From Saloi to Abdal: Religious Continuity and Holy Foolishness in Anatolian Conversion to Islam

Erdal Günes
erdalgns@gmail.com

Abstract

When Anatolia shifted from 90% Christian to 90% Muslim between the 11th and 16th centuries, did modes of sacred performance cross the confessional boundary? This study examines whether the Abdalan-i Rum's practice of holy foolishness—transgressive behavior, feigned madness, deliberate marginalization—represents continuity with Byzantine *saloi* traditions or independent Islamic development. If continuity can be demonstrated, it challenges rigid periodization separating "Byzantine" from "Islamic" Anatolia and suggests conversion preserved as much as it replaced.

Byzantine *vitae* (Leontios of Neapolis's *Life of Simeon Salos*, 6th c.; the *Life of Andrew the Fool*, 10th c.) and Turkish *menakibname* and *velayetname* compiled generations posthumously suggest notable parallels. The Abdalan-i Rum constituted a distinctive antinomian dervish collectivity characterized by celibacy, extreme asceticism, and transgressive public performance, distinguishing their practices from contemporaneous Anatolian Sufi orders. Early abdal figures including Baba Ilyas (before 1240) and Sarı Saltuk (13th c.) mirror earlier *saloi* through ritual poverty, prophetic authority, and transgressive behavior. Fifteenth-century continuity appears in Abdal Musa and Kaygusuz Abdal (d. 1444) in Konya. Syncretic elements emerge in abdal narratives: Christian liturgical elements, Hızır/St. George and İlyas/Elijah identifications preserved in Hıdırellez festival observances (May 5-6), and Byzantine shrine conversions. Geographic distributions align with earlier *saloi* patterns, clustering in Constantinople/Istanbul and Konya, regions with documented crypto-Christian communities through the nineteenth century.

Significant methodological constraints apply. Hagiographical topoi circulate transregionally, making convergent evolution as plausible as direct transmission. The temporal gap between Byzantine and Ottoman sources, combined with posthumous compilation of *menakibname*, obscures transmission mechanisms. Karakaya-Stump's work on indigenous Shi'i roots and Said's critique of orientalist essentialism demand rigorous source criticism. This study proposes that geographic clustering, syncretic vocabulary, and crypto-Christian persistence offer verifiable markers of religious transmission.

Keywords: Abdal dervishes, Byzantine holy fools, saloi, Anatolian conversion, religious syncretism, Bektashi order, hagiography, Kaygusuz Abdal

Literature Review

Introduction

The historiography of Anatolia's Islamization has long oscillated between two competing paradigms: syncretic continuity and violent rupture. Scholarship on the Byzantine *saloi* (holy fools) and the Ottoman-era *Abdalan-i Rum* (Fools of Rum) epitomizes this bifurcation. Vryonis's monumental *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* positioned

Turkification as fundamentally disruptive, a process that systematically dismantled Byzantine Christian culture through demographic replacement and institutional violence. Conversely, Hasluck's earlier *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans* emphasized cultural persistence, identifying widespread shrine sharing and syncretistic practices that suggested deeper continuities beneath nominal religious conversion. Recent scholarship, particularly the work of Karakaya-Stump on indigenous Anatolian Shi'ism and Karamustafa's analyses of antinomian dervish movements, has productively destabilized this binary, revealing more complex patterns of religious formation that resist reductivist categorization.

This literature review engages four interconnected historiographical problems: the relationship between literary topoi and lived religious practice; the tension between rupture and continuity frameworks; the specific traditions of Byzantine holy foolishness and Anatolian Abdal mysticism; and the methodological challenges inherent in cross-confessional comparative analysis. The synthesis demonstrates that while scholarship has established robust frameworks for understanding both Byzantine *saloi* and *Abdalan-i Rum* as discrete phenomena, the question of transmission mechanisms, convergent evolution, and shared cultural matrices remains productively unresolved. This study contributes to these debates by triangulating hagiographical, geographic, and ethnographic evidence to propose testable hypotheses about religious continuity in Anatolia's longue durée.

