

PROMINENT THEMES AND EVENTS IN ALEVI HISTORY AMONG QIZILBASH ALEVIS AND THE LEGITIMIZING ROLE OF HISTORY

KIZILBAŞ ALEVİLER ARASINDA ALEVİ TARİHİNDE ÖNE ÇIKAN TEMALAR, OLAYLAR VE TARİHİN MEŞRULAŞTIRICILIK ROLÜ

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Öz

Bilindiği üzere Kızılbaş Alevi topluluklarda, kendilerine geçmişten intikal eden çeşitli yazılı kaynaklar bulunmaktadır. Ancak Aleviliğin yüzyıllarca nesilden nesile aktarımında sözlü gelenek çok daha önemli bir roller üstlenmiştir. Tarihsel süreç Aleviliğe ilişkin bilgilerin sistematik bir tarih yazımı çerçevesinde ele alınmasına imkan tanımamıştır. Alevilik tarihine ilişkin bilgiler, sadece tarihsel geçmişe odaklanan eserler yerine, cönklerin, menakıpnamelerin, buyrukların, Ehl-i beyt ve Kerbela temalı elyazmaların içerisinde dağınık şekilde yer almıştır. Bunlar da köylerde okuma yazma oranı düşük olduğu için çok az sayıda okur yazar tarafından bu geleneksel kitaplardan okunabiliyordu. Alevilik tarihine ilişkin bilgiler çoğunlukla sözlü aktarıma dayalı olarak nesilden nesile aktarılabilirdi. Bu aktarım süreci Ocak sistemi çerçevesinde kırdan kente göç ve geleneksel kurumların çözülmesine kadar başarıyla varlığını sürdürdü.

Kentleşme ve geleneksel kurumların çözülmesi ile birlikte bu sözlü aktarım süreci artık işlememeye başladı. Ancak hala köylerde yaşayabilen veya belli bir yaşa kadar köylerde yaşamış olan yaşlı kuşaklar geleneksel Aleviliği ve onun Aleviliğin geçmişine ilişkin bilgileri hafızalarında taşıyarak bugünlere ulaştırdılar. Bu bilgiler sadece tarihsel olayları değil aynı zamanda adeta dogma niteliğinde kabulü ve kutsal bir bağlılığı da ifade etmekteydi. Hiç şüphesiz bu kutsallığı sağlayan Yolun kurucu şahsiyetleri ve Ocaklar gibi kurumlarıydı.

Artık kentlerde yaşamaya başlayan ve geleneksel bilgi kaynaklarından mahrum kalan Aleviler için Alevi tarihinin ve inancının ifade ettiği anlam giderek farklılaşmaya başladı. Geleneksel tarih anlatılarının yerini, daha kafa karıştırıcı ve geleneksel tarih anlatımlarını bozan bilgiler almaya başladı. Gerek başka uzmanlarca gerçekleştirilen alan araştırmalarında gerekse benim gerçekleştirdiğim alan araştırmalarında Alevilerin sözlü tarih anlatımlarında bazı tarihsel olayların ve temaların daha fazla iz bıraktığı görülmektedir. Aynı şekilde sözlü geleneğin yerini giderek kitabi bilgiye bırakmaya başladığı günümüzde en fazla tartışılan ve etkilenen tarihsel olaylar ve temalar da bunlar olmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada yaklaşık yirmi beş yıllık kırsal ve kentsel alanlarda gerçekleştirdiğimiz alan araştırmaları doğrultusunda, geleneksel Aleviliğin tarihini ele alış biçimi, Alevi tarihinde ön plana alınan tarihsel olay ve temalar ile bunlar üzerinde bugün yürütülen tartışmalar ele alınmaya çalışılacaktır. Ayrıca bunlara ek olarak Aleviliğin inanç, kurum, ritüel, kural vb. uygulamalarının nasıl tarihsel bir takım olaylarla meşrulaştırıldığı ve/veya temellendirildiğine ilişkin de örnekler verilmeye çalışılacaktır.

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Abstract

As it is known, there are various written sources inherited from their antecedents in Qizilbash Alevi communities. However, oral tradition has played a much more important role in the transmission of Alevism from generation to generation for centuries. The historical process has not allowed the information about Alevism to be handled within the framework of a systematic historiography. Information on the history of Alevism was scattered in cönk, menakıbname, and Buyruk manuscripts with the theme of Ehl-i beyt and Karbala, instead of works focusing only on the historical past. These, too, could be read from these traditional books by very few literate writers, since the literacy rate in the villages was low at that time. In other words, Alevi historiography could be transferred from generation to generation, mostly based on oral transmission. This process continued successfully within the framework of the Ocak system until the migration from the countryside to the city and the dissolution of traditional institutions.

With the urbanization and the dissolution of traditional institutions, this oral narrative tradition no longer worked. However, the older generations, who can still live in villages or have lived in villages until a certain age, have carried traditional Alevism and its information about the history of Alevism in their memories and have brought it to the present day. This information expressed not only historical events, but also dogma-like acceptance and a sacred devotion. Undoubtedly, it was the founding personalities of the Path and its institutions such as the Ocaks that provided this holiness.

The meaning of Alevi history and belief began to differ gradually for Alevis, who started to live in cities and were deprived of traditional sources of information. Traditional historical narratives began to be replaced by information that was more confusing and distorted traditional historical narratives.

It is seen that some historical events and themes left more traces in the oral history narratives of Alevism, both in the field studies carried out by other experts and in the field studies I carried out. In the same way, these are the historical events and themes that are most discussed and affected in today's world, where the oral tradition is increasingly being replaced by book knowledge.

In this study, in line with the field research we have carried out in rural and urban areas for about twenty-five years, the way in which traditional Alevism is handled, the historical events and themes that have come to the fore in Alevi history, and the debates on them today will be discussed. In addition to these, the examples of how their practices such as Alevism's beliefs, institutions, rituals and rules are legitimized and/or grounded by some historical events will be explained.

Key words: Alevi history, oral history, Kızılbaş Alevis, ocaks,

Introduction

The topic of this article does not beg a detailed discussion of historical backgrounds. However, we cannot understand the conditions under which written/oral sources and historical/religious knowledge have been transmitted from generation to generation over centuries without being aware of the developments that have influenced the formation of contemporary Alevism. This article will address three important historical events which will help us to understand why oral transmission has played such an important role for Alevi communities and why we cannot speak of standardized knowledge in relation to their historiography/theology: 1.The Babai Revolt (13th century),¹ 2.The Sheikh Bedreddin Rebellion (15th century), 3.The Ottoman-Safavid Wars (16th century).²

1 See also: Ocak, 1996.

2 See Also, Imber, 1979; Gündüz, 2018; Gülten, 2022.

These three cornerstones of Alevi history can also be linked to many preceding and subsequent developments. They can be regarded as important turning points in understanding the situation of Alevism in Asia Minor and the surrounding regions during the pre-Republican era. This period was dominated by the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires, whose policies were based on Sunni Islam. Meanwhile, those attached to folk Islam with its belief centred around Ali constituted a large population in the region. Thus, while the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires as the dominant political powers favoured Sunnism, the population was largely under the influence of folk Islam based on devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt. And these masses could exert a collective power. They were at the source of movements capable of shaking both the Seljuk Empire, as in the case of the Babai Revolt, and, through the Sheikh Bedreddin movement and by supporting the establishment of the Safavid Empire under the leadership of Shah Ismail, the Ottoman Empire. In their pioneering studies, scholars like Babinger and Köprülü have provided evidence that the majority of people stood aloof from madrasa Islam and were much closer to and under the influence of the Turkmen *babas*. In his well-known article “Islam in Anatolia”, Babinger pointed out that the poems of Hacı Bektaş’s successors, especially those of Yunus Emre, excited large masses of people and that these poems were passed down from generation to generation. According to Babinger, the religious needs of these masses were met by Turkmen clergymen (Babinger-Köprülü, 1996, 21).

