

A Saint “On the Move”: Traces in the Evolution of a Landscape of Religious Memory in the Balkans

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The ignorance of where the body was would produce everywhere a pilgrimage of Muslims and, from the pilgrimage, would result in the incorporation of these lands into the kingdom of Islam.

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1 Introduction

On the rugged coastline where the Adriatic and Ionian seas meet to the northwest of Saranda in southern Albania, towering above the water on a high cliff of sedimentary rock, lies the most recent Bektashi place of worship (*tekke*). Named after the late leader of the Albanian Bektashi order of dervishes, Reshat Bardhi (d. 2011), it holds a striking, saintly trace that has only recently been discovered. Miraculously, the imprint of the right foot of perhaps the most important saint in the Balkans, Sari Saltuq (whom the Bektashi claim as their own), was found next to the imprint of the right foot of the sixteenth-century grand master Balim Sultan, the Second Pir of the Bektashi order (fig. 4.1).

Before the construction of the *tekke* complex could begin, its foundations and both footprints were consecrated with the blood of propitiatory animal sacrifice (*qurban*).² The head of the sacrificial animal, a goat with spiralling “markhor”-type horns,³ was buried under the threshold, and its horns preserved

1 *Seyahatname*, Istanbul 1896–1935, ii, 133/Bağdat ms. 304, fol. 266aff; cited after Leiser, Sari Saltuq Dede, in *ET*².

2 Halili, Kurban 200–2.

3 The makhor (*Capra Falconeri*), with its large coiled horns, was greatly appreciated in the Sufi milieu; its horns often serve as *ex-votos* at dervish tombs and pilgrimage sites; cf., for instance, Castagné, *Le culte* 77.



FIGURE 4.1 “Rediscovered” footprints of right foot of Sari Saltuq (left) and of the right foot of the 16th-century grand master Balim Sultan of the Bektashi Sufi order (right), *tekke* complex of the Albanian Kryegjysh Reshat Bardhi, Saranda, southern Albania

and hung above it, an apotropaion guarding the threshold of a sacred space. The ceremony, which took place in May 2009, was directed by Reshat Bardhi and the present leader of the order, Edmond Brahimaj, popularly known as, “Baba Mondi,” with the support of some of the main leaders (*babas*) of the order. In March 2012, the *tekke* opened fully (fig. 4.2) and—as was to be expected—the footprints became objects of pilgrimage and ritual activity, visited by those seeking access to charismatic power. Material reminders that the site had previously been sacralized by the saints’ presence during their visit to Saranda, the blessed traces were apparently lost and forgotten until they were “rediscovered” and identified at a decisive moment. The saints’ footprints provide not only a proof that they were there, but also “reconnect” them to the Bektashi devotional tradition. For the leaders of the order and their followers, the miracle of rediscovering the physical vestiges of these two important figures is seen as a blessing of their community. It allows members of the order not only to memorialize the traces, but also to ritually re-present and re-enact them, thereby renewing their faith.



FIGURE 4.2 *Tekke* complex of the Albanian Kryegjysh Reshat Bardhi, Saranda, southern Albania

Several *lieux de mémoire*⁴ (places of memory) or different “platforms” of veneration⁵ of the legendary presence of Sari Saltuq are found throughout the Balkans, amplified in modern history by new *topographia sacra*, like that at Saranda. The supra-regional and trans-historical religious memory landscape⁶ associated with this polyvalent saint allows us to discern and discuss some of his traces, paraphernalia, and ephemeral characteristics that materially enshrine his sainthood. Various layers of memory related to his miracles, linked through the simultaneity of the ritual performances in different places and within different communities, attest to his ability to translocate, that is, to be physically present in multiple locations and embodied in multiple Christian saints.

In this article, I investigate an identity of Sari Saltuq which has thus far received scant attention: that of “a walking saint.” This identity will be examined

4 Coined by Nora in his pathbreaking *Realms of memory*, the expression refers to the crystallization of the collective memory of a social group in certain places.

5 A term borrowed from Georg Stauth that, in a figurative sense, alludes to the various conceptualizations of the veneration of Sari Saltuq (employed here with reference to the manifold markers and traces associated with the saint and the various physical interactions therewith), often in the context of institutionalized strategies; Stauth, Introduction 19.

6 The expression is inspired by Kirmayer, *Landscapes*.

in light of his relics,⁷ potent traces or markers that we can detect in the memory landscape of sacred places associated with the saint. To that end, I will concentrate on key concepts from the relevant literature, such as his benedictory attributes and intercessory effects as a living saint, especially his numinous presence in his absence⁸ in the “embodied localities,”⁹ his proselytizing function, and the emanation of his blessings (*baraka*). I hope to demonstrate that these notions remain important in our days as the traces of Sari Saltuq continue to play a pivotal role in commemorative religious consciousness.¹⁰ My argument is based on a series of ethnographical observations of sacred sites dedicated to the saint in the Balkan Peninsula from 2011 to 2019, in particular in the Dobruja, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Albania, combined here with archival research.

Sari Saltuq (alternatively, Sarı Saltıq), who lived in the second half of the thirteenth century, is one of the most fascinating figures in Balkan medieval religious history. He was a bearer of enduring charismatic force, *baraka*, which is generally believed to reside in extraordinary saintly figures. An unconventional personage, often portrayed as a wonder-worker and trickster, Saltuq left a deep impression on his contemporaries, as well as historians, travellers, and hagiographers who described his life and deeds. Several miracles were woven into tales of his early missionary activities, which connect him with the first wave of Muslim Turkmen immigration from Asia Minor to the Byzantine territories along the Danube during the latter half of the thirteenth century. He is said to have propagated Islam in the region of Dobruja in present-day Bulgaria and Romania and in the Ukranian/Crimean steppes (barr Qaraman),¹¹ and he still plays a significant role in local and regional memory today.

7 “Relics” in this article refer to material objects and physical traces sanctified by contact with the saint.

8 In his study on the Sri Lankan Sufi saint Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (d. 1986), Frank Korom describes the saint’s “presence of absence” as “a process by which a figure no longer physically in the world of lived reality is made manifest through the ritual use of stuff formerly belonging to or associated with the entity no longer present in the mundane realm, some of which may be termed *relics*.” Korom, *The presence* 1.

9 The expression, “embodied localities,” is borrowed from the study by Werbner and Basu on the embodiment of the charisma of saints in the sacred landscape of their shrines and cults in modern and contemporary South Asia. See, Werbner and Basu, *Embodying charisma*, 29.

