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A Brief Sketch of the Development of Alevi Studies

Yayın Tarihi: **15 Ocak 2026**

Summary

This is an annotated bibliography of the most significant contributions to Alevi studies, in chronological order from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It identifies American Protestant missionaries as the earliest category of observers who took a (positive) interest in Alevism as a religion. Somewhat later, European archaeologists looked at Alevi communities as the possible survivors of the old civilisations they studied. European Orientalists combined the study of Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish texts with the findings of the missionaries and archaeologists. In the early twentieth century, Turkish nationalists countered these “foreign” approaches with the study of Alevism as an expression of authentically Turkish traditions. However, because of their difference from mainstream Islam, Alevism was also perceived as a threat to national unity. Sunni theologians followed Turkish nationalists in studies purporting to demonstrate the Islamic and Turkish roots of Alevism. Social changes of the second half of the twentieth century – migration from villages to the large cities and later to Europe, mass education, Sunni-Alevi conflicts – redirected Alevi studies towards the social, economic and political dimensions of Alevism. From the 1970s onwards, anthropologists have also made major contributions to Alevi studies. The Alevi revival, which began around 1990, brought three major new developments: for the first time, it was Alevi intellectuals and academics who made major contributions to Alevi studies. Secondly there was, especially in Turkey itself, a new turn towards the study of the religious dimension of Alevism, rather than just its history and sociology. Thirdly, in the past twenty years, Kurdish Alevism has emerged as a distinct variety, on which especially scholars based in the diaspora have made major contributions.

Introduction

Alevis, or rather the various religious communities that later came to be named Alevis or Bektashis, are mentioned in a wide range of historical documents, and the communities also produced and preserved their own documents. It is only rarely that we come across historical documents that actually describe these communities and

make an attempt to analyse what is observed. One of the few Ottoman authors to whom we owe some interesting observations and comments is Evliya Çelebi, whose *Seyahatname* contains information on Bektashi and other *tekkes* in Anatolia, the Balkans, Greater Syria (Sham), Kurdistan and Transcaucasia in the mid-seventeenth century. He also relates prejudices and the “*mum söndü*” libel against Kızılbaş and other extreme Shi'i (*ghulat*) groups in all the places he had visited but notes, on the basis of his own close observations, that he found those accusations baseless. This sceptical attitude sets him apart from his contemporaries but it is not sufficient to consider his observations an early contribution to Alevi studies. It is only from the mid-19th century onwards that we encounter an interest in these communities and their religious beliefs and practices that resembles modern scholarly attitudes.

The bibliography following this essay lists the main publications on Alevis and Alevism of which I am aware in chronological order, so that shifts over time in type of author, approach, subject matter and academic discipline may easily be seen. The list is no doubt not complete but I believe it is quite representative for what was published until roughly 1990. By that time the amount of publishing on Alevis and Alevism expanded so rapidly that I made no attempt to keep track of all that appeared and have instead identified some of the major authors and topics of research.

American Protestant Missionaries

The earliest more or less systematic observations were made by 19th-century and early 20th-century American Protestant missionaries who worked among the Christians of Central and East Anatolia: Dunmore, White, Trowbridge, Riggs and others. These men found it much easier to establish relations with the neighbouring Alevi communities than with Sunni Muslims, and they took a genuine interest in their religion.^[1] They speculated that the Alevis were superficially converted former Christians but also perceived survivals of older religions, and several were convinced that it should be possible to bring these communities back into the fold of Christianity. Several of them commented on the then widespread belief that Ali was an incarnation of God, as Jesus was to the Christians. The same observation was made by the Armenian Antranig (1900), who spent a long time among the Alevis of Dersim and reports various beliefs and practices that by now may have disappeared (including the belief in reincarnation in various non-human forms). The best-informed of the missionaries was probably Trowbridge, whose 1909 article contains an attempt to summarise an Alevi “catechism” based on extended conversations with religious authorities. He was also the only observer to note that there were direct contacts between the Alevis (of the Antep region) and the Ahl-i Haqq of South Kurdistan. The American missionaries paid relatively much attention to Kurdish Alevis, who were the

closest neighbours of the Armenians. Henry Riggs wrote in 1911 on “the religion of the Dersim Kurds”, which makes him the precursor of a long line of authors who present Kurdish Alevism as a religion in its own right rather than an Islamic sect.