In Ottoman historical accounts and epics (*menakıb*) describing the foundation and development of the Ottoman Empire, it is legendary figures like Hacı Bektaş, Abdal Musa, Karaca Ahmet, Geyikli Baba, and Karaca Ahmet who appear most prominently (Aşık Paşazade, 2003, 297, 571). They had a great impact not only among the communities from which they emerged but also on the local Christian population in Anatolia and the Balkans. Both in the Seljuk and Ottoman periods, the orders dominated by the *babas* played a major role in the Islamization of the non-Islamic masses in Anatolia and the Balkans. In this respect, Ocak notes that one cannot find sufficient information on the impact of madrasas, but that the epics of the saints (*evliya menakıbnameleri*)³ documented the role of dervishes who had earned the title of *abdal* or *baba* (Ocak, 1981, 35).

As Kasaba states, from the end of the 15th century onwards, “...*Qizilbash gradually became a generic term for all Alevis in the Ottoman Empire, reflecting the deep suspicion of the ruling circles who equated Alevism with rebellion and collaboration with the enemy. After this date, the Ottomans implemented increasingly discriminatory and violently oppressive policies against this community*” (Kasaba, 2012, 46). There are many fatwas from the Ottoman period that attest to this fact, for example those issued by the famous Ottoman Shayk Al-Islam Ebusuud Efendi (Düzdağ, 1983). A wide range of examples can also be found in the official documents published by Ahmet Refik (Refik, 1932).

Meanwhile, one should be cautious when stating that the Anatolian Seljuks and Ottomans pursued a Sunni policy.⁴ For one cannot speak of one consistent religious policy in the centuries-long life of these empires. It was only from the beginning of the 16th century, after the Ottoman Empire took over the caliphate, that Sunnism

3 The manuscripts, referred to as *vilayetname* (‘biography’) or *menakıbname* (‘epic’), contain information about the Path, as well as the lives and extraordinary experiences of the Alevi Saints.

4 It is in this context that one should think about the observation of German Orientalist Franz Babinger that “...the Seljuks of Rûm belonged to a Shiite sect. In one word, they were Alevis...” (Babinger & Köprülü, 1996: 13-14)

moved to the center of its policy. Babinger describes this transition as the replacement of the Persian-Shiite influence by Arab-Sunnism (Babinger & Köprülü, 1996, 24)

A religious/sectarian perspective alone will not allow us to understand the agreement or disagreement of the Anatolian population with the Seljuk and Ottoman administrations. Many socio-economic and political factors contributed to the increasing alienation of Alevi from the central state administration, especially from the 16th century onwards, as well as to the fact that they were registered, surveilled, and banished, as they increasingly began to be seen as an internal enemy and a security problem. This situation led the Qizilbash populations to lead a closed community life in regions far from the center where the influence of the Ottoman administration was rather feeble. Here, they developed their own forms of social organization to address their educational and religious needs. This was achieved through the organization in *ocaks* based on strict *dede-talip* relationships, which ensured the survival and continuity of Alevism for centuries.

How the *ocak* system served to protect and pass on Alevi traditions over centuries

Without going into too much detail here, I would like to briefly touch upon how the *ocak* system contributed to the continued existence of the Alevi community. After the Qizilbash Turkmen tribes in Anatolia, led by Shah Ismail whom they regarded as their *murshid* (“guide”), lost the Battle of Chaldiran, they had to continue living in a political order that viewed them with suspicion. In this situation, the *ocak* system, which took its final shape following the developments of the 16th century, contributed to their survival in all respects. The hundreds of *ocaks* and sub-*ocaks* to which Alevi populations all across Anatolia were affiliated primarily solved the problem of leadership. In addition to ensuring unity and solidarity among the members of the local sub-*ocaks*, among the members of *ocaks*, and among the *ocaks* themselves, the *ocaks* also fulfilled many religious, educational, and legal functions (Yaman, 2004, 84).

Representing the lineage of the Ahl al-Beyt, each of the *ocakzades* were the leaders of their own *talips*. Living in the community, deprived of the majority of the state’s facilities, they were nonetheless very successful in finding solutions at the local level to basic questions regarding what can be called “Alevi identity”, i.e., the history and the sociological and religious characteristics of Alevism. The *Buyruk* manuscripts, which may be considered the “religious handbooks” of the *ocaks*, were reproduced in different versions at this time and served as the main reference sources for literate *ocakzades*. In addition to the *Buyruks*, the manuscripts (*vilayetname/menakıbnama*) of Alevi saints like Hacı Bektaş, Abdal Musa, and Karaca Ahmet, the predecessors of the *ocakzade*, were central sources of information that helped to protect Alevi identity and secure its transmission from generation to generation. In the absence of any formal educational institutions, the *ocak* system allowed Alevi to access information about their own community, even though this information was rather limited in scope. In many villages, the *ocaks’ dedes* came to visit only once a year, but in the meantime the local Alevi community managed to learn and pass on the knowledge about traditional Alevi history and faith. The *ocaks*, *dedes*, *Buyruks* and *cem* rituals proved as successful means in informing the widely dispersed Alevi population about the Path and ensuring its transmission to future generations.

Narratives Based on an Oral Tradition Informed by Written Sources

When we examine the themes and contents of the written and oral tradition, we see that they are structured and presented in such a manner that Alevis living at the time would understand them. Vis-à-vis an Ottoman Empire that officially embraced Sunnism as state policy from the 16th century onwards, Alevis were unable to freely congregate for religious or educational activities and were forced to hide their identity. They were pushed to areas far from the center where they lived in a closed community structure for centuries. As a result of this lifestyle, everything related to Alevism was kept secret from the outside world and guarded as sacred knowledge and rituals on the inside.⁵ The primary carriers of knowledge were the *dedes*, i.e., those descending from the holy lineage of the Ahl al-Bayt. The community's encounter with historical and spiritual knowledge and worship practices related to the path mostly took place during *cem* rituals,⁶ in the month of Muharram, or in the month of Hızır, in other words, at times when faith was practiced more intensely. Here, the *bağlama*, the "stringed koran", also played its part.⁷ All this reinforced the sacred character of the knowledge and information related to Alevism. Conveyed to the community in accordance with the living conditions of the time, this knowledge also served to legitimize Alevism in the eyes of the community. In this article, I will first discuss the themes included in traditional written manuscripts and then highlight the thematic changes observed today by presenting examples of the oral tradition based on the data obtained during my field research.

A. From Traditional Manuscripts to Printed Books

Despite the improvements achieved in the Ottoman social order through reforms in the 19th century, literacy rates remained rather low (Engin-Uygun, 2011, 203). This is even more likely to be the case for rural areas far from the center. Considering that Alevis mostly lived in rural areas where they were deprived of the opportunities afforded by urban centers, especially education, one should assume that illiteracy was even higher among Alevis. The state of deprivation which Alevis found themselves in had to do directly with their political and socio-economic marginalization within the Ottoman society. Alevis did not live in the city, engage in commerce, or occupy positions in the civil or military bureaucracy, any of which could have enabled them to benefit from educational opportunities. Consequently, it is more than likely that the level of literacy and/or education among Alevis was lower when compared to other segments of Ottoman society. This is certainly not to say that there were no literate individuals among Alevis.

Both the interviews and the sources I found in different Alevi villages during my field research suggest that there were individuals, though not many, in some villages who were literate and possessed manuscripts that qualify as traditional sources of Alevism.