10 The expression, “commemorative religious consciousness,” is inspired by Pierre Nora; Nora, *Realms* 6.

11 Kiel, Sari Saltuk 253.

The earliest surviving reference to the saint, the *Tuffah al-arwah*, was compiled in about 1314 by Muhammad al-Sarraj al-Rifa'i.¹² This treatise portrays Sari Saltuq as an ascetic, antinomian dervish, who made a pilgrimage to the famous shrine of Ahmad b. 'Ali al-Rifa'i (d. 578/1182) in Wasit in Iraq, where he became a follower of Shaykh Mahmud al-Rifa'i, one of the spiritual deputies (*khalifa*) of the eponymous founder of the Rifa'i order.¹³ As his name indicates, al-Sarraj himself was affiliated with the Rifa'iyya. Sari Saltuq is also said to have been a disciple of Sayyid Bahram Shah al-Haydari, who was initiated into the Haydari Sufi tradition. Both groups of dervishes—the Rifa'is and the Haydaris—rejected normative piety and were known for their miraculous feats. Sari Saltuq is reputed to have “performed stupendous miracles and accomplished mighty deeds.”¹⁴ These often involved converting people to Islam and forming communities of devout Muslims in the Dobruja, which was then known as the “Land of the Qipchaq” (Turkish Kıpçakiyye),¹⁵ a Turkish tribal confederation in the western part of the Golden Horde region.¹⁶ It was here that Sari Saltuq died in 1297–8.¹⁷

2 Bones, Bodies, and the Multiplication of Coffins

According to al-Sarraj, a group of trustworthy witnesses related that when Sari Saltuq's death approached, some people who did not reside in his city wanted to bury him where they lived. He said: “Bury me here, but dig other graves there. You will find me in each one of them!” And so they did.¹⁸ In 1332–3, eighteen years after al-Sarraj's account, the famous fourteenth-century traveller

12 al-Rifa'i, *Tuffah al-arwah*, quoted by al-Nabhani in *Kitab jami' karamat al-awliya'* ii, 100–101. In his extensive studies, Machiel Kiel used an unpublished copy of this text preserved in Berlin: Staatsbibliothek Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Katalog W. Ahlwardt No. 8794. For Bernd Radtke's German translation of the text pertaining to Sari Saltuq, see Kiel, *Sari Saltuk* 262–5.

13 On the development of the Rifa'iyya after Ahmad al-Rifa'i's death, see Trimmingham, *The Sufi orders*, 32, 37–40, 280–281; cf. Popović, *Un ordre*, 55–6, 99–100.

14 al-Nabhani, *Kitab jami' karama al-awliya'* 100–1, cited after Kiel, *Ottoman urban development* 286.

15 Hazai, Qipçak, in *ET*².

16 Cf. Birge, *The Bektashi order* 51, 119, n. 2; DeWeese, *Islamization* 251–3.

17 Wittek, *Yazijioghlu 'Ali*, 648. For a short biography of Sari Saltuq and a translated passage from the *Saltuq-name* (“Book of Saltuq”), which presents him as a warrior-saint, see Karamustafa, *Sari Saltik* 136–44.

18 al-Sarraj, *Tuffah al-arwah*, Berlin Staatsbibliothek Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Katalog W. Ahlwardt No. 8794, fol. 108aff; Kiel, *Sari Saltuk* 265.

Ibn Battuta reported that when he passed through an important town held by the “Turks”, called, “Baba Saltuq”, in the “Steppe of the Qipchaqs” (Dasht-i Qipchaq), he learned about the eponymous dervish, an ecstatic (*mukashif*) figure whom he characterized as “extra-worldly and mystical, although things are told of him which are reproved by Divine Law (*shari‘a*).”¹⁹

Machiel Kiel has shown that the historical Sari Saltuq was most probably buried in the town of Babadag (Turkish Babadağ, literally, “mountain of the father,” the cognomen, Baba, being an appellative used particularly in dervish circles) in the Dobruja, a location which can be identified with Ibn Battuta’s “Baba Saltuq.”²⁰ According to a popular tradition, the shepherd Qoyun Baba (literally, “father of the sheep”)²¹ one day met some Turkish *babas* who asked him about Sari Saltuq’s tomb (*türbe*). He answered that its location was unknown to him, but that he had noticed that his flock avoided a certain stone-covered place on the mountaintop. Sheep are popularly thought to be able to perceive the “scent of sainthood,” the sanctity (*vilaya*) that emanates from the body of the saint even after death, and, by association, shepherds are also credited with supernatural powers.²² Guided by this wondrous sign, the *babas* started digging and at sunset discovered the miraculously untouched bones of the saint. A *türbe* was erected upon the spot, where it still stands today. The story of Qoyun Baba’s rediscovery of the saint’s grave is also steeped in the belief that a saint retains the power to work miracles *post mortem*, reflected in his disclosure of the location of his physical remains, thus allowing his devotees to rebuild his *türbe*.²³

This story probably has its origin in the periods of decline of the city of Babadag. During these periods, the sanctuary of Sari Saltuq disappeared, but then was rediscovered and rebuilt. According to the seventeenth-century Ottoman traveller and historian, Evliya Çelebi, the mausoleum of Sari Saltuq was destroyed and covered with earth, stones, and garbage, and it was not until a visit by the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II in 1484–5, that it was substantially rebuilt.²⁴ During the late Ottoman period, the *türbe* again fell into a ruinous

19 *The travels*, trans. Gibb ii, 499–500.

20 Kiel, *The türbe* 205–225; Kiel, *Ottoman urban development* 283–98, esp. 286–7; cf. Deny, *Sari Saltuq* 1–15.

21 His namesake was a contemporary of Hajji Bektash, the site of his alleged grave being at ‘Othmanjiq near Amasya in Anatolia. See Babinger, *Qoyun Baba*, in *ET*².

22 Many folkloric stories stress the intimate understanding between shepherds and their animals, such as the well-known Romanian pastoral ballad of Miorița (The Lambkin). See Preminger, Warnke and Hardison, *Princeton encyclopedia of poetry and poetics* 724–5.

23 The same phenomenon is observed in an Albanian context in Dervish Hysni Shehu’s *Shenjtore të Ehli-Bejtit* 3–4; cf. Clayer, *Les hauts lieux* 38.

24 *Seyahatname*, cited after Kiel, *Sari Saltuq* 274.

state, finally disappearing altogether during the Russo-Turkish wars in 1828–9, when the city was burned down. In 1829, a simple domed *türbe* was built over the grave. When Grace Martin Smith visited the *türbe* in 1966 during her fieldwork in the Balkans, she observed that it was in a dilapidated condition but still visited by many pilgrims, especially women, on Thursday and Sunday nights.²⁵ In 2007, the *türbe* was renovated once again. The ongoing importance of the holy man, not least for Turkish interests in the region, is underlined by the fact that it was re-inaugurated by no less a personage than Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in July 2007. Today, the *türbe* consists of a domed tomb chamber and a portico that is open to the front, supported by three wooden posts, and covered by a roof.

But Qoyun Baba's discovery of the bones is not the whole story. The fact that he was instrumental in the discovery of the burial site of Sari Saltuq allowed him to partake in the mediating presence of the saint and his aura of sacrality, which imbued Qoyun Baba too with personal blessedness. The *Vilayet-name* ("Book of Sainthood") of 'Othman Baba mentions that Qoyun Baba was buried on Mount Babadag.²⁶ Today, his grave is marked by a stone mound and a sacred tree. This shows that not only could the saint's miraculous powers be accessed through the *baraka* emanating from his earthly tomb, but that the person who "rediscovered" such a site under "quasi-miraculous" circumstances was sanctified by osmosis. Having partaken in the immaterial blessings, his own burial place, in turn, became a sacred site.²⁷ Legend has it that at the very place where Qoyun Baba was put to rest, the earth split in two to mark his grave. Located on top of Mount Babadag, the site became a place of pilgrimage visited by all faiths. The local Turco-Tatar population now congregate there to hold supplications in the open air²⁸ on two important holidays, the Feast of Ritual Sacrifices (Qurban Bayram) and the Feast of Ramadan (Ramadan Bayram).