The missionaries’ writings on Alevism, although generally sympathetic, were marred by prejudice and misunderstandings, and they need to be read with caution. They remain valuable, however, because they recorded beliefs and practices that may have disappeared during a century of Republican governance and education. The most important of the missionary authors was John Kingsley Birge, who spent many years in Turkey, befriended Bektashi *babas* in Turkey and Albania (including Salih Niyazi Baba), and collected many books and manuscripts. His 1937 book on the Bektashi order, which takes account of all earlier research by missionaries, archaeologists, Orientalists and Turkish historians, was to remain long unsurpassed and is still one of the essential books.

European Archaeologists

The same may be said about the archaeologists, whose interest in Alevis was due to the search for possible descendants of the ancient civilisations whose artefacts they were unearthing. Both missionaries and archaeologists tended to believe that religious minorities represented originally different peoples or “racial” groups, submerged by more recent waves of migration. The Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan, who took part in large archaeological expeditions in Southwest and Central Anatolia in the 1880s, measured the skulls of different population groups in search of “older” populations surviving from the period before the large Arab, Turkish and Kurdish migrations. He found that the skulls of the Tahtacı, the “Bektaş” of Elmalı, the Ansariye (Nusayri or “Arab Alevis”), the Kızılbaş of the upper Euphrates and the Yezidi were very similar, and quite different from those of their Sunni neighbours and speculated about the pre-Islamic religious and racial origins of these communities (Luschan 1889, 1891, 1911). The British archaeologist John Winter Crowfoot (1900) added some further evidence of the pre-Islamic origin of the Kızılbaş or Bektaş of Cappadocia, and the French archaeologist René Dussaud, specialist of Hittite and Phoenician religions, wrote a book on the Nusayri (1900).

The archaeologist whose work has had the greatest impact on later scholarship is Hasluck, best known for his great posthumous work on shrines and nature sanctuaries and their Muslim and Christian devotees (1929). His earlier publications too (1913/14, 1921) remain important; in the 1921 article he provided a critical discussion of the observations by Luschan, Crowfoot and others, informed by his own observations. He rejected the common assumption that many, if not most, of the unorthodox practices

of the various Alevi groups had Christian origins and insisted that they either belonged to a substratum of primitive religion that was shared by Christians as well as Muslims, or derived from Shi'a Islam in an earlier phase of its development.

European Orientalists

It was around the same period, at the turn of the 20th century, that European Orientalists began to study written materials that were associated with Alevi and Bektashi communities. One important pioneer was the Scottish scholar E. J. W. Gibb, whose six-volume *History of Ottoman Poetry* surveyed the major poets of the entire Ottoman period. Gibb's focus was on "high" literature written in metred verse, like its Arabic and Persian models, and he paid scant attention to the "popular" form of quatrains with fixed number of syllables. Of the poets beloved by Alevi he only discussed Nesimi and Fuzuli, who also wrote *ghazals*. He made a brief mention of the poems of Khata'i and others writing in a form of Azeri Turkish but did not include them in his survey because they were not Ottoman subjects. Neither early Alevi poets such as Kaygusuz Abdal or Pir Sultan Abdal nor the 19th-century Bektashi poets were included in Gibb's survey. Gibb died before the entire work was published; the last five volumes were edited and completed by his friend and colleague Edward G. Browne, a specialist of Persian literature who was also familiar with Ottoman political and religious culture. It was Browne who first drew attention to the possible influence of Hurufi ideas on Bektashi and Alevi religious thought, after he bought a set of Hurufi manuscripts that was offered to him in Istanbul and that he gathered originated from a Bektashi *tekke*. He had previously written an overview of the Persian Hurufi literature and a summary of Hurufi doctrine (1898) and complemented that with an overview of Hurufi and Bektashi manuscripts in his own collection and library collections (1907). Many of the manuscripts described in Browne's 1907 article were later studied in detail by other Orientalists.