Historiographical Paradigms

The study of holy foolishness across religious traditions confronts two fundamental methodological challenges that structure subsequent interpretation: the historicity of hagiographical sources and the conceptual frameworks applied to religious change. These challenges have generated competing scholarly paradigms that continue to shape the field.

Ivanov's comparative study of holy fools in Byzantium, Islam, and the medieval West questions the historicity of holy fool narratives, arguing that such figures function primarily as literary topoi that express theological ideals rather than document actual religious practitioners. His analysis emphasizes hagiography's rhetorical dimensions, suggesting that the recurring narrative patterns across diverse traditions indicate literary borrowing and theological construction rather than independent historical phenomena. This skepticism toward source reliability extends White's influential argument in *Metahistory* that all historiography constitutes narrative construction shaped by underlying tropological structures. From this perspective, scholarly attempts to recover "authentic" historical practices risk misrecognizing literary conventions as empirical data.

Krueger's *Writing and Holiness* offers a more nuanced counterposition, arguing that Byzantine hagiography, while certainly rhetorical, nonetheless reflects and actively shapes lived religious practices within specific urban contexts. Her analysis of sixth- and seventh-century Constantinopolitan holy fool narratives demonstrates how these texts engaged contemporary theological controversies, monastic politics, and urban social dynamics in ways that presuppose audience familiarity with actual holy fool performances. The specificity of urban topography, contemporary ecclesiastical debates, and detailed descriptions of public performances suggest that while hagiographers certainly employed literary conventions, they worked from lived traditions that their audiences recognized and inhabited. Rydén's critical edition of the *Life of Andrew the Fool* similarly demonstrates how tenth-century Byzantine texts encode specific historical details about urban religious culture even as they deploy standardized hagiographical tropes.

This study adopts a position of critical realism: hagiographical texts are irreducibly rhetorical constructions that employ literary conventions and serve theological agendas, yet they simultaneously reflect, shape, and document lived religious behaviors within identifiable historical contexts. The methodological challenge becomes distinguishing between literary borrowing, convergent cultural evolution, and actual historical transmission—a problem particularly acute when examining phenomena separated by religious boundaries and temporal gaps.

As Geertz's concept of "thick description" emphasizes, contextual specificity provides the crucial framework for interpretive adequacy.

The second foundational debate concerns conceptual frameworks for understanding Anatolia's Islamization. Vryonis's comprehensive synthesis positioned the process as fundamentally discontinuous, driven by Turkish migration, Byzantine institutional collapse, and systematic Islamization campaigns. His massive documentation of Byzantine churches converted to mosques, Christian communities subjected to devşirme recruitment, and Greek linguistic retreat before Turkish advancement painted Islamization as demographic replacement rather than cultural synthesis. While Vryonis acknowledged some continuities, his framework emphasized rupture, reflecting mid-twentieth-century nation-state historiographies that mapped contemporary Greek-Turkish antagonisms onto medieval Anatolia.

Hasluck's earlier anthropologically-informed work presented the diametric opposite: an Anatolia characterized by extensive shrine sharing, Muslim-Christian ritual overlap, and syncretistic saint veneration that suggested profound cultural continuities beneath nominal religious boundaries. His documentation of Muslim veneration at Christian shrines, Christian participation in Muslim festivals, and shared saints like Hızır-St. George indicated that ordinary religious practice often transcended official confessional categories. However, as Karakaya-Stump and others have noted, Hasluck's framework reflected colonial assumptions about "folk religion" as degraded forms of "pure" doctrinal traditions, essentializing both Islam and Christianity as monolithic systems subsequently corrupted through peasant ignorance.

Recent scholarship has productively moved beyond this binary. Karakaya-Stump's systematic deconstruction of the Köprülü paradigm demonstrates how earlier syntheses imposed diffusionist assumptions that obscured indigenous Anatolian religious formations. Her emphasis on Anatolian Shi'ism's roots in early Islamic *ghulat* movements, rather than Central Asian shamanism or Christian heterodoxy, repositions Alevi-Bektashi traditions as authentically Islamic developments that require analysis within Islamic intellectual history rather than as syncretic hybrids. Peacock's work on Islamization similarly emphasizes vernacular Islamic traditions' internal diversity, questioning frameworks that position "orthodox" and "heterodox" as stable analytical categories. These interventions create space for analyzing religious continuities and transformations without presupposing either pure origins or syncretic contamination.