We find a parallel case of the intimate "sharing" of *baraka* in the recent rediscovery in Saranda of Sari Saltuq's footprint next to that of the Second Pir of the Bektashiyya, Balim Sultan (between 1501–2 and 1516–7 according to Bektashi tradition). The close association of the two saints goes back to at least the second half of the sixteenth century, during which the Ottoman state increasingly

25 Smith, *Some türbes/maqâms* 222.

26 *Vilayet-name-i Otman Baba*, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms Turk 43, fol. 16v, cited after Norris, *Popular Sufism* 56.

27 Călin-Bodea, *Românii și Otomanii* 236–7.

28 On such open-air gatherings at sacred places, or *dovišta*, see Hadžijahić, *Sinkretistički Elementi* 301–28; Stegemann, *Regen*, in *Handbuch des Aberglaubens* 7, 580–84.

imposed restrictions on religious antinomianism.²⁹ This led to the transformation of the Bektashi order into a fully formalized order under the leadership of Balim Sultan, while partially absorbing some other unorthodox dervishes, such as the Rifa'i and the Haydaris, during the process.³⁰ Even though, as we shall see below, the cult of the most prominent charismatic saint in the Balkan region had already been incorporated into the fifteenth-century *Vilayet-name* of Hajji Bektash Veli (d. 669/1270–1), these developments further tightened the connection between the saint and the Bektashiyya. The fact that his imprint was discovered in 2008 next to the footprint of Balim Sultan reemphasizes the ideological fusion which had taken place. It additionally endows Balim Sultan with Sari Saltuq's potent *baraka*. Moreover, the association with the famous saint reasserts the Second Pir's own sainthood and revitalizes his place in Bektashi commemorative religious consciousness.

From the fifteenth century onward, stories with roots in the rich oral traditions about the legendary life of Sari Saltuq were increasingly recorded. The most important of these is the eponymous, hagiographical compendium, *Saltuq-name* ("Book of Saltuq"), which offers a legendary account of the saint's life in the context of the Islamization of Ottoman Rumeli (*Rum ili*), the "Land of Rum," which grew out of the escalating conquests in the Balkans.³¹ In the late fifteenth century, at the request of Mehmed the Conqueror's young son, Cem Sultan, a certain Abu l-Khayr Rumi visited different *tekkes*, *türbes*, and *maqams* (pilgrimage stations) associated with Sari Saltuq in Rumeli and collected the oral traditions that circulated among the dervishes and holy warriors (*ghazis*).³² One of the most famous stories relates to the time when the saint felt that death was near. Echoing al-Sarraj's account, the stories relate that the saint instructed his warrior-dervishes to deliver, upon his death, a coffin to each king or prince who arrived to demand his body. In the *Vilayet-name* of Hajji Bektash and Evliya's *Seyahatname* ("Book of Travels"), seven kings take away seven (meaning "many") coffins.³³ These would yield an equal number

29 Karamustafa, *God's unruly friends* 84.

30 Cf. *Ibid.* 84

31 *Vilayet-name-i Hajji Bektash* 350–53. Köprülü, *Anadolu Selçukluları* 44–45; Birge, *The Bektashi order* 51. For a brief discussion of Rumeli, see the recently published, Peacock, de Nicola, and Yildiz, *Introduction* 1–20, esp. 2–3.

32 See Smith, *Some türbes/maqâms* 216–18; Karamustafa, *Early Sufism* 191 and n. 32.

33 After the saint's death, kings from outside the Ottoman empire (of Moscow, Danzig in Poland, Pızoņiçe (?) in Czechia, Yivance in Sweden) and from inside the empire (of Boğdan (in Bosav in Moldavia, probably present-day Buzău in Romania), Dobruja and Edirne (in Baturiya) each requested a coffin. *Seyahatname*, II.266b–267a, III.111a; cf. *Vilayet-name-i Hajji Bektash* (the full title is *Menaqib-i Hajji Bektash-i Veli*, "Legends of Saint Hacı Bektaş") 366. Anetshofer, *Legends*, 298.

of tombs for pilgrimage and, according to Evliya,³⁴ ultimately effect the miraculous conversion to Islam of these regions. In the *Saltuq-name*, the number of coffins grows to twelve, and they are then respectively whisked away to twelve places.³⁵

The compilation of the *Saltuq-name* and other legends coalescing around Sari Saltuq was designed to grant legitimacy to the Ottoman military conquests in the Balkans. The stories about Sari Saltuq, which paint him as ideal type of warrior saint, share characteristics with the heroic adventures of the *ghazis* in oral story cycles of the Arab and Turkic worlds. These are based on the expeditions of the Prophet Muhammad's companions and on the heroic exploits of those later Arab and Iranian heroes that were frequently elaborated and recounted and thus left a deep impression on the collective memory. Prototypes for this genre are superhuman characters, such as Abu Muslim al-Khurasani, the eighth-century leader of the 'Abbasid revolutionary movement against the Umayyad caliphate, Sayyid Battal, the legendary ninth-century Arab fighter against Byzantium, and Melik Danishmend, the pre-Ottoman warrior who fought against the first Crusaders.

3 *Kafirkubat, Wooden Weapons, and Contact Relics*

Like Sayyid Battal, Sari Saltuq was woven into the Bektashi tradition and, as mentioned earlier, advanced the spread of Bektashi beliefs in the Balkan regions, reaching as far as Albania and Corfu. Both the *Saltuq-name* and the *Vilayet-name* of Hajji Bektash, the patron of the Bektashi order of dervishes, claim that Sari Saltuq was a disciple of Bektash. Hajji Bektash is reported to have handed him a wooden sword, a bow with seven arrows, a prayer rug, and a retinue of two dervishes before sending him, via Sinope, to Islamize Georgia, from where he proceeded to Rumeli. The emblems with which the saint was invested were highly symbolic. The fact that he was girded with a wooden sword and received a bow with the indefinite, round number of seven, meaning many arrows, signals that the office with which he was invested was that of a warrior. The symbolic meanings, however, run deeper. According to the *Vilayet-name* of Hajim Sultan (a *khalifa*, "successor," of Bektash), the wooden

34 *Seyahatname*, Istanbul 1896–1935, ii, 133/Bağdat ms. 304, fol. 266aff; cited after Leiser, Sari Saltuq Dede, in *Er*².