The following anecdote recounted by Sait Yılmaz (born 1945), an *ocakzade* I interviewed⁸ in the village of Akmeşe (Ziniski) in the district of Divriği in the Sivas province, sheds sufficient light on the state of literacy in the villages. It also helps us to grasp the changes that occurred in the Republican period:

5 Yaman draws attention to the sacred character of the knowledge contained in the *Buyruks* (M. Yaman, 2000: 18-19)

6 See also about the transformation of Alevi rituals: (Ersal, 2024; Yaman.)

7 The poems of Alevi ashiks such as Shah Hatayi Pir Sultan Abdal, and Kul Himmet which are sung to the accompaniment of the bağlama, also contain information about faith and history. (Yaman, 2010)

8 Interviewed in Akmeşe (Ziniski) Köyü in Divriği on 30 August 2022.

“...I was 12 years old. My grandfather had his peers İsmail Dede, Halil Dede, İsmail Varol, and Ahmet Çavuş over. The latter was not a dede. My grandfather had tea, coffee, and cigarettes at home. Back then, no one in the village had tea at home. I was still young. I listened to their conversations, but it was really hard to keep up with the elders because you listen and listen, but you don't understand what they are saying, so you remain a passive listener. My late grandfather used to read old script very well, he was able to read old script and the verses, he had it well memorized. He knew its meaning. When you know the meaning, you have truly memorized it. One day, he read a page from the Qur'an, in Arabic. They were 4-5 people. When he finished reading, he asked, 'Do you understand what I just read to you, friends of God?' They said they did not understand. They really did not. Then he read the verse in Turkish and asked them once again, 'Do you understand now?' They said, 'Yes, now we understand.' Not so Ahmet Çavuş. With his beard, he would always just go like, 'Uh-huh, uh-huh'. My grandfather said, 'Alright, Ahmet Çavuş, I read it to you in Turkish, can you tell me what you understood?' He must have sensed that he had not understood. When Ahmet Çavuş said 'uh-huh' again, my grandfather was sure that he had not understood a thing. Do you know what he said then? He said, 'You are still carrying grapes in the Arapgir mountains.' That was his way of saying in one ear and out the other. I remember him using this expression...”

Similar examples can be given from my own village, and even from my own family. Ocak Köyü in Kemaliye (EğİN) is the central village of the Hıdır Abdal Sultan Ocak because it is where the tomb of Hıdır Abdal Sultan is located. Although some of the *ocak's ocakzades* live in the villages of Divriği and EğİN, Ocak Köyü is the center of the *dedes* of the Hıdır Abdal Ocak, also known as the “Ocak of excommunication”(düşkünler ocağı). My late father belonged to a family of *ocakzades* from the village of Ocak Köyü known as the Yamakgil.

One of the literate people in our village was my father's great-grandfather, Yamakzade Seyyid Mehmet Efendi (Yaman 2018, 35-36). According to the accounts of my late grandmother Akile, my father, and the elders of the village, he could not only read the old script, but also taught it to the children in the village. Hodja Mehmet Efendi also traveled to Hacıbektaş, where he copied a number of manuscripts and brought them to the village. Other families in the village with literate ancestors, who possess handwritten books attesting to their ancestors' literacy, include the Babagil and Musae fendigil.

Especially in villages that were home to *sayyids/dedes*, such as Ocak Köyü, there were at least a few literate individuals. Families who could read the old script and possessed handwritten books were mostly found in the villages of *ocakzade dedes*. I have had ample opportunity to observe this during my years-long field research in the regions of central and eastern Anatolia since 1994.

During the fieldwork I conducted for my doctoral thesis between 1996 and 2001, I asked my interviewees, all descendants of *dede* families, about the books they had in their possession. The most frequently mentioned traditional sources were the following: *Buyruk, Kumru, Kur'an-ı Kerim, Hüsniye, Faziletname, Kerbela Vakası, Velayetname (Vilayetname), Makalat, Cönkler, Bektaşiliğın İçyüzü, Cenk Kitapları, Eba Müslim Horasani, Cabbar Kulu, Gülzar-ı Hasaneyn, Hadikatüssüeda (Saadete Ermişlerin Bahçesi), Divanlar, and Nehcül Belaga*. Other book titles mentioned in my interviewees' responses, albeit less frequently, include the following: *Mezhepler Tarihi, Ravzatül Ahabab, Hutbetül Beyan, Tarihi Teber, Seyyid Nizamoğlu, Cavidanname, Battalname, Şah İsmail Divanı, Siret-i Nebi/Siret, Miratül Makasid, Bektaşî Şiir*

ve Nefesleri, Kırk Sual, Burçname, Müzekkin Nufus, Anadolu Evliyalari, Virani Buyruğu, Ehlibeyt Kitapları, Hacı Bektaş Veli'nin Şeceranesi, Bektaşîye, İmam Zeynel Buyruğu, Kerbela'nın İntikamı, Alevilik Araştırmaları, İmam Ali Buyruğu, Mizahlı İlmihal, Dürrü Mekkun, Bektaşî Nefesleri, Hacı Bektaş Veli'nin Kitapları, and Demeler. Here, I quote my interviewees' answers verbatim, regardless of whether a book with the respective title actually exists or not, or whether these books are related to Alevism or not. The purpose of the question "What books do you have related to Alevism?" was to shed light not only on traditional reference sources but also on the current situation. The answers given to this question indicate that rather than manuscripts, more recently published books such as *Buyruk*, *Kur'an-ı Kerim*, *Kumru*, *Hüsniye*, *Faziletname*, *Kerbela Vakası*, *Velayetname/Vilayetname*, *Makalat*, *Cönkler* etc. tend to line the shelves of *dedes* today (Yaman, 2004, 328-329).

Nowadays, *dedes* learn and teach Alevism by consulting traditional sources such as *Buyruk* and *Vilayetname*, as well as more recently published books by various authors. This change began in the 1950s-1960s, when books like Sefer Aytekin's *Buyruk*, *Velayetname*, *Hüsniye* (1955-1958), Enver Behnan Şapolyo's *Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar Tarihi* (1964), and M. Tevfik Oytan's *Bektaşîliğin İcyüzü* (1965) started to enter Alevi homes. Having learned the Latin alphabet after the establishment of the Republic, many people were no longer able to access and/or read old manuscripts so that they tried to quench their thirst for knowledge by resorting to new editions of traditional sources or entirely new books. During my fieldwork for my doctoral thesis, all interviewed *dedes*, except the four (3.6%) who were illiterate, said that they purchased and benefited from newly published books on Alevism (Yaman, 2004, 330). In the Republican period, especially starting from the 1960s, traditional sources and the oral tradition associated with these gradually ceased to be the primary sources of information used by *dedes* and Alevis as a whole.

Alongside the traditional sources found in Alevis' home, another important question is whether the descendants of *dede* families can read old script or not. In my field research between 1996-2001, asked whether former *dedes* in their families knew old script, 14.5% of the interviewed descendants of *dedes* said yes, while 85.5% answered with no. Only 8.2% of the interviewees stated that they themselves could read old script. This rate has decreased even further in the past 25 years. Even in families that have books and documents in old script in their homes, it is difficult to find anyone who can read them today. This is illustrated most strikingly by the words a descendant of a *dede* family of the Hubyar Ocak, who does not know Ottoman, wrote inside his copy of the *Şeyh Safi Buyruk*: "Dear Father, you did not teach me, who is going to read this? S.A."⁹ (Yaman, 2004, 331).

B. Observations on Oral Tradition

Before large populations migrated to the cities, knowledge was transmitted through both written and oral tradition. *Dedes'* visits to other villages or *cem* rituals and the collective fast-breaking during the Muharram and Hızır Fasting in their own villages were the most suitable occasions for a transfer of knowledge. These were occasions not only to practice worships but also for elderly *ocakzades* of the holy families to impart their knowledge about Alevi faith and history directly to the community.