The German turcologist Georg Jacob authored a book and a major article on the Bektashi order (1908, 1909), on the basis of his personal contacts in Turkey, Bektashi manuscripts (some of them lent him by Browne) and anti-Bektashi polemics in the late Ottoman period. His Bektashi acquaintances were friendly but declined to give him information on their actual beliefs and rituals. He therefore translated and annotated one of the most influential of the polemical tracts, İshak Efendi's *Kâşifü l-esrâr*, which takes up half of the book. In the 1909 article, Jacob compared Bektashi belief and ritual with those of the Tahtacı (as described by von Luschan), Kızılbaş, Nusayri and Yezidi, judging that the Tahtacı represented essentially the same religion as the Bektashi and that several elements (reincarnation, the divinity of Ali, rejection of or lax attitude towards the Sunni "pillars of Islam", use of alcohol in ritual, taboo on

mentioning the name of Shaytan, etc.) were shared in various combinations by these groups.

Somewhat related to this, the French scholar Clément Huart published a collection of Hurufi texts in the original Persian and French translation (1909). Huart knew Browne and remained in close contact with him while working on these texts. He also had personal connections with Bektashis in Istanbul (of which his 1909 article testifies), and he invited the learned Ottoman intellectual Rıza Tevfik, who was rumoured to be a Bektashi, to contribute a substantial essay on the religion of the Hurufis to the book. With this lengthy text, Rıza Tevfik (1909) may have been the earliest author from Turkey to contribute significantly to European Orientalist knowledge.^[2] Hurufism is a mystical doctrine about God's manifestation in the world through the letters of the Arabic alphabet, first formulated by the Persian Fazlullah Astarabadi (d. 1394). Well-known calligraphic representations showing the names of God, Muhammad and Ali inscribed in the human face or body express the Hurufi doctrine that God is immanent in humankind rather than transcendent as orthodox Muslims believe. Rıza's essay, which identified Hurufi ideas in Bektashi poetry, placed Fazlullah's doctrines in a genealogy connecting all *ghulat* ("extreme" Shi'i groups that recognise Ali and their own founders as manifestations of God) with Iranian resistance to domination by Arab Islam. The impact of Huart's and Rıza Tevfik's scholarship was such that Hasluck (1929) became convinced that all Bektashis were essentially Hurufis - which probably is a grave exaggeration.

Another French scholar, Jean Deny, authored a brief article on Sarı Saltık (1913), and several German scholars wrote on other saints later associated with Bektashi or Alevi tradition. Rudolph Tschudi (1913) edited and translated the *Vilayetname* of Hacım Sultan, a text already mentioned in Browne's 1907 article, and Erich Gross the most important text of this genre, the *Vilayetname* of Hacı Bektaş (1927). Franz Babinger (1921) published a long article on Sheikh Bedreddin, and later a facsimile of the sheikh's *Menakıbnâme* (1943). Babinger's student and successor Kissling later published an analysis and summary translation of this *Menakıbnâme* (1950). Babinger also wrote on the Safavids (1922), on the varieties of Islam in Anatolia (1922) and, much later and on the basis of personal observations, on the Bektashi *tekke* of Demir Baba in Northeast Bulgaria (1962). An earlier study of another Bektashi *tekke*, Seyyid Gazi in Eskişehir, was carried out by Georg Jacob's student Theodor Menzel (1925).

Turkish Nationalist Scholarship

The early twentieth century was also when several leading Turkish nationalist intellectuals took a keen interest in Alevi and Bektashi - at least in part because of

the perception that these minorities were natural political allies but also a potential threat to national unity.[3] This interest was reflected most clearly in the nationalist journal *Türk Yurdu*, which in the 1920s published quite a few articles on Tahtacı, Bektashi and other Alevi communities and their traditions as authentic Turkish traditions.[4] Some of these authors took issue with the writings by foreign missionaries and archaeologists, whom they accused of attempting to use these minorities to subvert the Turkish nation by converting them or denying their essential Turkishness.