35 Tuna Baba (Babadag), Yılan Baba (Kiligra), Edirne, Eski Baba (Babaeski) in eastern Thrace, the Qipchaq steppe, Wallachia, Moldavia, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Czechia, Andalusia. *Saltuq-name* III.297–302; III.333. Ocak 2002, 62–3; Anetshofer, *Das Şaltuqnâme* 50; Anetshofer, *Legends* 298.

sword with which Bektash himself was invested was given by no less a personage than Ahmad Yasavi (d. 562/1166–7),³⁶ the founder of the eponymous Yasawiyya order. Interestingly, this order was associated with a Shi'i sect, the Mubayyidiyya (“those dressed in white”), that unified the supporters of Abu Muslim in Khurasan in eastern Iran.³⁷ The prayer rug marked the saint's spiritual mission and, as will be seen in what follows, served as a means of transport. According to a story recorded some two centuries later by Evliya, it was Ahmad Yasavi himself who bestowed the wooden sword upon Sari Saltuq and sent him to Rumeli.³⁸

In the early Islamic period, wooden arms (such as clubs, sticks, and swords) were identified as the weapons of those who normally went unarmed, the lowest class, and slaves.³⁹ Abu Muslim, too, was probably a slave of Iranian origin. At the outbreak of his uprising against the Umayyad caliphs in Khurasan (in 749), his followers came on foot and on donkeys and horses from various parts of eastern Iran to the camp in Merv, then the most important city of Khurasan. They were dressed in black and wielded clubs, which they called *kafirkubat*, a half-Arabic, half-Persian word meaning “infidel-bashers.”⁴⁰ Patricia Crone has shown that in an Umayyad and 'Abbasid context, wooden arms were predominantly employed by non-Arab, and specifically Iranian, revolutionaries.⁴¹ They are clearly deployed for symbolic purposes and are one of the signs that ultimately links the hagiography of Sari Saltuq with the Khurasani revolutionary Abu Muslim. The sixteenth-century dervish who used the pen-name Vahidi⁴² describes the *abdals* (wandering saints who do not stay in one place or belong to an established Sufi order (*tariqa*) and whose *türbes* do not leave a trace)⁴³ as carrying on one shoulder the hatchet of Abu Muslim⁴⁴—to demonstrate that they were hostile to the enemies of Prophet Muhammad's son-in-law and

36 *Vilayet-name-i Hajim Sultan*, trans. Tschudi 17. Hajji Bektash also invests Hajim Sultan, who lived around the beginning of the fourteenth century, with his wooden sword. *Vilayet-name-i Hajim Sultan*, trans. Tschudi 31–34.

37 Zarcone, Yasawiyya, in *ET*².

38 *Seyahatname*, 1.212b; Anetshofer, Legends of San Saltik 296.

39 Cf. the discussion of the Persian-speaking Khashabiyya (“wood people”) who came mainly from former Sasanian territories and the significance of the wooden weapons in Crone, The significance 174–87, esp. 174, 179.

40 Chouémi, *Kafirkub*, in *ET*². Crone, The significance 180. Cf. Wellhausen, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien* 79–80.

41 Crone, The significance 183.

42 Cf. Vahidi, ed. Karamustafa 7.

43 Cf. İnalçık, Dervish 21; Chabbi, Abdal, in *EIr*; Beldiceanu, Abdalan-ı Rum, historical, in *ET*³.

44 On the symbolism of Abu Muslim's axe in the Turko-Iranian world, see Mélikoff, *Abū Muslim* esp. 68, 98–9.

cousin, 'Ali b. Abi Talib's—and, on the other, *şüca'i* (serpent-like or heroic) clubs in honour of the fourteenth-century Abdal master Sultan Şüca' al-Din.⁴⁵ Abu Muslim's axe, the counterpart of 'Ali's mythical double-bladed sword (the Dhu'l-faqar; literally, furnished with grooves, hence echoing the vertebrae of a spine), became a symbol of the Bektashi order.

The legendary wooden sword, associated with a variety of Muslim saints and with Sari Saltuq in particular, is seen as evidence of being a "friend of God," who, according to the great Iranian Sufi mystic and poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 672/1273), can be identified by his ability to turn the wooden weapon into the Dhu'l-faqar;⁴⁶ a topos which seems to have been current in the thirteenth century.⁴⁷ Concomitantly, the wooden sword also links Sari Saltuq to the insignnia of a *khatib*, who usually conducts the Friday prayer (*salat*) and preaches as *imam*. These comprise the "two things of wood": the pulpit (*minbar*) and the wooden sword. The *khatib* wields the latter in his hand during the sermon, and it can also serve as a staff upon which to lean.⁴⁸ The symbolism of the wooden weapon is further elucidated in a popular narrative according to which, during the siege of Constantinople, an angel sent a wooden sword to Constantine XI Palaeologus (r. 1404–1453), the last reigning Byzantine Emperor, to help him vanquish the Turks. However, on account of the alleged power of his magnificent steel sword, the emperor spurned the offer, leading the angel to present the wooden sword to Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, who gladly accepted it and was thus able to conquer the city.⁴⁹

Sari Saltuq is also invested with a wooden sword in his eponymous hagiography. Made of date palm wood, it is said to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad. It was brought to Sari Saltuq by none other than Khidr,⁵⁰ the eternal, wayfaring saint who was granted immortality in order to instruct people about the true God and who is the patron of the mystics who follow the path of spiritual immortality. It is related that "he handed him a sword. It was made from wood, but its nature was like iron. He said: 'This sword belonged to the Prophet; he has given it to you as your lot!'"⁵¹

45 Imber, *The Wandering Dervishes* 38.

46 *Divan* 2506:5.

47 Cf. *Vilayet-name-i Hajim Sultan*, trans. Tschudi 32. One of the oldest surviving *vilayet-names* is that dedicated to Hajim Sultan, although the work was not committed to writing until about 1460 and is only preserved in a version dating to the early sixteenth century.

48 Pedersen, *Khatib*, in *ET*²; Goldziher, *Der Chatib* 97–102.

49 Carnoy and Nicolaïdès, *Folklore de Constantinople* 74–5.

50 Cf. Wensinck, al-Khadir (al-Khidr) in *ET*².

51 *Saltuq-name* II.29; for the wooden sword see also *Saltuq-name* I.170–1; II.32; III.177.