The differences in terminology, religious organization, and belief practices between Alevi communities in Anatolia, the Balkans and elsewhere were due to the reasons

9 The interview with *dede* from the Hubyar Ocak took place on 14 February 2001 at the Yenibosna Cemevi.

mentioned earlier. As they were not free in their religious education and organization, Alevis had to organize their communal life around the *ocaks* for centuries. This gave great influence to the *ocakzades*, each of whom guided their own *talips* in their respective regions. Alevis had neither the religious education institutions Sunnis had, nor the state-financed clergymen. In secret from the state, they tried to provide religious education and services with their own means through the *ocaks*. As far as governmental policies concerning Alevis are concerned, the Ottoman legacy took on different shapes but was largely continued in the Republican era. Consequently, Alevis have not been able to achieve standardization in the areas of belief and education until today.

The lack of educational institutions in the *ocaks* led the *dedes* to embrace differing practices and interpretations. Due to the scarce number of written sources and the social organization of Alevi communities, *ocakzade dedes* had greater authority to enforce religious rules when compared to Sunni Imams. The practice of excommunication alone is enough to demonstrate this. *Dedes* could modify the belief practices of their own *ocaks*, adding and removing elements as they saw fit. In this regard, the religious organization of Alevism provided more leeway than the madrasa/academic approach of Sunnism.

The Republican era saw a process of urbanization and a breakdown of traditional institutions. In this context, Alevi religious education and services remained deprived of public support, while civil society failed to develop any up-to-date alternatives in this area. Changes have occurred and continue to occur regarding various aspects, such as terminology, the view of history and faith, rituals, etc.

This change becomes clear not only in the observations I made during my field research, but also when comparing the content of traditional Alevi sources and more recent publications. Here I will present the contents of two *Buyruk*, the manuscripts of which *dedes* relied on in the past, to show that some of the themes included in these works have grown increasingly irrelevant to the wider Alevi public.

A comparison of the content and topics in traditional sources such as *Buyruk*, *Vilayetname*, etc. with those included in more recently published books that aim to explain Alevism will help us to trace these changes.

The content of the *Buyruk (İmam Muhammed Bakır ve İmam Cafer-i Sadık Buyruğu)* published by Baki Yaşa Altınok is as follows:
(Altınok, 2012)

1. *İmam Muhammed Bakır Buyruğu*
2. *Peygamberler Soy*
3. *On iki İmamlar*
4. *Abdal Olmak*
5. *İmam Cafer Buyruğu*
6. *Dört Kapı nedir?*
7. *Rehber Kapısı,*
8. *İkrarına Sadık Olmayan Talibin Durumu*
9. *Musahip Kapısı Nedir?*
10. *H. Muhammed'in Hz. Ali İle Musahip Olması*
11. *Oniki Farz*
12. *On İki Farz Nedir?*
13. *Musahip Kavli ve On İki Farz Nasıl Yerine Getirilir?*
14. *Mürebbi Kapısı Nedir?*
15. *Talibin Dünyadan Ayrılması*
16. *Ahret Hayatı*
17. *Talib Cennette,*
18. *Tarik Çalma*
19. *Talibin Tac, Hulle ve Kemberbest Giyinmesi*
20. *Talibe Erkân Çalınması*
21. *Talibe Verilen Cennet Yemekleri*
22. *Dünyada İyilik Eden Talib Mükafatını Görür*
23. *Azrail'in İkrar Vermesi*
24. *Mikail ve İsrail'in Tanıklık Etmesi*
25. *Azrail'in Dara Durması*
26. *Cebrail'in Cem'e Gelmesi*
27. *Azrail'in Semaha Girmesi*
28. *Yaratılış*
29. *İnsanın Yaratılışı*
30. *Elmanın Dört Parçaya Bölüntüğü ve Ruhların Yaratılışı*
31. *İnsana İki Türlü Kısmet Verilir*
32. *Ruhların Yaratılış Sırrı*
33. *İnsanın Yaratılış Nedeni*
34. *Ali Cömerttir*
35. *Mürebbi Kimdir?*
36. *Mürebbi Kapısının Farzı Üçtür*
37. *Mürebbi Kapısının Üç Farzı*
38. *Mürşid Kapısı Nedir?*
39. *Mikail ve Azrail'in Darı,*
40. *İkrar Nedir?*
41. *İkrardan Dönenin Hali*
42. *Azrail'in Münkir ve Nekir'e İkrarından Dönen Kulu Sorması*
43. *Azrail ve İkrarlı Talip*
1. The Buyruk of Imam Muhammad Bakır
2. The Lineage of the Prophets
3. The Twelve Imams
4. The Abdal
5. The Buyruk of Imam Cafer
6. What are the Four Gates?
7. The Gate of the Rehber
8. What Happens to a Talip Who Breaks His Vows?
9. What is the Gate of the Companions?
10. The Companionship of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali
11. The Twelve Duties
12. What are the Twelve Duties?
13. Performing the Companionship Oath and the Twelve Duties
14. What is the Gate of the Murrebi?
15. The Talip's Departure from the World
16. Afterlife
17. The Talip in Heaven
18. The Tarik ritual
19. Dressing the Talib in Taj, Hulla and Kemberbest
20. Striking the Talip with the Erkân Stick
21. The Heavenly Meals Offered to the Talip
22. The Talib's Good Deeds in This World Will Be Rewarded
23. Azrael's Vows
24. The Testimony of Michael and Israfil
25. Azrael Answering to his Deeds
26. Gabriel Joining the Cem
27. Azrael Joining the Semah
28. Creation
29. The Creation of Man
30. The Division of the Apple into Four Parts and the Creation of Souls
31. Two Kinds of Fortune are Given to Man
32. The Secret of the Creation of Souls
33. The Reason for the Creation of Man
34. Ali is Generous
35. Who is a Teacher?
36. Three are the Duties of the Gate of the Murebbi
37. The Three Duties of the Gate of the Murebbi
38. What is the Gate of the Murshid?
39. Michael and Azrael Answering to their Deeds