Byzantine Holy Fools and the *Saloi* Tradition

The Byzantine tradition of holy foolishness (*salosynē*) emerged from theological currents emphasizing radical kenosis, apophatic mysticism, and the rejection of worldly wisdom articulated in Pauline texts like 1 Corinthians 4:10: "We are fools for Christ's sake." The sixth-century *Life of Simeon Salos*, attributed to Leontios of Neapolis, established the hagiographical archetype: a ascetic who abandons the desert for urban anonymity, deliberately performs scandalous behaviors to conceal his sanctity, and exercises prophetic authority through seemingly mad utterances and actions. Simeon's calculated transgressions—entering women's bathhouses, associating with prostitutes, disrupting church services—constitute deliberate performances of social pollution that simultaneously critique worldly values and protect the saint from vainglory through public dishonor.

Krueger's analysis demonstrates that holy fool narratives encode sophisticated theological arguments about authentic sanctity in an increasingly institutionalized church. The sixth-century proliferation of holy fool vitae coincided with Justinianic ecclesiastical centralization and theological controversy over Origenism and Chalcedonian Christology. Holy fools' urban spectacles functioned as anti-institutional critiques, suggesting that authentic holiness might bypass ecclesiastical structures entirely, manifesting instead through apparently secular or even scandalous performances that only the spiritually discerning could recognize. Their feigned

madness enacted apophatic theology somatically, embodying the fundamental incomprehensibility of divine wisdom to worldly understanding.

Saward's theological analysis positions holy foolishness within broader Christian traditions of sacred inversion and liminal sanctity. The holy fool inhabits the social position Douglas identifies in *Purity and Danger* as maximally dangerous: deliberately transgressing purity boundaries to generate prophetic authority through strategic pollution. This liminality, which Turner theorizes as "betwixt and between" normative social structures, becomes permanent rather than transitional, creating what Turner terms "professional liminars" who embody communitas against hierarchical structure. The Byzantine *saloi* thus represent not individual eccentricity but a recognized religious type with specific theological genealogy and social functions.

The *Life of Andrew the Fool*, in Rydén's critical edition, expands holy foolishness into elaborate apocalyptic vision and theological instruction, suggesting tenth-century developments toward more explicitly didactic functions. Andrew's extended eschatological visions, delivered through mad utterances, position holy fool discourse as vehicle for theological speculation that might prove controversial in more official contexts. The text's detailed topographical references to Constantinopolitan churches, forums, and neighborhoods indicate urban audiences familiar with specific locations where actual holy fool performances might occur.

Yet significant gaps remain in Byzantine holy fool scholarship. Comparative analysis with Islamic traditions remains limited, with Ivanov's work providing one of few systematic cross-confessional examinations. The relationship between literary representations and actual practices requires further specification: while Krueger convincingly demonstrates that texts reflect lived traditions, the precise sociology of Byzantine holy foolishness —its practitioners' social origins, the extent and duration of performances, the mechanisms of social recognition —remains obscure. Most crucially for this study, Byzantine scholarship has not systematically examined holy foolishness's potential transmission to or convergent development with Islamic mystical traditions in Anatolia's transitional zones.

Abdalan-i Rum and Anatolian Heterodox Mysticism

Scholarship on *Abdalan-i Rum* and related Anatolian mystical traditions has undergone fundamental reorientation in recent decades, destabilizing earlier synthesist paradigms while opening new analytical possibilities. The dominant interpretive framework for much of the twentieth century derived from Köprülü's pioneering synthesis, which positioned Anatolian heterodoxy as syncretic amalgamation of Central Asian Turkish shamanism, heterodox Islamic mysticism, and residual Christianized elements absorbed through conversion. Köprülü's *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* established a genealogy tracing Alevi-Bektashi traditions through Central Asian Yasavi mysticism back to pre-Islamic Turkish religious culture, with Christian influences understood as superficial accretions onto fundamentally shamanistic substrates.