Wooden weapons were often displayed at sacred sites associated with Sari Saltuq. The German Protestant theologian Stephan Gerlach, a member of the Austrian diplomatic mission of David Ungnad, describes, in his travelogue, his visit in 1578 to a church dedicated to St. Nicolas in the village of Eski Baba (present-day Babaeski), located between Edirne and Lüleburgaz, in which Sari Saltuq was said to have been buried. Hanging on the walls next to his cenotaph were the contact relics that embodied the saintly presence, a wooden sword, and two wooden clubs.⁵² Implicitly associated with the revolutionary aura of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani and transmitted from Ahmad Yasavi to his *khalifas*, Hajji Bektash and Sari Saltuq, these indicate a sanctified status. As mentioned above, the wooden sword is also linked with the Dhu'l-faqar that Rumi portrays as a symbol of spiritual maturity and which he likens to the staff of Moses. This staff, like the sword, is a “water-giver,”⁵³ recalling one of the most prominent feats of Sari Saltuq described in al-Sarraj’s *Tuffah al-arwah*, namely, the discovery of water sources.⁵⁴

4 Markers, Traces, and “Corpothetics”

With his wooden sword, Sari Saltuq is said to have performed countless miraculous feats, which reflected his charisma and earned him the status of one of the itinerant Abdals. As such, the saint is one of the “hidden wayfarers” (*rijal al-ghayb*), who participates by means of his powerful influence in the preservation of the order of the universe.⁵⁵ This ability is reflected in the *Vilayet-name*, which describes Sari Saltuq as traveling on his prayer rug together with the two dervishes, Ulu Abdal and Kiçi Abdal, and landing at Kiligra (present-day Kaliakra), then the capital of the Dobruja, located on a cape which extends into the Black Sea.⁵⁶ The sanctuary itself, a natural cave, was situated at the site of the ruins of the ancient Greek church of St. Nicolas, which, at least until the 1920s, functioned as a pilgrimage site for both Muslims and Christians,⁵⁷

52 Gerlachs, *Stephen Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch* 511.

53 *Divan* 3496:5; 871:1.

54 Kiel, Sari Saltuk 264.

55 Cf. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans* 154.

56 *Vilayet-name-i Hajji Bektash* 35–357. Sari Saltuq’s travelling the Danube on top of his prayer rug, or flying in the air, is also a common motif in the *Saltuq-name*. “From time to time, he would spread his prayer rug on the River Danube, get on it, and travel about, without sinking” (*Saltuq-name* 11.29; see also 11.210–11). Anetshofer, *Legends of Sari Saltik* 297.

57 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* ii, 431. Sari Saltuq’s *maqam* at Eski Baba likewise lies in a well-known, pre-Islamic sanctuary that is frequented for healing and is said to be the ancient Greek church of St. Nicolas, visited by both Muslims and Christians; *idem* 431.

although nothing remains of it today. Here the saint undertook a deed of cosmic importance. According to Evliya, who stayed there for eight months in 1641–2, Sari Saltuq fought with a seven-headed dragon, Khidr arriving just in time to remind the saint of his wooden sword. With its help, he overcame the dragon by cutting off its seven heads,⁵⁸ leading to the rescue of two princesses and the conversion of the king of Dobruja to Islam. After his victory, the saint demonstrated his control over the natural world by making water flow from a spring at the spot where he had slayed the dragon. This miraculous gift of God exemplified his spiritual power and sanctified the site. In his description of the Kiligra *tekke*, Evliya also takes note of the saint's tangible remnants, notably his wooden weapons, saying that the saint's wooden sword and sling, tambourine and drum, and banner and standard were kept within the structure.⁵⁹

Another feat accomplished by the saint was the transformation and development of the cave into a large and active gathering place for dervishes,⁶⁰ who must have settled there when the fortification was built in 1444.⁶¹ Kiligra cave was not only the setting for one part of Sari Saltuq's hagiographical *vita*, but also served as his burial place.⁶² It is significant that his hand and foot sank into the limestone rock and left their impression at the place where he overcame the dragon. Both the hand and the foot marks serve as further contact relics, powerful material intermediaries conveying a sense of his continued physical presence, figuratively asserting control and agency.⁶³ Formally putting one's foot down in a place is a symbolic affirmation of sovereignty and dominance. At the same time, the action symbolizes cosmic conquest and order. Having vanquished the dragon, the saint secured the water supply, a feat with which he was already intimately connected in al-Sarraj's *Tuffah al-arwah*.⁶⁴ With this action, he exerted his control over the elements, thus reestablishing order.

58 Cf. Birge, *The Bektashi Order* 119, n. 2.

59 *Seyahatname*, trans. Hammer-Purgstall, *Narrative of travels* ii, 72.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Kiel, *Sari Saltuk* 282.

62 Cf. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* i 223.

63 *Seyahatname* 1.212b; 11.266a–266b; 111.109b; 111.110b–111a. While the name Kiligra (Kaliakra) is not mentioned in the *Saltuq-name*, it is most probably identical with a place called Yılan Baba/Yılan Tekyesi ("Father Snake"/"Snake Tekke" in allusion to the victory over a (snake-)dragon) in the *Saltuq-name* (11.21–22; 353–57). Cf. *Vilayet-name-i Hajji Bektash* 357–62. Other serpent- or dragon-slaying stories in the *Saltuq-name* take place on Mount Qaf (1.126), in Ethiopia (1.309–11), in India (1.365–6), and on Mount Nirkab in Rumeli (11.185–6). See Ocak, *Sari Saltuk* 46–60; Anetshofer, *Legends of Sari Saltuk* 297 and ns. 459 and 460.

64 Kiel, *Sari Saltuk* 264.

The veneration of sacred traces (*athar*) of the prophets and other holy persons on rocks, although significantly predating Islam, is extensive across Islamic lands. Among the miracles popularly attributed to the Prophet Muhammad was the claim that when he trod on a rock, his foot would sink into the stone and leave its impression there.⁶⁵ The numerous impressions of one or both of the feet of Muhammad in different parts of the Muslim world are still venerated today.⁶⁶ The multivalent potential of these marks and the inherent fluidity and ambiguity of their identity are reflected in the footprint on the rock over which the Dome of the Rock was built in Jerusalem. The Crusaders attributed it to Jesus Christ,⁶⁷ and in Jewish times, it probably served as the imprint of Abraham.⁶⁸ We find other prototypes in the footprints of Abraham (*maqam Ibrahim*) at Mecca⁶⁹ and in Anatolia,⁷⁰ of Adam in Ceylon,⁷¹ of 'Ali at the hill-top shrine of Mawla 'Ali near Hyderabad in the Deccan,⁷² and of the Prophet's mule at the Masjid al-Baghla in Medina.⁷³

These examples provide potent “frames of reference” for Sari Saltuq's traces in the Balkan regions, drawing on notions from the “commemorative consciousness” with which audiences in these regions are familiar. A form of popular devotional, prophylactic, and therapeutic tradition is the veneration of such tracing, which—as a physical object—can stir a strong “affective” response in the body of the beholder. At the same time, it should be remembered

65 Another miracle is that the Prophet's sandals left no imprint on the sand, see Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, commentary on *al-Qasida al-Hamziyya*, 1. 176 (Ind. Off. Ms., Loth, no. 826, fol. 94).

66 On which, see Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* i, 185–87, ii, 609; Hasan, The footprint 335–43; Gruber, The Prophet 297–307. On Muhammad's footprint in the Indian subcontinent, see Hasan, Kadam rasul, in *Banglapedia*, and Welch, The shrine 166–78.

67 See the description of the German pilgrim John of Würzburg (c. 1165) of the *Templum Domini*, the Islamic Dome of the Rock; John von Würzburg, *Descriptio* 126.

68 The pre-Crusader account of Nasir-i Khusraw's visit to the Rock in Jerusalem in 1047 states that the footprint was then thought to be that of Abraham. Le Strange, *Palestine* 128.