44. *Ruhların Kırk Bin Yıldır Yatması*
45. *Her Şey Ben'im*
46. *On İki İmamlar'ın Ruhlarının Yaratılması ve Kandilin İçine Konulması*
47. *Sekiz Cennet*
48. *Yedi Cehennem*
49. *Mikail, Cebrail, Azrail, İsrail'in Kandile Konması*
50. *Cennetlere Ad Verilmesi*
51. *Ebedi olan Hak'tır*
52. *Kara Taştan Cehennemın Kaç Yılda Yapıldığı*
53. *Yetmişiki Milletin Yaratılışı ve Güruhu Naci*
54. *Yedi Cehennemın Yapılışı*
55. *Cennet Çeşmeleri*
56. *Tuba Ağacı*
57. *Süt*
58. *Bal*
59. *Mizan Terazi*
60. *Şeytan'ın Ateşten Yaratılışı*
61. *Şeytan'ın Lanetlenmesi*
62. *İnsan Dört Nesneden Oluşur*
63. *Sofranın Hazırlanışı*
64. *Azrail, Cebrail, Mikail, İsrail'in Ruhlarının Bedenlerine Girmesi*
65. *Dört Büyük Meleğin Ruhlarının Elli Yedi Bin Yıldır Yatması*
66. *Hızır'ın Dört Melekten Üstünlüğü ve Hızır'a Verilen Boz At*
67. *Dört Büyük Meleğe Ad Verilmesi*
68. *Kitabı Yazanın Adı ve Duası*
69. *Yol Ehli Neleri Bilmeli*
70. *On İki İmam'ın Hayatlarını Anlatır*
71. *Talib Hakkında Hz. Ali'ye Söylenen Sözler*
72. *Yol ve Erkân*
40. *What are the Vows?*
41. *The Status of a Person Who Renounces His or Her Vows*
42. *Azrael's Asking Munkir and Nekir about the One Who renounced his Vows*
43. *Azrael and the Talip Who Pledge His Vows*
44. *The Souls Rest for Forty Thousand Years*
45. *I am Everything*
46. *Creation of the Souls of the Twelve Imams and their Enlightenment*
47. *The Eight Heavens*
48. *The Seven Hells*
49. *Michael, Gabriel, Gabriel, Azrael, and Israel's Enlightenment*
50. *The Naming of the Heavens*
51. *The Eternal is God*
52. *How Many Years Did it Take to Build Hell from Black Stone?*
53. *The Creation of the Seventy-Two Nations and the Righteous Community*
54. *The Making of the Seven Hells*
55. *The Paradise Fountains*
56. *The Tuba Tree*
57. *Milk*
58. *Honey*
59. *The Scale*
60. *The Creation of Satan from Fire*
61. *The Damnation of Satan*
62. *Man Consists of Four Objects*
63. *Preparing the Table*
64. *The Spirits of Azrael, Gabriel, Michael, and Israfil Enter Their Bodies*
65. *The Spirits of the Four Great Angels Rest for Fifty-Seven Thousand Years*
66. *The Superiority of Khidr over the Four Angels and the Grey Horse Given to Khidr*
67. *The Naming of the Four Great Angels*
68. *Author's Name and Prayer*
69. *What those Committed to the Path Should Know*
70. *Narrative About the Lives of the Twelve Imams*
71. *Words Spoken to the Hazrat Ali about the Talip*
72. *The Path and its Rules*

The contents of the *Buyruk (Menakıb-ı İmam Cafer-i Sadık)* by *Sefer Aytekin* is follows:

1. *Kırkların Cemii*
2. *Hakkın Sırrı Hakikat*
3. *Peygamber ile Ali'nin Musahip Olması*
4. *Pirlik ve Taliblik*
5. *Pir Olan Neleri Bilmeli*
6. *Vechi Kamil Vech-i Cahil*
7. *Makamlar Beyan Olunur*
8. *Mürebbi Müsahip*
9. *Dört Kapı*
10. *Teslimi Rıza*
11. *Musahiplikte Sadakat Gerekir*
12. *Ocak Kazdırın Talibin Tarifi Beyanındadır*
13. *İki Talibi Müsahip Eylemek Beyanındadır*
14. *Öz Kurbanı Vermiş İki Müsahipli Camı Aşına Etmek Beyanındadır*
15. *İki Aşinalı Sufiyi Peşine Etmenin Beyanındadır*
16. *Talibi Erkândan Geçirmek Yani Meydana Geçirmenin Tarifi Beyanındadır*
17. *Oğlan İkrarı Almanın Tarifi Beyanındadır*
18. *Kız İkrarı Almanın Tarifi Beyanında*
19. *Bir Talibin Evini Ondalamanın Tarifi Beyanındadır*
20. *Alınacak Üstad Hakkı ve Döşek Beyanındadır*
21. *Haza Tarikname Beyan Olunur Şahım*
22. *Kim kim ile musahip olur*
23. *Niyaz*
24. *Sufinin Yolu*
25. *Oniki Farz*
26. *Dört Kapı*
27. *Halife, Pir, Zakir*
28. *Cebrail'in Tariklenmesi*
29. *Tarikat Yolu*
30. *Tac*
31. *Yolun Hizmetleri*
32. *Ademle Cebrail'in Kardeşlik Olması ve Lokma Yenmesi*
33. *Muhammedin Elini Aliye Vermesi*
34. *Tarikatın Oniki İşleği*
35. *İmamların Övgüsü*
36. *Tasdik ve Teslim*
37. *Büyük Alem Küçük Alem*
1. The Congregation of the Forty Saints
2. God's Secret is the Truth
3. The Prophet and Ali become Companions
4. Guides and Disciples
5. What the Guide Should Know
6. The Accomplished and the Ignorant
7. The Levels
8. Teachers and Companions
9. The Four Gateways
10. Giving Consent
11. Companionship Requires Loyalty
12. The Founding of an Ocak by a Disciple
13. Making Two Disciples Become Companions
14. Making Two Companions Become Aşinas
15. Making Two Aşına Become Peşine
16. Making the Disciple Pass the Erkân
17. Taking the Vows from Boys
18. Taking the Vows from Girls
19. Taking the Tenth from Disciples
20. Master and Berth Fees
21. Haza Tarikname
22. Who can become companion with whom?
23. Prayer
24. The Way of the Sufi
25. The Twelve Duties
26. The Four Gates
27. Caliph, Pir, Zakir
28. Gabriel Being Struck the Tarik
29. The Way of the Order
30. The Taj
31. The Services of the Path
32. Adam and Gabriel's Brotherhood and Eating Offerings
33. Muhammad Holding Out his Hand to Ali
34. The Twelve Functions of the Order
35. Praise of the Imams
36. Confirmation and Surrender
37. Big Realm, Small Realm
38. The Answer to Challenges
39. Basmala
40. The 'Hu'
41. Being From the Same Womb
42. Three Sunnahs and Seven Duties
43. The Twelve Traditions
44. Celibate dervishes

38. *Müşküllerin Cevabı*
39. *Besmele*
40. *Hü*
41. *Karındaş Olmak*
42. *Üç Sünnet Yedi Farz*
43. *Oniki Erkân*
44. *Mücerretlik*
45. *Musahip aynı yerde Olmalı*
46. *Ceme Gelmek Kurban Yemek Kime Haramdır*
47. *Musahiplerin Rızası Olunca*
48. *Sufiler Mürşit ve Mürebbiye Bağlıdır*
49. *Tarik Çalmak Yedidir*
50. *Mürit Üç Türüdür*
51. *Musahip, Mürebbi, Mürşit, Rehber, Sufi Beyanında*
52. *Sufiliğin Vasıfları*
53. *Dört Kapı Kardaşı*
54. *Piri Ziyaret Erkânı,*
55. *Cömertlik Yapılmıyan Yedi Nesne*
56. *Bal, Süt, Elma*
57. *Muhammedin Tuba İle Tariklenmesi*
58. *Kamberin Nefesinin Pâk Edilmesi*
59. *Selam*
60. *Musahipler Teklifsizdir Muhibler İçin Davet Gerekir*
61. *Şia Mezhebi*
62. *Maraş Nüshasından Parçalar*
63. *Kırkların Cemi*
64. *Alaca Nüshasından Parçalar*
65. *Rehber*
66. *Üç Sünnet Yedi Farz*
67. *Rızasızlık*
68. *Sufilik*
69. *Tarik Ahvalin Beyan Eder*
70. *Sufiliğin Faziletin Beyan Eder*
71. *Soy İle Öğünülmez*
72. *Ölmeden Evvel Ölmek*
73. *Musahip Kavlin Beyan Eder*
74. *Pirlik*
75. *Dört Kapının Cünubunu Beyan Eder*
76. *Musahib Olmanın Tarikini Beyan Eder*
77. *Gümüşhacıköy Nüshasından*
78. *Malatya Nüshasından*
79. *I. Hacibektaş Nüshasından*
80. *Musahip Kavlin Beyan Eder,*
81. *Vasiyeti Resul,*
82. *II. Hacibektaş Nüshasından,*
83. *Naad-ı Ali, Gülbenk ve Tercümanlar.*
45. *Companions Must Be in the Same Place*
46. *Who May Not Come to a Cem and Share Sacrifices?*
47. *The Consent of the Companions*
48. *Sufis' Dependence on Murshids and Murebbis*
49. *The Tarik is Struck Seven Times*
50. *There are Three Types of Disciples*
51. *Companions, Teachers, Murshids, Guides, and Sufis*
52. *The Properties of Sufism*
53. *The Brother of Four Gates*
54. *The Ritual of Visiting the Pir*
55. *The Seven Things Not To Be Generous With*
56. *Honey, Milk, Apples*
57. *Muhammad is Struck with the Tuba*
58. *Purifying Kamber's Breath*
59. *Salutation*
60. *Companions Are Free, Muhibs Require an Invitation*
61. *The Shia Sect*
62. *Fragments from the Marash Manuscript*
63. *The Cem of the Forty*
64. *Fragments from the Alaca Manuscript*
65. *The Guide*
66. *Three Sunnahs and Seven Duties*
67. *The Lack of Consent*
68. *Sufism*
69. *The Conditions of the Path*
70. *The Virtues of Sufism*
71. *No Pride in Lineage*
72. *Dying Before Dying*
73. *The Companionship Oath*
74. *Being a Pir*
75. *The Junub of the Four Gates*
76. *Declares the Way of Being a Musahib*
77. *From Gümüşhacıköy Manuscript*
78. *From Malatya*
79. *From the First Hacibektaş Manuscript*
80. *The Companionship Oath*
81. *The Legacy of the Prophet*
82. *From the Second Hacibektaş Manuscript,*
83. *Naad-e Ali, Gulbenk and Tercümans*

