja, Otman baba in Nova Zagora. At the holy shrines of the Muslims gifts are brought to honour the saints. The Kazalbashi strictly observe certain rules in visiting these holy places: they bring the saint a gift; when they give sacrifice (*kurban*) these gifts are generous, but small offerings can also be given. The things are left at the holy place.

The Alawites display great deference for their religious leader. The leader of the Baktashi tekke (holy place) is called a sheikh or baba, and the leader of the religious community (the *Jam*) is the baba or dede. The religious leader performs the functions of a political and economic chief as well, he has judicial authority in the framework of traditional law. Usually the man chosen to be "baba" is well-versed in religion, mindful of public matters, economically well-off, honest and just. The meetings of the *jam* take place in the baba's home. He takes part in all religious and other traditional ceremonies, is present at all meetings of the faithful. Believers are obliged to ask his permission to go to the holy place for making sacrifice (*kurban*). He never refuses permission and must be present at the ritual.

Engagement ceremonies take place in the baba's home. Once an engagement has been agreed upon with the religious leader, it cannot be broken, even if one of the sides desires to do so. For an agreement before the baba is like an agreement before God. The baba is an authority on all matters. He determines the punishments for the sins of the faithful.

The Kazalbashis in Bulgaria have a different system of rituals from the Sunnites. The system includes both traditional Alian features and elements specific to the Bulgarian Alians. For instance, as all Alians, they do not observe the five daily prayers, but neither do they follow the Shi'ite rule of making three daily prayers. They pray two times a week in a special room. They reject the orthodox practice of praying where ever they may be at the hour of prayer. The two prayer days are different for the two divisions of the Kazalbashis in our country. The Baktashis pray on Tuesday and Thursday evening, while the baba'ites pray on Thursday and Sunday evening. The exact prayer hour for both groups is midnight. They carry out the ritual in full secrecy from people of other faiths. They pray in a seated position, with all present, without separation of sexes, holding their hands to form a circle. They thus symbolize their unity and mutual good will. The words of the prayer mostly refer to the life and works of Ali and the expected coming of the twelfth imam. They have a specific prayer for the remission of sins. All stand in a circle upon a rug and the leader of the ritual strikes each person in turn with a special stick called *tarik*, while saying a prayer of forgiveness. At last the stick is washed in water, the water is poured into a special vessel and is sipped down by each person in turn. The carpet is swept with a broom of basil leaves, and special ritual breads are eaten.

The Kazalbashis share many common elements with the rituals and customs of Paganism and Christianity. This is plain to see in their festival. They observe the basic holidays of Islam, but interpret them in a different way. They reject the 30 day fast (*Ramazan*), but have a ten-day abstinence from sexual intercourse. They observe holidays by the solar calendar. The major one is Nevruz, in honour of the beginning of the spring season, and symbolic of the revived Alian faith. It is celebrated on March 21, the birthday of Ali. Another important holiday is Hudrez. May 5 and 6, considered to be the start of the new year. Alians honour and participate in certain rites on Easterday, St. George's Day, St. Eliah's Day and other Christian holidays.

Women are highly respected among the Kazalbashis. They pray together with the husbands, do not veil their heads. They have a leading role in the household, but perform it without outward display, a remainder of pagan Turkic traditions.

The prayers include maledictions on the usurper caliphs, Abu Bekir, Omar, Osman and Yezid ibn Muavia, and blessings for the Prophet Mohammed, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, Husein. People are not to shout loudly, not to swear. The Kazalbashi rule is "to be master of one's tongue, of one's hands and of one's hips", i.e. not to lie, steal or commit adultery.

Music plays an important role. The various religious rites are accompanied by specific music; the task of leading the singing is assigned to a given person. Raki and wine are drunk at religious ceremonies. Alcohol is used to intensify religious feelings. The wine-bearer serves the gathered people, beginning with the baba and kneals before each guest in token of respect and hospitality. The number of glasses to be drunk by each person is fixed at 3, 5, 7 or 12. But usually the number stops at three.

For the Kazalbashis the numbers 3, 4, 5, 7 12, and 40 are sacred. The number 3 symbolizes the trinity Allah, Mihammed, Ali; 4 designates the 4 doors of Baktashism, 5 is an image of Mohammed-Ali-Fatima-Hasan-Husein, and the number 12 is a symbol of the 12 Shi'ite imams.