69 According to a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (*hadith*), during Abraham's visit to Isma'il in Mecca, Isma'il's wife washed Abraham's feet, whereupon he left a footprint on the stone that had served as a footstool. Cf. Brown, *The Dervishes* 30, 40; Wheeler, *Mecca* 81.

70 For Abraham's footprint in Anatolia, see, for instance, van Berchem and Herzfeld, *Matériaux* 178–9.

71 The legend of Adam's footprint is first mentioned in the geographical literature of the Islamic medieval period, the anonymous *Akhbar al-Sin wa-l-Hind* 5 and Mas'udi, *Kitab muruj al-dhahab* 60. Adam's seventy-cubit wide footprint on top of a mountain called “Rahun” (a name of Sanskrit origin) in Ceylon or Sarandib (present-day Sri Lanka) is regarded as the still visible spot at which Adam descended after his expulsion from Paradise.

72 Jaffri, Muharrem 225.

73 al-Samhudi, *Geschichte* 136–8.

that the veneration of the feet of prophets, saints, and rulers has been commonplace throughout history, especially in the medieval world, where it was a routine ritual gesture. The veneration of feet is a clear declaration of hierarchy, affirming the absolute superiority of the one venerated, as well as signaling total submission and devotion by the venerator, providing an opportunity for the physical expression of humility. By touching the feet of protectors, the great, and the powerful, one signals one's own submission and surrender.

In the account of his journey across Georgia, the nineteenth-century writer and scholar William Gifford Palgrave reports having seen a "footprint" at a certain place on a coastal cliff in Georgia. The imprint was venerated by adherents of various religious affiliations, who attached different identities and significance to the same image. Palgrave describes it as a "huge granite slab, deep imbedded in the sand, the impress, clearly defined, of a naked human foot, long and delicate like that of a woman, but deeply indented, and of a darker colour than the rest of the stone." The varied identities of the one who left this timeless trace ranged from the legendary Georgian queen Tamar (1166–1213), to a Christian priest fleeing from persecution, to a Muslim saint who converted the region to Islam.⁷⁴ It is tempting to see in the Muslim saint an avatar of Sari Saltuq, who, after all, had been sent to Georgia by Hajji Bektash to Islamize the local population and whose visits were often represented by the traces of his footprints. The last word on the identity of the maker of the imprint, however, belonged to the individual or collective agents who responded to this type of iconographic open-endedness and polyvalency, imaginatively determining its creator and claiming it for their own purposes. The fact that all locals recognized the sanctity of the holy place and shared the belief in the efficacy of the sacred image on the ground exemplified one aspect of the reality of the coexistence of different religious communities within the same territory and an expression of the ties between individuals and their local community. Such "relics" thus served as "receptacles for individual and collective memory" in Christian as well as in Islamic contexts.⁷⁵

The earliest reference to the *tekke* in the town of Blagaj near Mostar in southern Bosnia-Herzegovina is by Evliya, who journeyed through the city in 1664. In his travelogue, he speaks highly of the *tekke*, which then belonged to the Khalwati order, and of the amicable and scholarly discussions he had with the dervishes there. However, he does not mention a *türbe* or the saint.⁷⁶

74 Palgrave, *Ulysses* 74.

75 Meri, *Relics* 99.

76 There is no written record of who was buried there, but it is popularly said that it is the last resting place of Ačik paša (Muhammed Hindija, "the Indian"), *shaykh* of the *tekke*

According to local legend, a *türbe* was erected near the spot where Sari Saltuq mysteriously disappeared by the source of the Buna, leaving behind his mace and the sword with which he conquered the dragon. The *türbe* is thus closely tied to the sacred abode whence the saintly man departed alive, vanishing into the bowels of the earth.

In 1891, the Austro-Hungarian vice consul in Craiova, Carl Peez, confirmed having seen two graves marked by the wooden cenotaphs (*sanduka*) of the “shaykh” and his servant as well as his mace and sword hanging on the wall.⁷⁷ The link to the world beyond the grave is thus in the locality itself, which is sacralized through association with the saint and symbolized by his tomb and weapons. Local tradition also places importance on the continuing presence of the living saint. Peez noted that “a jug of water is always placed there for him in the evening. In the morning, it is said, the floor is wet and there is less water in the jug.”⁷⁸ It is believed that Sari Saltuq, like other saints, gets up from his tomb at night to perform his ritual ablutions. According to other accounts that I have heard in dervish circles, towels and a jug of water are left near the two tombs. The next day, the jug is found to be empty and the towels wet.⁷⁹ Pilgrims verify the continuous saintly presence by looking for traces of water used and splashed about. It is this characteristic and the sacrality of the locality that attract them to come to visit the *türbe* (fig. 4.3).

Certainly the most sacred place of worship in the small mountain town of Kruja in the northern part of Albania is the *tekke* and cave sanctuary of Sari Saltuq (Teqeja e Sari Salltëkut), which is noted for its curative capacities.⁸⁰ It had previously been the site of the Christian church of St. Alexander (Shën Lleshit)⁸¹ or of St. Spyridon (Shën Shpirgjon),⁸² which had in turn, been built on an earlier pre-Christian religious site. According to Hasan Kaleshi, the Krujan cult of Sari Saltuq supplanted an ancient place of worship dedicated to some mountain or nature god.⁸³ Once again, the site is linked to a story about Sari Saltuq’s feats. Recorded at the end of the nineteenth century by Alexandre Degrand, the last French consul in Shkodra, the Krujan legend follows the

for many years since 1848. He represented himself as Indian, but in fact is thought to have been sent from Istanbul to spy on Ali-paša Rizvanbegović and other feudal lords in Herzegovina. See Mujezinović, *Islamska epigrafika* iii, 335–43.

77 Peez, *Mostar* 184–6.

78 Ibid. 184–6.

79 Cf. Kriss and Kriss-Heinrich, *Volks Glaube* 337.

80 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* ii, 550.

81 Tirtja, *Survivances* 49–69.

82 Kaleshi, *Albanische Legenden* 821, n. 20.

83 Kiel, *The türbe* 212.



FIGURE 4.3 Inside the *türbe* of Sari Saltuq, Blagaj Tekke, Blagaj near Mostar, present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina

same predictable and repetitive plot, as does that of Kiligra.⁸⁴ A dragon guarded the ruins of the Christian church, and the saint overcame the monster, cutting off its seven heads and tongues by means of his wooden sword, liberating a princess and gaining her hand in marriage before spending several years in the *tekke*. However, when he was forewarned of an insurrection against him, the saint disappeared.⁸⁵ His disappearance spotlights, once again, not only his restlessness and evanescence but, as we will see in what follows, his continual presence, his overwhelming power, and his *baraka*.

Near the top of Mount Sari Saltuq (Albanian Mali i Sari Salltëkut), hidden behind rocks, an architectural complex associated with the saint harbors a deep cave that houses his *türbe* (Albanian *tyrbe*) (fig. 4.4). At the end of the main cave sanctuary is the sacred spring from which the English archaeologist Frederik Hasluck recorded an inscription in 1776–7.⁸⁶ During his visit to the site in 1928, the German historian Franz Babinger noted another inscription, dated 1692–3, in the cave sanctuary.⁸⁷ More recently, the Dutch historian

84 Degrand, *Souvenirs* 236–43.

85 Ibid. 240.

86 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* ii, 549–50.