(Aytekin, 1958)

When comparing the contents of traditional sources like the two above-cited *Buyruks* with those of books published especially after 1990, we see that some of the topics have gradually lost their importance, while other, more contemporary topics emerge.

We are now witnessing an Alevism or in fact “Alevisms” that have been updated and reshaped in line with the needs of an Alevi population that now lives in the cities. Without getting enmeshed in the details of this comprehensive subject here, I will content myself to presenting some examples to explain how this update prompted certain changes.

The predominance of stronger and more dominant practices in urban environments also causes regional differences to disappear in the cities over time. The diversity of belief-related terms, belief practices, *cem* and *semah* rituals etc. arising from differences between regions and *ocaks* (for instance between the Tahtacı, Çepni, Abdal, etc.) now changes according to the region and school that is dominant in any given *cemevi* in the cities. Moreover, some foundations/associations determine the *cem* and funeral procedures to be followed in *cemevis* and have these procedures adopted by *cemevis* and their branches, which also indicates the emergence of an updated brand of Alevism.

Many of the themes that featured in the two *Buyruks* cited above, e.g. *murrebis*, *taj*, *the three sunnahs*, *the seven duties*, *the tarik*, *Adam*, *heaven*, *hell*, *angels*, *the Tuba tree*, etc. no longer play a part in publications on Alevism or in Alevi’s belief practices. The sine qua non practices of traditional Alevism have undergone drastic changes. For example, the *ikrar* ritual, the sacred vows, is no longer a condition for becoming an Alevi. And the list goes on and on. As a result, today, one can only hear traditional explanations and interpretations of Alevi history and theology from the older generations, whose numbers are dwindling slowly but surely.

Examples of Traditional Oral Narratives

In preparation for this article, I have re-listened to a large number of interviews I have conducted since the mid-1990s. The most authentic interviews are those I did with relatively older people who spent most of their lives living in the village. The majority of them are descendants of *ocakzade* families.

As someone who has been conducting interviews in the field for a long time, I would like to share some of my observations before moving on to the themes that emerged in the interviews.

I have always been surprised by how consistent some of the oral narratives were with the information found in written sources. This may be considered natural when talking about literate individuals who have access to manuscripts, but it is all the more striking when observed with Alevi individuals whose situation is different altogether.

Another observation is that oral narratives recount similar events, while involving different people and places depending on the region. Narratives about the life and miracles of Alevi-Bektashi saints such as Hacı Bektaş, Baba Mansur, Karaca Ahmet, Hubyar Sultan, etc., may involve different casts of characters and locations for the same event.

Meanwhile, one can observe changes in the way those who complement traditional sources and oral tradition by reading books published in the Republican era or by obtaining information about Alevism from other sources such as television, talk and

write about their traditional practices.

Likewise, educational opportunities and changing sources of information prompt individuals to question and critically review oral tradition, sifting it through the filter of rational thought.

In addition, changing conditions and needs in the Republican era brought about changes in the topics, content, and prominent themes in traditional sources and in the narratives of older generations.

The Place of Karamat (Miracles) in Narratives

In traditional Alevi narratives, the motif of miracles is always present when talking about the founders of the Path and other Alevi Saints. When narrating the lives of Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş Veli, Pir Sultan Abdal and other *ocak* saints, their miracles are never omitted. This served to emphasize their significance and importance for the Path. I would like to give three examples to illustrate this:

1. In the 1990s, I did an interview with Hüseyin **Özdemir**, known as Zaro Dayı (born 1916), from the Hıdır Abdal Ocak in Ocak Köyü in Kemaliye (Eğin), Erzincan. Despite being illiterate, Zaro Dayı was knowledgeable in matters concerning the historical background and belief practices of Alevism. In the interview, he explained the notions of patience (*sabır*), gratitude (*şükür*) and prayer (*dua*) which figure in many Alevi poems by referring to the miracle of the Prophet to draw conclusions regarding the requirements of Alevism:

...The miracle of the Prophet was that he had three moles on his face. Those moles started to cry out at the command of Allah Almighty. One was patience, one was gratitude, one was prayer. That is how praying was born. You need to eat a lot of food to know these things. Praying was handed down from the Prophet. Whoever does not honor prayer, gratitude and patience will have a miserable afterlife.

Let's be patient heart, what can we do

Does the Sultan not love the patient servants

You brought Joseph out of the well

For the love of Ali and Muhammad

If you say you want to follow the Prophet's words, if you want to love Ali and Muhammad, if you want to follow their path, we shall abide by these. If we do not, we shall burn in hell. These are the pillars of heaven and earth (patience, gratitude, prayer). The ninth heaven, heaven, and earth stand for the sake of the Twelve Imams. It's for their sake. We shall know these things to be true. You shall fast, share your food, and make your sacrifice. You shall boil as much soup as you can, so that it will be clear that you are a Muslim. And be a servant close to God..."

2. Similarly, Mustafa Karaya (born in 1917), another *ocakzade* from the Hubyar Ocak I interviewed in 1997, talked about the saint of his *ocak* and his miracles as follows:

"...He put Hubyar Devletli in the oven here. The one burning in Istanbul. Sultan Murat V had him put in the oven here in Istanbul. He kept him inside the burning oven for seven days and seven nights, the doors locked, the oven surrounded by soldiers standing watch. Seven days and seven nights, so that he would burn to ashes. First, he gave him poison, which he drank and said, 'Take this and give it to another friend'. The Sultan got scared, thinking, 'If we don't burn this dervish, he will take the crown

and throne from me.' Then he has the furnace built, and the furnace burns for seven days and seven nights. A heathen boy of not even ten years is also put in the furnace. Then, they vanish and climb the top of Tekeli Mountain. It's the end of May. There, they confess their faith, performing the 12 services, and pray, while the boy is picking primrose flowers from that mountain. The Sultan says, 'The dervish is burnt to ashes'. He opens the door and the dervish's beard is frozen, he is shivering. The boy is holding a stalk of primrose. The Sultan asks the boy, 'Where did you get this? And the boy answers, 'My Sultan, they went up a high mountain and called on God. That's when I collected them. The water flows down from the top, from the sides of the mountain.' Hearing this, Murat IV falls at the feet of the dervish. He says, 'My crown and my throne shall be yours.' Hubyar Devletli says, 'I don't want your crown and throne. But you will write an edict on Derdiyar.' So, the Sultan writes, 'Derdiyar is Hubyar's son. He is the most pious and righteous... serving at the mill from sunrise to sunset. Whoever doubts him shall be an infidel, bereft of his harvest.' The dervish is handed the edict. Before he leaves, the dervish says, 'This corpse, bury it before you go.' Rolling up the living man, they ask, 'Are we to pray for the dead or for the living?' The dervish responds, 'How would you pray for the living for someone who is dead?' Of course he too sees that he is very well alive. He says, 'Pray for the dead, Allah-u Akbar.' And now they see that the man is dead. That's the discovery, the miracle of Hubyar Devletli, that's when he cursed the furnace..."