Karakaya-Stump's systematic critique has demonstrated this paradigm's methodological nationalism and diffusionist assumptions. Her analysis reveals how Köprülü's framework projected twentieth-century Turkish national identity formation onto medieval religious history, privileging Central Asian Turkish origins while marginalizing or dismissing indigenous Anatolian developments. More fundamentally, the Köprülü synthesis misrecognized Alevi-Bektashi theology's *ghulat* Shi'i roots—its distinctive doctrines of divine manifestation through Ali, antinomian interpretations of Islamic law, and esoteric cosmologies—as syncretic corruption rather than authentic development within Islamic intellectual history. Karakaya-Stump's reconstruction positions Anatolian Alevism as continuous with early Islamic *ghuluw* movements that migrated westward from Iraq and Syria, developing distinctive forms in Anatolia's specific social and political contexts but remaining fundamentally Islamic rather than crypto-shamanistic or crypto-Christian phenomena.

This crucial intervention requires careful calibration for the present study. Karakaya-Stump convincingly establishes that Alevi-Bektashi theology derives from Islamic sources and must be analyzed as Islamic tradition, not syncretic hybrid. However, her focus on doctrinal genealogy and theological content leaves open questions about practice, performance, and local sacred geographies where Christian-Islamic interactions might manifest differently than in formal theology. The *Abdalan-i Rum*—literally "Fools of Rum," with Rum denoting Byzantine Anatolia—represent a specific mystical collectivity whose very nomenclature suggests geographic and possibly cultural distinctiveness.

Karamustafa's magisterial *God's Unruly Friends* provides the most comprehensive analysis of *Abdalan-i Rum* as distinct from other antinomian dervish movements. His reconstruction, drawing on hostile Sunni sources, sympathetic hagiographies, and archival documentation of Ottoman persecution, identifies the Abdals as twelfth- to sixteenth-century itinerant mystics characterized by extreme asceticism, celibacy, social deviance, and deliberate transgression of Islamic behavioral norms. Unlike Qalandars and Haydaris who shared some antinomian practices, Abdals cultivated specific associations with madness, maintained celibacy more strictly, and demonstrated particular geographic concentration in western Anatolia—the former Byzantine heartland.

Karamustafa carefully distinguishes between historical Abdal practices and their later absorption into formalized Bektashi orders. The Bektashi synthesis, occurring primarily in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, domesticated earlier Abdal antinomianism within more institutionalized structures connected to Janissary corps patronage and Ottoman imperial politics. Mélikoff's work on Bektashi formation demonstrates how the order retrospectively claimed Hacı Bektaş Veli (thirteenth century) as founder despite the formal order postdating him by two centuries, and how the *Velayetname*'s compilation occurred centuries after Hacı Bektaş's lifetime, requiring methodological caution about reading later texts as straightforward historical sources for earlier periods.

The figure of Sarı Saltuk epitomizes these interpretive complexities. The *Saltukname*'s epic narratives of Saltuk's missionary activities in the Balkans, miraculous transformations, and culture-hero exploits blend historical memory, hagiographical convention, and folkloric elaboration in ways that resist simple source criticism. Karamustafa's analysis of the *Saltukname* emphasizes vernacular piety and Islamization through charismatic religious authority rather than doctrinal instruction. Saltuk's legendary ability to assume different forms, perform miracles, and navigate between Christian and Islamic contexts reflects the ambiguous religious landscape of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Anatolia and the Balkans, where formal confessional boundaries remained porous and individual religious authority might transcend institutional affiliation.

Ocak's work on the Babai Revolt (1239-1241) positions Baba Ilyas and related figures as proto-Abdal movements that challenged both Seljuk political authority and mainstream Islamic orthodoxy. The revolt's suppression and subsequent persecution of related mystical movements created conditions where antinomian practices might strategically deploy seeming madness and social transgression as protective camouflage, similar to Byzantine holy fools' protective foolishness. This functional parallel—transgressive performance as simultaneously prophetic authority and protective concealment—suggests possible convergent evolution even absent direct cultural transmission.