87 Babinger, Ewlija Tschelebi's 61, n. 2.



FIGURE 4.4 Cave of Sari Saltuq on Mount Sari Saltuq (Mali i Sari Salltëkut), Kruja, northern Albania

Machiel Kiel discovered an Ottoman tax register from 1567–8 which noted that the rough mountain road that leads up to the tomb of Sari Saltuq, named the "Road of Sari Saltuq," is in need of repair.⁸⁸ This provides, for now, the earliest documented link between Sari Saltuq and Kruja. Then as now, his tomb was a major pilgrimage site in Albania, a visit to which is still said to be equivalent to a pilgrimage to Mecca.⁸⁹ Degrand stated that the inhabitants of Kruja, who were (and still are) almost all Bektashis, must make the pilgrimage to the cave at least once a year, where they usually spend the night. At that time, Wednesday was the day reserved for women to visit the holy place, but today women may visit the cave on any day.⁹⁰ Then as now, many pilgrims come to the cave, where they light candles, offer their prayers, and leave monetary gifts behind to induce the saint to provide assistance and intercession, or to show gratitude for a fulfilled request. Sometimes they leave personal items, such as prayer beads, pieces of clothing, towels, blankets, or photographs of themselves or other people that are supposed to acquire healing powers and other blessings through their association with the place. They then pay their respects to the saint's *maqam*, reverently touching and kissing it. The spring water at the bottom of the holy cave, which pilgrims drink and in which they wash their faces, is also regarded as having curative properties. Before leaving the sacred site, pilgrims collect the water in bottles as well as bits of rock from the steep rock formations flanking the *maqam*, which thence—charged with mnemonic meaning and affective potential—serve as movable relics of place that spread sacrality into their homes (fig. 4.5).⁹¹

When the saint disappeared, he is said to have crossed in four great strides to the Greek island of Corfu across the channel. Each stride is marked by a footprint and a *tekke*: one just outside of Kruja, the second close to Shijak, the third in Durrës (Dyrrachium) on the Adriatic coast, and the fourth on Corfu, the place where, it is said, the saint died.⁹² One of the sacred footprints (Albanian Gjurma e-shenjtë), which Sari Saltuq left behind during his miraculous crossing to Corfu, is preserved today in a small forest between Kruja and Fushkruja. A *maqam* was erected at the sacred site to enshrine the trace (fig. 4.6). In religious terms, the material object of veneration, the stone bearing the impression of the right foot of the saint, has become a relic because it bears the

88 *Tahrir* of the Sanjak Ohrid, see Kiel, A Note 268.

89 Tschudi, Einleitung (Introduction), *Vilayet-name-i Hajim Sultan* ii. Norris, *Popular Sufism* 62. For a detailed description of the site, see Clayer, "Les hauts lieux 169–74.

90 Degrand, *Souvenirs* 243.

91 On the reverence of similar natural objects, see the recent study of Bartal et al., *Natural materials*.

92 *Ibid.* 240.



FIGURE 4.5 Pilgrims collecting pebbles as relics, Cave of Sari Saltuq on Mount Sari Saltuq, Kruja, northern Albania



FIGURE 4.6 Maqam with the footprint of Sari Saltuq in the small forest between Fushkruja and Kruja, northern Albania

imprint of the saint's *baraka* and, thus, contains an indisputable beneficent power. It must, therefore, be protected, carefully encased and contained in a special receptacle that is visible through a glass cover (fig. 4.7). In his travel account of 1928, Franz Babinger recorded his visit to the sacred footprint, housed in a small “chapel.”⁹³ Like most Bektashi structures, the site was destroyed during the Hoxhaist period, but a simple structure to shelter the imprint relic was reconstructed by Asllan Hasan Sula in August 1992. Its construction plaque reads, “We ask from the Master kindness and light for us and you” (*kerkojme prej zoti miresi e drite per ne e ju*).

Notably, the saint's footprint is much larger than a normal human foot. Its size most likely reflects a belief in the saint's giant stature. This idea is corroborated in the chronicles of an Italian envoy for the Habsburg court, Marco Antonio Pigafetta, who described extraordinarily large *sanduka* in the church of St. Nicolas in the above-mentioned village of Eski Baba. When he visited the church in 1567, he was told that it held the remains of a giant Turkish warrior,

93 Babinger, *Bei den Derwischen* 165.



FIGURE 4.7 Footprint of Sari Saltuq in the small forest between Fushkruja and Kruja, northern Albania

identified by Stephan Gerlach with Sari Saltuq when he visited the sanctuary eleven years later.⁹⁴

The relic serves as a materialization of the immaterial, a kind of corporeal extension, even an actual embodiment, of the saint's spiritual power. The "presence in absence" points to its liminal status as a commodity of communication and control between human beings and other realms. As a result, it is frequently regarded as proof of the living presence of the saint, his immortality, and his revivifying and life-giving powers. Pilgrims reverently visit the site to pay their respects to the relic and to offer petitionary prayers (*du'a*) in front of it. In

94 Gerlachs, *Stephen Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch* 511.

doing so, they interact spiritually and physically with the trace that embodies the saint. Their physical "gestures of homage" assume a form of "corporetics" (a neologism coined by Christopher Pinney in a South Asian context),⁹⁵ which is to say that they establish intimacy with the saintly vestige. These bodily, religious enactments of reverence arouse emotional and physical responses in the ritual performance, through which the pilgrims seek to activate the latent, sacred powers transmitted by the vestige in order to internalize and appropriate some of Sari Saltuq's extraordinarily beneficial, saintly *baraka*.

The material manifestation is conceived of as being empowered through the physical contact with the saint's body, reflecting an ontological blurring of time and space. Enacting the practice of *tabarruk* (transmission of *baraka*), pilgrims strive to absorb the blessing by kneeling down, reverently bending over the footprint, touching the case containing the relic with their foreheads and rubbing their cheeks on it, then kissing it. The mystical processes engendered by the sensory contact between the bodies of the pilgrims and the relic symbolize the tangible connection between them and the saint. Importantly, the gesture signals reciprocal obligation. The saint who has been surrendered to, and who has accepted this surrender, is obliged to provide guidance, healing, and protection. Just as at the Krujan cave sanctuary, pilgrims light candles and leave personal items in order to partake in the formidable charge that emanates from the sanctified footprint. The footprint serves as a material channel and intermediary that echoes the saint's intercessory role as a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad,⁹⁶ who is, himself, the chief intercessor. The relic's efficacy and protective potential even extend beyond the boundaries of the building, meaning that its *baraka* can be absorbed outside the *maqam*. During my field research in 2012 and again in 2018 and 2019, I observed how drivers that passed the street sloping around the *maqam* habitually stopped their cars to offer *du'a'*, appeals for the saint's miraculous help, protection and intervention. As citizens of Kruja confirmed to me, this remains a contemporary practice.