3. Divane Yalçinoğlu Dede¹⁰ (born 1920) from the Kureyşan Ocak, in an interview in 1997, mentioned various miracles when he told me about his lineage. His accounts display several parallels with the *Vilayetnames* of Hacı Bektaş Veli:

"...Kara Donlu Can Baba was under the patronage of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Sarı Saltuk descended from Battal Gazi. He is his ninth grandson. Both were Anatolian saints, who performed miraculous deeds. Sarı Saltuk's murshid was Seyyid Mahmut Hayrani. Hacı Bektaş Veli went to Sarı Saltuk and saw him grazing sheep. He said, 'Saltuk, bring me a glass of water to drink.' When Sarı Saltuk brought a glass of water, Hacı Bektaş Veli drank half of it and gave it back to Sarı Saltuk. He said, 'Here, drink it. I declare you a saint.' Sarı Saltuk said, 'Thank you, my Murshid.' Hacı Bektaş Veli said, 'Go to the Black Sea, take this prayer rug with you, as well as Genç Abdal and Ulu Abdal. Lay this rug on the sea and sit in the middle with them to your left and right. Sail across the Black Sea to reclaim the lands of Georgia and Zengi and make them your disciples.' Hacı Bektaş Veli said, 'I will take care of the sheep until you come back.' He went and spread the rug on the Black Sea and they sat down on his left and right. He said, 'The Saints will carry us', and the prayer rug started moving. When he saw them approaching, the Georgian Begh said, 'This must be the Saints'..."¹¹

A centuries-long feeling of oppression

A centuries-long sense of oppression stands out in the narratives of the grandfathers. The early origins of this feeling are Ali being denied the right to the caliphate and the Battle of Karbala. Unfavorable fatwas and the violent suppression of uprisings during the Ottoman period further contribute to this feeling. Today's Alevis consider the massacres of **Çorum**, **Maraş** and **Sivas** as a continuation of this traditional narrative, reinforcing the centuries-old feeling of oppression. Here, I want to give two examples

¹⁰ Interviewed on 20 March 1997.

¹¹ *Vilayetname*, 41-47. The same *dede* also told me some of the miracles of Kara Kesici, a *baba* of the Hüseyin Abdal Ocak.

of traditional narratives from the *ocakzade*:

1. Divane Yalçınoğlu Dede states that Alevi originally came from Khorasan and migrated to Anatolia because they feared Yazid. Touching on the feeling of oppression he claims that Alevi have been oppressed for 1400 years since the time of Prophet Muhammad:

“...I am Divane Yalçınoğlu, son of Seyit İsmail from the Ovacık district of Tunceli. Originally, we are from Khorasan. We fled to this country out of fear of Yazid, I am not going to lie. Since the days of Prophet Muhammad, we have been tortured for 1,400 years and we are still being tortured today...”

2. For Mustafa Karaya Dede, the oppression of Alevi begins in the time of Imam Hussein, with his abandonment in Karbala:¹²

“...I have never seen a Sunni who became an Alevi, but there are many Alevi who became Sunni. They are all converts. Already in Karbala, the Alevi betrayed the Prophet Imam Hussein. When you see a Sunni, chances are high that he used to be an Alevi. Saint Hussein marched with 70 thousand men behind him. In the end, only 70 of them were left. They sold themselves to Yazid’s man Ibn Ziyad for money. They lost their way. They abandoned the Ahl al-Bayt and Imam Hussein. Imam Hussein cursed them so that they would never be able to escape Yazid’s persecution until the hereafter. And we still cannot escape Yazid’s persecution...”

Narratives About the Birth of Alevism

In oral narratives, history and faith are intertwined, interconnected and interdependent. The birth and origin of Alevism, tales about the Prophets, the life of Prophet Muhammad and the Ahl al-Bayt, and the *ocaks* occupy an important place in traditional narratives. The information contained in these narratives may be related to historical events, or they may be embellished with ahistorical and mythological elements. Here I would like to present four such traditional narratives:

1. Zaro Dayı (Hüseyin Özdemir) dates back the origin of Alevism to the birth of the Prophet. This is how explains this decision:

“...The origin of Alevism is the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. When the Prophet came to the world, the ground opened and swallowed a hundred thousand churches. The monks exclaimed, ‘All our churches have been destroyed! What does this mean?’ He said, ‘The Prophet was born.’ He said, ‘This religion is false.’ He told them that a man named Ali would come, the Prophet would come. ‘Ali,’ he said, ‘will draw a sword’. He said, ‘He will ruin this religion. If you keep Ali’s word, he will not kill you. Otherwise, he will kill all of you. They asked, ‘What can one man, one Ali possibly do to us? We have so many men, our king has soldiers. We have a thousand men.’ They said, ‘He would fight one day and flee the second.’ He responded, ‘No, he won’t flee. He is not afraid of anything. If you keep his word, he will let you go, if not, he will root you out. Our Prophet was born...”

2. Mustafa Karaya Dede from the Hubyar Ocak tells the following legendary anecdote to explain how the schism between Alevism and Sunnism occurred:¹³

“...He was the True Prophet at that time, one before the Last Prophet, the head of government. Two children were born to his family, their sides joined together. Since

¹² Interviewed by Burhan Süzgün and Veysel Kızılırmak.

¹³ Interviewed by Burhan Süzgün and Veysel Kızılırmak.

there was no doctor around, the women separated them with a knife. They said, 'If we can cure them, we will inform the ruler. If not, we will bury them.' They cured them with their own medicines. Then they went to the ruler and said, 'Give them a name. We separated them with a knife and cured them. Now it is upon you to give them a name.' He said, 'If only both of them had died. Tomorrow they will be in dispute because they were separated by a knife: A sword has come between them. There will be enmity until forever.' He named one of them Kūşad and one of them Haşim. Sunnis came from Kūşad. From Hashim came the Alevis, do you understand? This is the root of Alevism. From Hashim came Abdulluttalip, from him came Sheikh Abdullah, and from Sheikh Abdullah came the Prophet Muhammad. And from Abu Talib, the Ali was born. This is where Alevism is rooted. Not inciting neighbor against neighbor, not committing adultery with anyone other than your own people, refraining from everything haram, being righteous, this is what Alevism is about..."