Introduction

The Holy Fool in Two Worlds

In the early sixth century, the monk Simeon arrived in Emesa from the desert and immediately began a calculated campaign of public degradation. He entered the city gates on Sunday morning dragging a dead dog,

invaded the women's section of the bathhouse, overturned the tables of pastry vendors in the marketplace, and pretended to proposition a prostitute while pelting congregants with nuts during the liturgy. Leontios of Neapolis, writing his *Life of Simeon the Fool* sometime around 640, insists these scandals concealed profound sanctity—that Simeon deliberately courted contempt to achieve spiritual humility and protect his gifts from vainglory. The bathhouse incident particularly shocked contemporaries: Simeon stripped naked among women, provoking their screams and the bathkeeper's blows, transforming sacred space into theater of deliberate pollution. Yet Leontios presents this transgression not as apostasy but as radical imitation of Christ's kenotic self-emptying, a performance of foolishness that paradoxically manifested divine wisdom.

Seven centuries later and five hundred miles east, in the newly Islamized landscape of Seljuk Anatolia, another charismatic figure enacted similarly transgressive spirituality. Baba Ilyas, leader of the Babailer dervishes, cultivated followers through ecstatic performances, celibate asceticism, and practices that scandalized settled Islamic society. His followers, known as Abdalan-i Rum—the "Substitutes of Anatolia"—embraced poverty so extreme it appeared as madness, rejected normative social bonds including marriage, and claimed prophetic authority that challenged both sultanic and ulama power. When their revolt erupted in 1240, Byzantine chroniclers and Seljuk officials alike described them in terms resonant with holy foolishness: possessed by divine madness, performing wonders, transgressing boundaries between sacred and profane. The *Menakibname* tradition that preserved their memory depicts similar urban performances, similar strategic use of scandal, similar claims that apparent madness concealed esoteric knowledge.

Were these parallel developments, separated by confession and centuries? Or does the second tradition somehow descend from the first, holy foolishness persisting across Anatolia's religious transformation in ways that theological analysis alone cannot detect?

The Problem: Religious Continuity Across Anatolia's Transformation

Between 1025 and 1600, Anatolia underwent one of history's most complete religious transformations. At the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, Byzantine control of eastern Anatolia collapsed before Seljuk Turkish forces. What followed was not merely military conquest but demographic and cultural revolution. The peninsula that had been approximately 90 percent Christian in the early eleventh century was 90 percent Muslim by 1600—a transformation more thorough than the Iberian Reconquista's reversal, more rapid than the Christianization of northern Europe. The Seljuk sultanate of Rum (1077-1308) gave way to the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922), consolidating Anatolia as the heartland of Sunni Islamic civilization.

Conventional historiography has treated this transformation as fundamental rupture. The narrative of demographic replacement—Turkic nomads displacing or absorbing Christian populations—dominates both nationalist Turkish historiography and Greek narratives of catastrophic loss. Byzantine studies and Ottoman studies have developed as largely separate fields, divided by periodization that treats 1071 or 1453 as civilizational caesura. Where continuity is acknowledged, it typically concerns material culture (architecture repurposed, trade routes maintained) or high theological discourse (falsafa building on Greek philosophy). The religious lives of ordinary people, particularly modes of devotional practice and performance, have received less attention as sites of potential continuity.

Yet certain forms of religious behavior appear in both Byzantine and Ottoman Anatolia with striking similarities. Among the most distinctive is holy foolishness—the deliberate performance of madness, poverty, and transgression as spiritual discipline. In Byzantine Christianity, the *salos* (plural *saloi*) feigned insanity to achieve humility, concealed sanctity beneath scandal, and claimed prophetic authority precisely through violation of social norms. These figures haunted Byzantine cities from the sixth through eleventh centuries,

documented in hagiographical texts that celebrate their calculated pollution of sacred spaces, their disruption of liturgical propriety, their strategic deployment of apparent madness.