The interior of the sacred site is sparsely decorated. A wall carpet depicting the bust of 'Ali with his Dhu'l-faqar hangs above a niche that contains some candles, plastic flowers, and a small golden frame that serve to sacralize and domesticate the space. The frame holds the only non-modern visual depiction of Sari Saltuq known to me (fig. 4.8). The black and white print pre-dates the Communist period, making it about seventy years old. It is probably on account of the saint's trickster-like elusiveness that there are no historical visual

95 Denoting a process that intended to evoke the domain of sensuous and corporeal aesthetics, see Pinney, *Photos* 194.

96 He is hailed both as a *seyyid* (descendent of Muhammad through his grandson Husayn) and a *sherif* (descendent of Muhammad through his grandson Hasan).



FIGURE 4.8
Print of Sari Saltuq, *maqam* with the
footprint of Sari Saltuq in the small
forest between Fushkruja and Kruja,
northern Albania

depictions. In spite of his tremendous popularity, he remains both marginal and liminal: marginal within the more normative or “orthodox” Islamic religious tradition and liminal in the sense that he is an uncanny thaumaturge of popular tradition who was never fully “domesticated.”

5 Slippers, Walking, and Free Translation

In the nineteenth century, many Albanians made the pilgrimage to the church of St. Spyridon in Corfu to worship the patron saint of the island as Sari Saltuq.⁹⁷ The identification of St. Spyridon of Corfu with Sari Saltuq probably solidified, in part at least, due to the policies of ‘Ali Pasha of Tepelena, the ambitious and quasi-independent governor of Yannina, who ruled from 1788 to 1822, during which time he sought to acquire the Ionian Islands.⁹⁸ Both the miraculous preservation and incorruptibility of Spyridon’s body, symbolizing his immortality, and the fact that it contained a sprig of basil, the “royal plant,” were taken as signs of his sanctity and assured the regular veneration of his physical remains (*reliquiae*). It is particularly significant that his cult involves the veneration of his feet. As a “walking saint,” he receives shoes as gifts

97 Elsie, *Historical dictionary* 397.

98 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* ii, 439. Cf. Degrand, *Souvenirs* 236–43.



FIGURE 4.9 St. Spyridon, Icon, 1500 to 1600, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, Greece

because he is said to wear out the slippers (otherwise preserved inside his reliquary) while he is out performing miracles. Because they wear down over time, like any pair of shoes, they must be replaced about once every year. One of the most popular miracle-working saints today, his relics, which have stayed on Corfu for over five hundred years, are believed to have a potent apotropaic and salvific function, protecting the island from conquest and plague.⁹⁹

If we take a closer look at the small poster of Sari Saltuq preserved at the *maqam* that shelters the impression of his foot in the forest between Kruja and Fushkruja, we see that it is, in fact, a print that depicts St. Spyridon (fig. 4.9).

99 Bakalova and Lazarova, *The relics* 434–64.

The latter is clearly recognisable through the visual vocabulary encoded in attributes such as his shepherd's hat. Obvious Christian markers, such as crosses, have been omitted, redefining the print's potential agency. We witness a representational shift in the context of devotional and therapeutic practice, which moves beyond mimetic representation to become a syncretic reality with affective powers for its intended audience. While not completely coinciding with Christian imagery, the force of this agency derives from the resemblance to, imitation of, and identification with the particular quality of the "other".¹⁰⁰ As a worker of miracles and a trickster, Sari Saltuq is eminently suited for this kind of free translation. The "adapted" print is ritually equal to the prototype and retains not only the latter's potency, but is additionally charged with Sari Saltuq's *baraka*.

6 Conclusion

Sari Saltuq's identification with the Greek St. Spyridon underlines, once again, the idea that he has the spiritual capacity to "be on the move" and transform his body to animate multiple embodiments and multiple *lieux de mémoire* simultaneously. The footprint cult is connected to this theme. The hollowed mark left by a foot or hand, a graphic marker of an absence, serves as a harbinger of spiritual power that links absence and presence. These signs of charisma were particularly useful in the context of the rapid military-political expansion of Islamic communities in the Balkan region after the Ottoman conquest in the fifteenth century. Such marks on solid ground, as well as other more ephemeral traces, such as contact relics or tombs, facilitated the creation of new centres of sacrality, thereby serving to extend and establish Islam in regions where it was previously unknown or to which it was only beginning to spread. We have seen that such traces can still be a powerful inspirational and aspirational model for contemporary actors, with the relics making possible the constitution of new and potent local sites of power.

More than a half century ago, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs noted the centrality of memorials, vestiges, and other topographical features in the formation of modern collective memory.¹⁰¹ Situating Sari Saltuq's activities within the larger historical context of performed representations since the advent of Islam in Rumeli, and following Halbwachs, we can view the

100 For a discussion of "cultural cross-dressing" and the transformation of body, self, and identity through changes in clothing, see Flood, *Objects of translation* 61–87 (chapter two).

101 Halbwachs, *La topographie*.

embodiments of the saint in Balkan oral and visual-material culture as part of the emergent evolution of a collective memory landscape. This landscape was altered in the twentieth century when Balkan memories were manipulated and partly lost during decades of communist/socialist regimes and wars.¹⁰² Yet, as Ron Eyerman has argued, the past becomes present through "symbolic interactions, through narrative and discourse, with memory being a product of both."¹⁰³

Concerning the contemporary religious context, this article has shown that via mimesis and representation, Sari Saltuq's material traces continue to be considered "live" by devotees, possessing affective agency. And, despite their often-recalcitrant nature, they continue, as we have seen, to be instrumentalized.¹⁰⁴ In a constantly changing world, such traces could serve as symbols of stability or permanence and as a profound source of symbolic and religious meaning. These embodiments of a commemorative religious consciousness¹⁰⁵ become an innovative recombination of previously existing elements, a series of fluid and, at times, even internally inconsistent, emergent discursive framing devices, rather than a definitive engagement with historical events. Nonetheless, in the past seven hundred years in the Balkan regions, sacred caves, ruins, former Christian churches, mountain retreats, and "markers" associated with the unruly, even anarchic saint, often constructed outside settlements in a no-man's-land next to water sources, have been used in contested framing strategies to build an enduring religious tradition that has even facilitated a powerful memory landscape.

The past tends to be embodied in material remains. The traces of the saint mediate his presence and serve as a figuration of the memory of what had once been gesturally performed by his body. Through this figuration, the performance is formalized and iconically recalled. Its meaning is recounted, understood, interpreted, and transmitted mainly through language, dialogue, and performance.¹⁰⁶ His gestures, their effects, and his charisma and "otherness" are transmissible via an iconization, becoming available for travel across time and space. In the twenty-first century, the extraordinary itinerant saint Sari Saltuq endures as a supra-regional, religious mnemotopos, himself a "place" embodied with memory.

102 Cf. Supple, *Memory*.

103 Eyerman, *The past* 162.

104 For, as David Morgan has observed, religious materiality may be instrumentalized but can be resistant to control: Morgan, *Materiality, social analysis, and the study of religion* 73.

105 See Nora, *Realms* 6.

106 Cf. Bal, *Introduction*.

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