3. Divane Yalçınoğlu Dede from the Kureyşan Ocak narrates the events of the Prophet's ascension, the assembly of the Forty Saints, and how the roles of *murshid*, *pir*, and *rehber* were inherited from the Forty Saints:

"...When the Prophet reached the place of the Forty Saints, he entered and saw that Mother Fatma, Hasan and Hussein and Ali were there. He said, 'Who are you?' They said, 'We are the Forty. One of us is forty, forty of us are one.'¹⁴ There, the *pir*, *murshid*, and *rehber* were chosen. The Prophet was named *rehber*, Hussein was named *pir*. When the Ali said, 'O Muhammad, who is your *murshid*?', Muhammad responded, 'You are my *Murshid*.' So, Muhammad became the *rehber*, Hussein the *pir*, and Ali the *murshid*. After that, everyone chose their spirital brothers, their *musahip*, at the venue of the Forty. According to the story, Ali and Muhammad became *musahip*. Gabriel brought a branch from the tree of heaven and Ali and Muhammad were seen. Seven drops of blood flowed from the Prophet's nose. From the seven drops of blood, the Seven were formed. The Seven were made from the Prophet's blood. After that, the Prophet got on his horse *Buraq* and went to the seventh heaven. The angels in the seventh heaven rejoiced, 'O Rasul, how come that you step foot here?' Then, the Prophet saw a man who was looking to his right and laughing, and looking to his left and crying. He asked, 'Who is this man who is crying and laughing?' The angels said, 'This is Adam.' The Prophet said, 'O Adam, you look to your right and rejoice and laugh, you look to your left and cry, what is the meaning of this? Adam said, 'O Prophet of the End Times, O Messenger, you are the Prophet of the End Times, but you are my intercessor, I hope for my intercession from you. When I look to my left, I cry as I see my people being tortured in hell. When I look to my right, I rejoice as I see my people at ease in the palace of paradise.' The Prophet went to the second heaven where he met Seth (peace be upon him). In the third heaven he met Jesus (peace be upon him). In the fourth heaven he met Aaron, the brother of Prophet Moses. He saw that someone was sitting there, and the angels were prostrating. The Prophet said, 'O Gabriel, this is Ali.' Gabriel said, 'No, this is an angel, he has taken the form of Ali.' The Prophet went to hug him and said, 'Brother Gabriel, this is the smell of Ali's sweat.' He went to the fifth heaven. He met Yusuf (peace be upon him). He went to the sixth heaven. He met Musa (Moses). Moses sent him to the seventh heaven. The seventh heaven was the place of Allah Almighty, shining brightly. Before he could get there, a lion blocked his way. He raised his hands and wanted to run backwards, but a voice came and said, 'O Muhammad, do not be afraid, throw your ring to the lion

14 For a similar narrative, see Aytekin, 1958: 7.

and it will not harm you.' He threw his ring and the lion snatched it in the air. He went inside. The claw holding the ring in front of him. A voice was heard, the voice of Ali. He returned to Musa (peace be upon him). Musa was in prayer, so he left and came back again. He said, 'Muslims shall pray four rak'ahs from morning to morning, two as a good deed, two as an obligation. He said, 'Those who belong to the Ahl al-Bayt shall kneel twice in their house when they get up in the morning.' When the Prophet finally returned, the saints at the venue asked him: 'O Rasul, where have you been?' Rasul said sadly, 'There was a lion. The I heard a voice. I threw my ring and barely saved my life.' The Ali took the ring off his finger and put it on the Prophet's finger. The Prophet said, 'I have understood your secret, my friends of God. Whatever my duty, I will embrace it.' He said, 'Ya Rasul, you are the intercessor of Muslims in the hereafter.' So, in short, the roles of murshid, pir, and rehber are a legacy of the Forty... There are basically four ocaks, founded by Pir Sultan's father Kazak Haydar, Abdal Musa's father Gazi Hasan, our grandfather Seyyid Mahmud Hayrani, and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli's grandfather Musa-i Sani. These four ocak come from the Ahl al-Bayt. They come from Saint Hüseyin. These are the four main ocaks. The other ocaks, for example those of Sarı Saltık and Kara Donlu Can Baba or dedes like Hüseyin Abdal, Cemal Abdal, and Hıdır Abdal, came into existence at the time of Hacı Bektaş Veli... So their roots do not go back directly to the Imams... Eighty thousand pirs from Khorasan and ninety thousand Anatolian saints. The roots and foundation of Alevism lie in the land of Khorasan. That is where they came from before they dispersed..."

4. Güldede Akpınar Dede from the **Üryan Hızır Ocak** explains how the Path came into being and how the sacred wooden staff, which is known by many names (*tarik* being only one example) and whose many miracles are still recounted by Alevi elders today, became part of Alevi worship:

"...My name is Fatimah Zahra. What is that crown on your head? It is Muhammad Mustapha, the Prophet of the End Times, the servant of two worlds. What is that belt around your waist? It is Aliyyel Mürteza, who will be my wife. What are they? These are Hasan and Hussein. And regarding the Twelve Imams, he said, 'If you are in trouble, write down these twelve names. If you shed a tear for them, Allah will help you.' Adam accepted these words when he was thrown out of paradise. At that time Gabriel created twelve posts. 'If you accept it, Hussein,' he said, 'You will be the pir, and I will be the rehber.' He said, 'Write this in the book.' The book is made of 12 branches, all 12 alive. 12 services, 12 posts, all alive. They said, 'Go and get 12 branches (*tarik*) from the Tuba tree.' In paradise, the Tuba tree said, 'I will go wherever you take me. Touching the branch of Ali and Muhammad, of Fatimah Zahra and Hatice Kübra, the *tarik* will be sacred, the Path will be the *tarik*at. From now on, those who come here shall love the Ahl al-Bayt and answer to God. I will sacrifice my life to that Path, not my branch but my life. Go to Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah Zahra, Hasan, and Hussein. If they pass under the *tarik*, I will give you my branch. Otherwise, I will not give it to you.' He went back to them, and they accepted what he asked of them. This is where the Path was founded. This is our place, whoever has not answered to God has no right to be part of it, to be a talip. The sharia is for the righteous. Let's say you haven't gone to pray on Fridays for 48 nights. In that case, you have not answered to God. How can we know that you are from the Ahl al-Bayt? It's easy to say 'I am a sayyid'. Being a sayyid that's an important title. It befits Ali, Muhammad, Hasan, and Hussein. Our Path is thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword. Gabriel is the rehber, Ali and Hussein are the pirs. No choice between them, they are one. Muhammad is the

murshid. What does 'Hand in hand, hand to God' mean? It means that Ali gave a hand to his son. Hussein was not left without a pir. His pir was Ali..."

Conclusion

Unlike earlier generations who spent a significant part of their lives in their villages, Alevi who grew up in the city have gradually moved away from traditional manuscript sources and knowledge based on oral tradition, as well as from practicing *cem* rituals within the *ocak* system. Traditional Alevi institutions such as *dedelik*, *düşkünüklük* ('banishment') and *müsaheplik* ('companionship') have started to lose their significance. Since the 1990s, associations and foundations have become institutionalized as so-called *cemevis*. Meanwhile, the vacuum left by the waning of the essential institutions of traditional Alevism is filled by contemporary political and ideological concepts. When dealing with historical and religious issues related to Alevism, these are now often considered completely isolated from their tradition. Taking into account the traditional view of Alevism and considering how worship and other rituals are practiced is very important. Therefore, it is imperative to give traditional Alevism its proper place when looking at different "Alevisms" today.

In this article, I tried to work out the prominent themes of traditional Alevism based on manuscripts and oral narratives. In terms of their contents, these themes were conveyed to the Alevi community in a way that was accessible and understandable to them, thus successfully passing on Alevism from generation to generation in the period prior to urbanization. The major themes of the past have changed in parallel with the socio-economic and political transformation that occurred in the wake of urbanization, and contemporary Alevism has arrived at quite different perspectives on faith and history. Had there been a greater focus on the Prophet, the Ahl al-Bayt, Karbala, and Alevi saints like Hacı Bektaş Veli and Pir Sultan Abdal in the past, current political topics and developments such as secularism and debates on ethnicity come to the fore today, and it is the *cemevis* rather than the *ocaks* that one has to look at to grasp this new understanding of Alevism.

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