In Ottoman Anatolia, particularly the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries, a parallel tradition emerged among the Abdalan-i Rum. These celibate dervishes, associated with the Bektashi and broader Alevi-Bektashi tradition, practiced extreme asceticism that contemporaries interpreted as madness, performed wonders that violated normative Islamic piety, and claimed authority that challenged both Sunni orthodoxy and political power. Like the Byzantine *saloi*, they concentrated in urban settings, particularly Constantinople/Istanbul and Konya. Like the *saloi*, they used transgressive performance to manifest spiritual authority. Like the *saloi*, they occupied an ambiguous position—simultaneously revered and suspect, orthodox and heterodox, mad and prophetic.

The central question this study addresses is whether these similarities represent cultural continuity, convergent evolution, or entirely independent development. Did Ottoman holy fools inherit practices from Byzantine predecessors through mechanisms of cultural transmission? Or did similar ascetic strategies emerge independently within Islamic Sufism, responding to parallel social conditions with parallel solutions? Or should we understand these as instances of convergence—unrelated traditions producing similar forms because holy foolishness serves universal religious functions?

Why This Question Matters

This investigation carries significance beyond antiquarian curiosity about obscure ascetic practices. It addresses three interconnected scholarly concerns: theoretical models of religious change, methodological approaches to cultural transmission, and historiographical assumptions about Anatolian history.

Theoretically, the question tests competing paradigms about how religious traditions transform. Models emphasizing theological discontinuity—the fundamental alterity of Christianity and Islam—predict independent development: Byzantine *saloi* derive from Pauline theology of foolishness for Christ's sake and Eastern Christian kenotic spirituality, while Abdalan-i Rum emerge from Islamic Sufi traditions of *majdhub* (the divinely attracted) and *qalandar* (antinomian dervishes). These traditions share superficial similarities but develop from distinct theological roots and serve different religious functions within incompatible cosmological systems. Continuity would be literary at most—hagiographical topoi circulating through translation—not practical transmission of embodied performance.

Conversely, models emphasizing practice over theology predict possible continuity. If religious life consists not merely in doctrinal propositions but in embodied disciplines, spatial practices, and performance repertoires, then these elements might transmit even across confessional boundaries. Holy foolishness as a *practice*—a set of techniques for managing charismatic authority, disrupting institutional power, and performing sanctity—might prove more portable than theology suggests. Just as architectural forms, agricultural techniques, and craft knowledge transmitted across Anatolia's Islamization, so too might repertoires of religious performance.

This study's approach to continuity carries important methodological implications. Recent scholarship, particularly Ayfer Karakaya-Stump's definitive work in *The Kizilbash-Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia* (2020), has decisively demonstrated that Alevi-Bektashi theology developed from indigenous Islamic—specifically Shi'i—sources rather than representing Christian syncretism or heterodox amalgamation. Karakaya-Stump's rigorous analysis of doctrinal content, tracing Alevi cosmology to early Islamic *ghulat* movements in Iraq and Syria, demolishes earlier interpretations that attributed Alevi heterodoxy to Christian contamination or Central Asian shamanism. Her intervention is methodologically crucial: it demonstrates that doctrinal genealogy requires analysis within intellectual history, not recourse to vague syncretism.

This study does not challenge Karakaya-Stump's findings regarding theology. Rather, it examines a different dimension of religious life: embodied practice, spatial geography, and performance repertoires. Karakaya-Stump herself notes that her focus on doctrinal content leaves open questions about "local practices and their relationship to Byzantine Christian traditions." The present analysis accepts that Abdalan-i Rum theology derives from Islamic sources while asking whether their *performative practices*—the specific techniques of holy foolishness—might show Byzantine influence. This distinction between theological genealogy and practical transmission allows for parallel developments: Islamic doctrinal frameworks might coexist with locally transmitted performance traditions, just as Islamic architectural forms adapted Byzantine building techniques without theological syncretism.