The genealogy of Alevi studies pursued from a Turkish nationalist perspective, sometimes referred to as the “Köprülü paradigm”, constitutes the subject of major studies by Markus Dressler.[5] It was Köprülü (Köprülüzaade Mehmed Fuad) who first insisted that Alevism had Central Asian Turkic origins, bore clear traces of shamanism, and owed its Islamic elements to the Central Asian Sufi master Ahmed Yesevi – claims that were repeated as dogma by later Turkish scholars as well as many Alevi intellectuals. (Rıza Tevfik’s work, which stressed the Iranian religious component in Bektashi and Alevi thought, was not acknowledged by the nationalists.) A related aspect of the paradigm is Köprülü’s insistence on a sharp distinction between Sunni “orthodoxy” and the “heterodox” beliefs and practice of the Türkmen tribes.

Köprülü’s dominance of the field, from his celebrated book *Türk edebiyatında ilk mutasavvıflar* (1919) and his article “Anadolu’da İslamiyet” (1922) onwards, was not only due to his nationalist posturing, however, but also on his access to, and masterly command of, manuscripts in his own and other Istanbul collections. He knew the Orientalist literature too, and was not shy to criticise it. He criticised Gibb for not surveying all of Turkish literature as one whole (instead of only Ottoman “high” literature), pointing to the Central Asian origins of Turkish literature and beliefs and the role of Anatolian “popular” mystics, neglected by Gibb, in the development of Turkish literature. He contributed to scholarly debate in German, with an elaborate critical commentary on Babinger’s Bedreddin study (1922), and in French, with a claim on Turkish origins of Sufi orders (1929).

Among Köprülü’s students we find Sadeddin Nüzhet Ergun, whose book on Bektashi nefes was endorsed by Köprülü himself (1930), and the sophisticated scholar of Turkish Sufism Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı (1931, 1953, 1963, 1966, 1977). Other men of literary interests were Besim Atalay, who published one of the first editions of Bektashi poetry (1924), and Necib Asim, who in 1925 published a remarkable Bektashi catechism (*ilmihal*).

Nationalist interest in Alevism was not restricted to the study of Turkish manuscripts,

however. There were also men who went out into the field and described actual Alevi beliefs and practices. The most prominent among them was Baha Said, who published in *Türk Yurdu* and other journals (1919, 1926-27). Another man who did actual field research was the theologian Yusuf Ziya [Yörükân], who knew especially the Tahtacı (1930, 1938). The most remarkable and most “political” of these nationalist scholars was Hasan Reşit Tankut, who wrote candidly about various ethnic and religious minorities and the need to assimilate them (1934, 1935, 1938, 1961). Tankut placed his scholarship in the service of what he called “ethno-politics”, by which he meant ethnic engineering. A later representative of this style of minority ethnography was the gendarmerie officer Nazmi Sevgen, whose articles on Zazas and Alevis in the popular history journal *Tarih Dünyası* (1950-1951) have retained their interest (and were reprinted by publishers of various political persuasions). None of these authors, incidentally, refers to Köprülü’s work; the study of texts and the study of living communities remained separate activities.

Several local historians published monographs containing valuable information on the Alevis tribes of their region and their social and religious organisation, framed however in a Turkish nationalist narrative of Central Asian origins and denial of other ethnicities: Kemali (1931) on Erzincan, Kadıoğlu (1935) on Balıkesir, Tarım (1948) on Kırşehir, Fırat (1948) on Varto.

After these authors, silence long prevailed in Turkey where Alevis and Alevism were concerned. For most of the Republican period before 1980 there was little other serious research on Alevism. The literature that was available consisted mostly of collections of religious poetry (*nefes / deyiş*) and an edition of the *Vilayetname* of Haji Bektash (Gölpınarlı 1958), an “inside story” of Bektashi tradition (Oytan 1949) and an ethnographic description of an Alevi village (Sün in Elazığ, a village of the Ağuçan *ocak*) by the ethnologist Nermin Erdentuğ (1959). The journalist Fikret Otyam (Cumhuriyet) published a long series of travel reports, which included visits to Alevi and Bektashi villagers, beginning in the 1950s.[\[6\]](#)

Two other Turkish works may be singled out, because they were based on actual observations and interviews by clearly sympathetic authors: Enver Behnam Şapolyo’s *Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar Tarihi* (1964) and Yahya Benekay’s *Yaşayan Alevilik* (1967), a journalistic journey along Alevi villages. Both remain informative because they reflect the conditions before large-scale urbanisation and mass education.

