Hacı Bektaş Veli Tomb and Museum

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Summary
The Hacıbektaş shrine complex in Nevşehir, Turkey, was the central lodge of the Bektaşi order for centuries until the abolition of religious orders in 1925 and now functions as a museum and major pilgrimage site for Alevis and Bektaşis. Organized around three courtyards, the complex includes tombs, ritual spaces, living quarters, and exhibitions showcasing the religious and cultural heritage of the Bektaşi tradition.

Keywords: Abolition Of Religious Orders, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Museum, Müze, Shrine, Tekke Ve Zaviyelerin Kapatılması, Tomb, Türbe

Architectural Layout and Sacred Symbolism

The main dervish lodge of the Bektaşi order is located in Hacıbektaş, in the Nevsehir province of Turkey. The oldest part of the shrine complex, the Hall of the Forty (*Kırklar Meydanı*) which contains the tomb chamber of Hacı Bektaş Veli, dates back to the late 13th century. New structures were added to the complex in the 15th and 16th centuries.[i] The complex, which houses the *Pir Evi* (Pir House) of Hacı Bektaş Veli, served as the headquarters of the Bektaşi order until the abolition of the religious orders in Turkey with Law

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No. 677, enacted on November 30, 1925.

In 1964, the site was re-opened as a museum under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture and has since become one of the five most visited museums in Turkey. Although it functions as a museum, the shrine of Hacı Bektaş remains one of the most frequently visited sacred sites, particularly for Alevis and Bektaşis.[ii] Visitors come not only for its historical and cultural significance but also to pray at the tombs and seek blessings. Since 2012, the complex has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.[iii]

The complex is surrounded by courtyard walls that define the parameters of the shrine. It is structured around three traditional courtyards. The first courtyard (*Nadar Avlusu*) is accessed through a monumental gate structure (*Çatal Kapı*) and contains the Üçler Fountain (*Üçler Çeşmesi*). Until December 2014, a ticket counter stood near the gate, and the entrance to the museum required a ticket -an unacceptable practice for many people who visit the site for ritual and religious purposes. Today, the complex is freely accessible to the public.

The second courtyard (*Dergâh Avlusu*) is entered through the gate (*Üçler Kapısı*). It features a square-shaped pool, the Lion Fountain (*Arslanlı Çeşme*), and several rooms and living spaces that used to serve mainly as the living quarters for the Bektaşi dervishes. These include the kitchen, warehouses, guesthouse, and the living quarters of the *dedebaba*. The *Meydan Evi*, which was the main ritual space of the lodge, opens into this courtyard. Also located in the second courtyard is the Tekke Mosque, which was added to the complex in the 19th century by Sultan Mahmut II. The presence of a functioning mosque on the museum grounds remains controversial as a marker of the sectarian transition of the site and the suppression of the Bektashi faith during that period.[iv]

The third courtyard (*Hazret Avlusu*) is considered the most sacred area of the shrine complex. It is entered through the

gate (*Altılar Kapısı*) and a narrow gate structure with a relief sculpture of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, commemorating his visit to Hacıbektaş in 1919. The courtyard contains the Pir House (*Pir Evi*) where the mausoleum of Hacı Bektaş Veli is located, along with the tombs of Balım Sultan, Güvenç Abdal, and Resul Bali, the cemetery of dervishes, the *Çilehane* or *Kızılca Halvet* (the seclusion space for dervishes), and the Hall of the Forty (*Kırklar Meydanı*).

The interior spaces of the complex also serve as exhibition areas, displaying ritual objects, such as candleholders, manuscripts, musical instruments used in rituals, restored textiles, silk carpets, examples of *teslim taşı* (symbolic twelve-sided stones), *kamberiye* (belts worn by Bektaşis) and a permanent photograph exhibition documenting the cultural life of Hacıbektaş.[v] Furthermore, the mulberry tree in front of the tomb of Balım Sultan is considered to be holy and visitors would tie pieces of cloth to its branches and make wishes until this practice was eventually prohibited by the museum staff to protect the ancient tree from dying.

After the closing of dervish lodges in 1925, many valuable objects and artifacts of the Hacı Bektaş lodge were transferred and stored at the Ankara Ethnography Museum and the books at the National Library.[vi] Following the restoration of the complex between 1958 and 1964, it was officially reopened as a museum on August 16th, 1964, and the belongings of the lodge were returned and incorporated into the museum's permanent exhibition.[vii]

Conclusion

With its historical and architectural layers, the Hacıbektaş shrine complex stands as a powerful testament to the enduring legacy of the Bektaşi order and its spiritual leader Hacı Bektaş Veli. Despite the secularizing reforms of the early Turkish Republic and its transformation into a state-controlled museum, the site continues to function as a sacred space, attracting thousands of pilgrims and visitors each year. Organized around three traditional courtyards,

the complex houses both ritual and residential spaces, including tombs, fountains, and ceremonial halls, each reflecting key aspects of the Bektaşi spiritual and communal life. The site's inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List underscores its cultural and religious significance. Ongoing pilgrimage practices, the display of ritual objects, and the contested presence of a mosque within the grounds all reveal the multilayered negotiations between secular heritage policies and living religious traditions. The Hacıbektaş complex thus continues to operate as a vibrant site of memory, belief, and identity for Alevi-Bektaşi communities in Turkey and the diaspora.

Endnotes

[i] For the history and architectural transformations of the Hacı Bektaş shrine complex in the 15th and 16th centuries, see Yürekli, 2012.

[ii] The meanings and functions of the site are continually transformed by contestations and negotiations between the state, the visitors, and the museum staff. For the museumification of religious sites in Turkey with a comparative analysis of Hacı Bektaş Museum and Konya Mevlana Museum, see Harmanşah et al. 2014.

[iii] https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5735/

[iv] See Harmanşah et al. 2014.

[v] Special thanks to archaeologist Taylan Sümer for providing updated information about the site. For a guide and detailed explanations of the complex and other landmarks in the town of Hacıbektaş, a website, and a mobile app are available: https://hacibektasmobil.com.

[vi] See Gürbey et al. 2022.

[vii] For information on the restoration work at the complex, the condition of the buildings during that period as well as

accompanying drawings and photographs, see Akok, 1967.

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