Historiographically, this investigation challenges the rigid periodization that separates "Byzantine" and "Islamic" Anatolia as discrete civilizational units. The conventional narrative treats 1071 or 1453 as absolute breaks, with Byzantine studies ending where Ottoman studies begins. Yet religious practices, particularly those embedded in local geography and urban spaces, might prove more resilient than political boundaries suggest. If holy foolishness persisted across confessional change, it would indicate that Anatolia's Islamization involved not merely replacement but complex processes of adaptation, where Christian populations converting to Islam brought embodied religious practices into their new confession, transforming both in the process.

This Study's Approach

This study examines whether the Abdalan-i Rum's distinctive practice of holy foolishness represents cultural continuity with Byzantine *saloi* traditions, convergent evolution of similar ascetic strategies, or entirely independent Islamic development. Rather than propose definitive conclusions—the evidence does not permit such certainty—it presents three converging lines of evidence that suggest continuity merits serious consideration as a working hypothesis requiring further investigation.

The first line of evidence derives from hagiographical comparison. Byzantine *vitae* of Simeon Salos and Andrew the Fool share striking narrative parallels with Turkish *menakibname* of Baba Ilyas, Sarı Saltuk, and Kaygusuz Abdal. Beyond generic ascetic topoi common to all hagiography, these texts describe specific performative techniques: bathhouse invasions, marketplace disruptions, feigned sexual transgression, prophetic utterances delivered through apparent madness. The geographic and material specificity of these parallels—references to particular urban locations, descriptions of architectural spaces, details of daily practice—suggest more than literary borrowing of conventional tropes.

The second line of evidence concerns geographic clustering. Both Byzantine *saloi* and Abdalan-i Rum concentrate in identical locations: Constantinople/Istanbul and Konya. These cities served as major urban centers for both Byzantine Christianity and Ottoman Islam, sites where institutional religion encountered charismatic disruption. Ottoman tax registers and endowment documents reveal that Abdal *tekkes* (lodges) often occupied sites of former Byzantine monasteries and churches. Shrines venerated as Hızır sites correspond to documented St. George shrines, preserving not merely general sacred geography but specific devotional locations across confessional boundaries.

The third line of evidence emerges from living traditions that preserve dual Christian-Islamic identifications. The Hıdırellez festival, celebrated on May 5-6, commemorates the meeting of Hızır and İlyas—figures identified with St. George and Elijah respectively. The festival date corresponds to the Eastern Orthodox celebration of St. George (May 6 Gregorian, April 23 Julian), and festival practices combine elements from both traditions. This ethnographic present provides a control on historical speculation: living communities maintain syncretistic traditions that encode the very continuities this study hypothesizes for the past.

Methodologically, the study prioritizes verifiable markers over speculative claims. Rather than argue from theological similarities (which might reflect convergence) or generic hagiographical parallels (which might represent literary borrowing), it focuses on specific, testable evidence: documented shrine locations, architectural reuse, festival calendars, geographic clustering in identical urban neighborhoods. These material and spatial markers provide external constraints on interpretation, limiting the range of plausible explanations.

Scope, Sources, and Limitations

The chronological scope extends from the sixth century—the earliest Byzantine holy fool *vitae*—through the sixteenth century, when the Bektashi order formalized and domesticated earlier Abdal antinomianism. The critical transition period spans the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, from the Seljuk conquest to the Babai Revolt and early Ottoman expansion. This longue durée perspective captures both Byzantine and Ottoman manifestations while acknowledging a significant temporal gap: tenth-century Byzantine sources precede thirteenth-century Abdal sources by two hundred years, during which direct evidence of transmission mechanisms remains elusive.

Geographically, the study focuses on western Anatolia—the former Byzantine heartland that became Ottoman territory earliest and most completely. Constantinople/Istanbul receives particular attention as the imperial capital of both empires, while Konya serves as a second major urban center where both traditions flourished. This geographic limitation acknowledges that religious dynamics in eastern Anatolia, the Arab borderlands, and the Balkans followed different patterns.