The 1960s, when travel in Turkey was relatively unrestricted, was the period when serious field research in Anatolian villages, including among Alevis, began to be carried out by foreign and Turkish anthropologists.[\[7\]](#) A French and a Turkish scholar,

Jean-Paul Roux and Kemal Özbayrı, jointly wrote an article on the religion of the Tahtacı (1964), on which nomadic community they later separately wrote more extensive studies (Roux 1970; Özbayrı 1972). The US-based Turkish anthropologist Nur Yalman combined field observations in Alevi villages in Elbistan and Malatya with a national-level analysis of elite efforts to reform (Sunni) Islam and presented Alevism as a liberal religious alternative (1969). This was the first study in English describing the structure of Alevi religious authority and discussing the distinctions between (village) Bektashis, Alevis and Nusayris as well as Kurdish and Turkish Alevis. The Norwegian anthropologist Reidar Grønhaug (1974) studied the interactions of different population groups in the Antalya region, focusing especially on the interaction of the Tahtacı and Abdal with the Sunni Turkish majority.

More empirical information on cultural and ritual variety was to be found in Mehmet Eröz's broad overview of Alevi communities and their rituals (1977). Eröz was a professor at the University of Istanbul and owed much of his information to his Alevi students from various regions. He was also affiliated with the nationalist extreme right and had earlier written books purporting to prove that all the Kurds are in reality Turks. The final part of his Alevi-Bektashi study is devoted to efforts to prove that Alevi ritual is rooted in pre-Islamic Central Asian Turkic rites. A similar overview was written many years later by the anthropologist Orhan Türkdoğan (1995).[\[8\]](#)

Towards the Alevi revival: 1970s and 1980s

After modest beginnings in the 1950s, the mechanisation of agriculture and gradual expansion of mass education resulted in increasing urbanisation in the 1960s and 1970s. Many Alevs left their villages for nearby towns or the large metropolises, increasing their visibility. This was also a period of rapid politicisation and youth involvement in left or right radical political groups. Young Alevi activists then were not much interested in the religious dimension of Alevism but rather in its culture of resistance to economic inequality and political repression, which they read into the poems (*nefes / deyiş*) by Pir Sultan Abdal, Kul Himmet and other historical figures. It was a time of political polarisation and increasing tensions between Sunnis and Alevs. The socialist Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP), established in 1965, sought and found support among Alevs in provinces like Malatya, Tunceli and Kahramanmaraş. It competed with a party specifically targeting Alevs, the Union Party of Turkey (TBP).[\[9\]](#) Revolutionary student movements – Dev Yol, Aydınlık, TİKKO, THKO – perceived that the Alevs were their natural allies, and revolutionaries on the run after the 1971 military coup sought places to hide in Alevi villages.[\[10\]](#) Minor clashes between Sunnis and Alevs occurred but did not yet draw much attention until the increasing left-right polarisation of the late 1970s, when Alevs were branded as “communists” and

unbelievers and Sunnis as “fascists” by their opponents. In 1978 and 1979, large anti-Alevi pogroms of Malatya, Kahramanmaraş, Çorum and Sivas took place.

These developments did not immediately result in a shift in scholarly writing on Alevis and Alevism, but from these years onwards we find an increasing interest in sociological research. The first serious analysis and attempt to explain these conflicts sociologically was published by Ömer Laçiner in his journal *Birikim* (1978) and later in further developed form in a German publication (1985). Other analyses of Alevism in Turkey as a political question include Cem (1980), Bayart (1982), and van Bruinessen (1982).