The differences between Orthodox Christianity and Islam are modified, softened through the common elements of the traditional cultures of Bulgarian Christians and Muslims. These common elements are evident in everyday life, in superstitions and in specific elements of the festival system. Differences are also softened through the rituals of magic, demonology, archaic conceptions of natural forces, in cases when people resort to the help of the supernatural. It is no secret that the rituals and rites of Muslim orders (or fraternities) have some kinship with everyday Christian customs. A kind of domestic-religious syncretism has taken shape, based on the common pagan rituals of sacrifice and presenting gifts to saints. The strict dogmas of theology are not taken into consideration. Many other examples could be given illustrating the impact of religious views on social communication between the Kazalbashis, and the way a system of beliefs dominates everyday life and controls the sociocultural aspects of communal life.

4. ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP OF THE ALIAN COMMUNITY

The Kazalbashis in Bulgaria accept the Sunnite and Shi'ite norms of organization and leadership of the religious community, but add their specific rules.

The religious community is based on kinship, not on territory, in other words on the community of descendents of the clan. In this way two or more religious communities

may be formed within a single settlement. Outwardly they observe the Sunnite formation of units of the faithful within the vicinity of a mosque.

Families are accepted into the Alian community only through special rituals and by taking a special oath. Children are not considered equal members of the community. For families who want to become members of the community, special teachers are proposed by the elder parents and assigned with the consent of the baba. This preceptor introduces the young family to the Alian dogmas, the ritual practices, and counsels them in matters of everyday life. The young family is in touch with the family of the teacher, and an exchange of visits within each year are almost obligatory.

The religious community is headed by the baba, zakir, council of elders and tarikchi. The baba has authority not only in religious matters, but likewise in the profane aspects of people's lives. Nearly all important activities are performed with his consent and blessing. The wife of the baba supervises the lives of Alian women. The zakir is the baba's deputy and substitute. He and his wife are expected to be able to sing Alian religious songs, and he should be able to play the lute. The council of elders includes men and women aged over 60. It accepts or rejects candidates for membership, administers punishments or revokes them. The tarikchis who perform the remission of sins ritual should be well versed in Alian dogma and practice.

Typical for Alians is that all the members of a community have some kind of obligation (an office), and they are relieved of all functions only in punishment. Each person passes from one obligation to another. Some of the families are cooks, others are lookouts, still others are responsible for the lighting of candles. Some do the cleaning, bring water, the lowest office is that of stoker, the one to keep the oven burning.

Besides the baba of the community, there is a senior baba for the entire settlement, and he is the superior of the other baba's. The regional senior baba of the baktashis in the Razgrad region resides in the village of Sevar, the head of the Silistra babas is in the town of Dukovo. They have a number of rights and obligations in regard to the religious life in their region. The main holy place of the Kazalbashi in Bulgaria is the tekke of Otman baba, in the village of Teketo, Haskovo district.

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The aim of this paper was to present some of the main features in the history, development, doctrine and present condition of the Kazalbashi community in Bulgaria. Without aiming to be comprehensive, I have outlined the religious situation and activities of Bulgarian Alians. We must not forget that any attempt to study the religion, history and culture of Alians comes up before complexities and ambiguities, which is inevitable wherever human society is concerned. It is hoped this paper will contribute to overcoming certain prejudices and stereotypes concerning the beliefs and practices of this little known religious community, and perhaps bridge the gap of ignorance or of distorted knowledge.

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RELIGIOZNE I SOCIOKULTURNE DIMENZIJE KAZALBAŠKE ZAJEDNICE U BUGARSKOJ

Veselin Bosakov

U radu se kazalbaška zajednica razmatra kao etnoreligiozna zajednica koja ispoveda islam u njegovoj šiitskoj verziji. Maternji jezik je turski. Religiozno učenje i poslanje usmereno je na samu zajednicu. Analiziraju se osnove učenja u upoređenju sa sunitkim. Nakratko se opisuje i organizacija kazalbaške religiozne zajednice (džem). Diskusija se zasniva na shvatanju saznanja (ovde religioznog saznanja) kao ontološke komponente socijalne stvarnosti. I praznične i svakodnevne dimenzije kazalbaškog socijalnog života u otvorenoj su vezi sa njihovom religijskom doktrinom.

Ključne reči: *Kazalbaška zajednica, šiitska verzija islama*