The source base combines Greek hagiography (Leontios's *Life of Simeon*, Rydén's critical edition of Andrew the Fool), Turkish *menakibname* and *velayetname* (compiled centuries after their subjects' deaths, requiring critical caution), Ottoman archival materials (tax registers documenting *tekke* locations, persecution records), and ethnographic observations of contemporary Hıdırellez celebrations. Each source type presents methodological challenges: hagiography's rhetorical conventions, *menakibname*'s posthumous compilation, archival lacunae, and the risks of projecting contemporary practices onto the medieval past.

Several methodological constraints must be acknowledged upfront. The temporal gap between Byzantine and Ottoman sources obscures direct transmission mechanisms. Hagiographical topoi circulate transregionally through literary channels, meaning that narrative parallels might reflect borrowing of textual conventions rather than continuity of embodied practices. Karakaya-Stump's critique of orientalist assumptions about Alevi "syncretism" applies forcefully to any argument about Christian influences on Islamic traditions. The alternative hypothesis—convergent evolution, whereby similar social conditions generate similar ascetic strategies independently—remains equally plausible on available evidence.

This study therefore proposes testable hypotheses rather than definitive conclusions. It argues that geographic, hagiographical, and ethnographic evidence converges to make continuity a serious possibility worthy of further investigation, while acknowledging that current evidence cannot decisively rule out convergence or independent development.

Roadmap

Following this introduction and the literature review presented in Chapter 2, the analysis proceeds through five substantive chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter 3 examines Byzantine *saloi*, establishing the baseline for comparison. It analyzes the theological roots of Christian holy foolishness in Pauline kenotic theology and apophatic mysticism, then examines the sixth-century *Life of Simeon Salos* and tenth-century *Life of Andrew the Fool* as exemplary texts. The chapter

emphasizes the urban contexts of holy foolishness, the specific performance techniques deployed, and the social functions these figures served—simultaneously critiquing institutional power and claiming prophetic authority through strategic transgression.

Chapter 4 turns to the Abdalan-i Rum, tracing their emergence in thirteenth-century Anatolia through figures like Baba Ilyas and Sarı Saltuk, their consolidation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through Abdal Musa and Kaygusuz Abdal, and their eventual absorption into formalized Bektashi structures in the sixteenth century. The chapter establishes the Abdals' distinctive characteristics—celibacy, extreme asceticism, associations with madness, antinomian practice—distinguishing them from other dervish groups like Qalandars and Haydaris while noting functional similarities to Byzantine *saloi*.

Chapter 5 presents the evidence for continuity across three domains. First, it compares hagiographical narratives in detail, identifying specific parallels beyond generic topoi. Second, it maps the geographic clustering of both traditions, documenting shrine locations and urban neighborhoods where *saloi* and Abdal practices concentrated. Third, it analyzes syncretic elements in Abdal traditions—the Hıdırellez festival, Hızır/St. George and İlyas/Elijah identifications, Christian liturgical remnants in *menakibname* narratives—as potential markers of transmission.

Chapter 6 conducts comparative analysis, systematically assessing similarities and differences. It examines convergent features (urban performance, transgressive behavior, prophetic authority through madness) alongside divergences (theological frameworks, institutional contexts, gender dynamics). The chapter evaluates alternative explanations—literary borrowing, convergent evolution, independent development—against the geographic and ethnographic evidence.

Chapter 7 addresses counter-arguments and implications. It engages Karakaya-Stump's indigenous Shi'i thesis directly, clarifying how this study's focus on practice complements rather than contradicts her theological analysis. It considers convergent evolution seriously, asking whether similar social conditions might generate similar ascetic responses. It examines possible transmission mechanisms—crypto-Christian communities, shared sacred geography, oral tradition—while acknowledging their speculative nature. Finally, it explores implications for understanding Anatolian Islamization as a complex process of negotiation rather than simple replacement.

The conclusion synthesizes findings, articulates this study's contribution to debates about religious continuity and change, and proposes directions for future research—particularly the need for systematic archaeological survey of shrine sites and oral history collection among communities maintaining Hıdırellez traditions.