Contemporary conflicts rekindled an interest in the 15th and 16th-century Kızılbaş rebellions and their repression. Several Ottomanists and Iranologists published new studies on Safavid-Ottoman relations and the repression of the historical Kızılbaş in the Ottoman period (Mazzaoui 1972; Savory 1965; Sohrweide 1965; Eberhard 1970; Imber 1979). Other major historical studies appeared in those years. Suraiya Faroqhi published her first study of the *tekke* of Hacı Bektaş and other Bektashi lodges (1976), soon followed up by a major study of the Bektashi order (1981).

Several studies comparing Alevism and other extreme Shi'i movements were published that systematically compiled information from all the previous empirical literature (including the prejudices and erroneous interpretations of the originals): Klaus Müller (1967), Rainer Freitag (1985), and Matti Moosa (1988). The last-named is the most judicious of these studies. These works are examples of 19th-century style armchair anthropology but they are helpful as overviews of the literature and demonstrations of the need for more profound field research.

Properly anthropological field research on the Alevis took off in the 1980s (after the early essay by Nur Yalman on Alevis in Malatya, 1969). Peter Bumke may have been the first anthropologist to write extensively of life in an Alevi village (in Dersim) (Bumke 1979 and 1989; see also Rotkopf 1978). The following year, Altan Gokalp published his study of a Çepni community in Aydın (1980), which pays much attention to tribal and religious authority. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, who was to become one of the most productive and insightful students of Alevism, published her dissertation and a separate study of the Tahtacı in 1988. Her work is based on careful reading of all available written sources, informed by fieldwork and conversations with numerous Alevi interlocutors. She gives systematic descriptions of religious institutions, rituals, and the belief system and symbols that many of the Kızılbaş groups have in common. She was to continue her research both in Turkey and among the Alevi diaspora in Germany. Another anthropologist studying the Alevi diaspora in Berlin was Ruth

Mandel, most of whose work concerns identity, trauma and memory but who also was one of the first to describe a cem organized in Germany (1989, 1995).

Peter Andrews' pathbreaking work on the ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey (1989) introduced a new element in perceptions of Alevi: could or should they be understood as ethnic groups rather than religious communities? Andrews' rather idiosyncratic definition of ethnicity took language, religion, and distinct tribal organisation as defining criteria, so that he ended up with four or five Alevi ethnic groups: Alevi Türkmen (with Avşar, Barak, Çepni, Nalcı, Sıraç and Tahtacı as distinct subgroups), Alevi Kurds, Alevi Zazas, Nusayri Arabs, and finally perhaps the Abdal, of whom he wondered whether they could be considered as an ethnic group.

Meanwhile Irène Mélikoff had begun publishing a series of influential articles on Alevi and Alevi religion (1975, 1982a, 1982b, 1988, 1995). Her earlier work (1962a, 1962b, 1966) had concerned the Turkish narratives of the battles of early Islam and the drama of Kerbela. She appeared very knowledgeable and very sympathetic to Alevi and Bektashis (and suspicious of Sunni Muslims). Her work was based on field visits to many Alevi communities and her reading of Turkish sources and travellers' reports in many languages. She was very much under the influence of the Köprülü paradigm but nonetheless she also pointed to non-Turkish sources of Alevi belief and practice, including the Paulicians, Neo-Platonism, and various Iranian religious formations.

Her student Ahmet Yaşar Ocak continued her work in a more strictly philological direction: he made many *menakibname* and other early sources available in careful editions (Erünsal and Ocak 1984; Ocak 1982, 1983, 1989). His emphasis on "heterodoxy" implied that the communities in which these texts were produced, as well as contemporary Alevi communities, were in fact Muslims though not Sunnis, rather than holding a distinct, different religion. Most of his numerous and important publications appeared after the period under consideration here. Both in terms of the volume and the quality of his academic work, Ocak may be considered as the closest successor to Köprülü in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

In the mid-1980s, two religious authorities representing the main streams of Alevism and Bektashism published works that were to have a major impact on the self-perception of Alevi in the following decade (Noyan 1985, Ulusoy 1986). Bedri Noyan was recognised as the *Dedebaba*, the head of the Bektashi Sufi order, by most members of the Babagan branch, and Celâlettin Ulusoy was the head of the Çelebi family that claimed biological descent from Haji Bektash and that was recognised by a large proportion of the village Alevi-Bektashis (the Dedegan or Sofiyan branch).

The Alevi Revival

The Alevi revival, which can be roughly dated around 1990, not only marked the increasing visibility of Alevis in the public sphere but also the beginning of publishing on Alevism by Alevis themselves. The Alevi diaspora, especially in Germany, played a major role in both. Since the 1980 military coup and the restrictive 1982 constitution, associational life was severely curtailed in Turkey. The first Alevi associations were therefore established in Germany, long before it became possible to do so in Turkey. It was the Alevi association of Hamburg that published one of the most iconic books of the Alevi resurgence, Nejat Birdoğan's *Anadolu'nun Gizli Kültürü Alevilik* (1990), which covered a wide range of aspects of Alevi history, belief and practice, based on the author's extensive travels among Alevi communities. Birdoğan was at home in the Turkish nationalist literature but also freely wrote of the Iranian and local, Anatolian, Mesopotamian and Hellenist elements in Alevism. In the following years he was to publish several other books that made an impact (1992, 1995).

Alevi publishing in the diaspora had in fact begun a little earlier if we take account of the Kurdish cultural journal *Berhem*, that was published in Sweden between 1988 and 1993 by Mustafa Düzgün and friends. Implicitly negating the claim that the ritual language of Alevis is exclusively Turkish, this journal was the first to publish Alevi prayers in Zaza/Kirmançki (Düzgün 1988). Several others later published religious poetry and more prayers in Zaza and Kurdish; the most substantial publication being Munzur Çem's almost 700-page statement on the Alevism of Dersim (2009).

In the early and mid-1990s Turkey witnessed an astonishing outburst of publishing on Alevis and Alevism by Alevis. Most of the authors were neither journalists nor academics but belonged to the type of vernacular intellectuals usually called "*araştırmacı-yazar*", researcher-writer. Birdoğan's work was among the best-informed of this new literature, Rıza Zelyut's books are of interest because of their focus on politics and the struggle for recognition, and Reha Çamuroğlu's work among the most thoughtful, reflecting on the religious aspects of Alevi tradition and its relation with the broader Sufi tradition. Other books focused on aspects of history, social life, memory of lost village traditions. The bibliography below lists only a small sample of this literature. A good, representative overview of this literature, the authors, publishers and the books and journals in which their work appeared, is provided by Karin Vorhoff's balanced and well-informed studies (1995, 1998).

Alevi authors also began to make their mark in academic publishing. In the late 1990s, Mustafa Düzgün and Ali Haydar Avcı established the Avrupa Alevi Akademisi, which published the journal *Alevilik Araştırmaları* (yıl 1, sayı 1: 1998). The contributors to the journal consisted of a mix of European and Turkish/Kurdish scholars. In a related initiative, the Alevi association of Bielefeld organised in cooperation with the university

a two-day congress in 2002, resulting in a publication that brought together Turkish and international scholars (Bahadır 2003).

A different initiative of the Alevi diaspora, which received support from Turkey as well as from Irène Mélikoff, was the Alevi-Bektaşî Kültür Enstitüsü established in Bonn by Güllizar Cengiz in 1997. Mélikoff wrote a strong endorsement for the institute which, in her view, should establish a good library of only the best works on Alevism and Bektashism, collect cönks and other manuscripts still existing in Alevi families, document (by audio or video registration) the *nefes* and other songs that are actually sung, as well as *cem* of various communities as they are actually performed. The institute has since 2009 published a biannual journal, *Alevilik – Bektaşîlik Arastirmalari Dergisi*, with the co-operation of a long list of Turkish academics.[\[11\]](#)

In Turkey itself, several universities established departments or research groups focusing on Alevism and Alevism, with their own academic publications. The Research Centre of Turkish Culture and Hacı Bektaş Veli at Gazi University and its journal *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi* have been the most influential of these.[\[12\]](#) The journal published numerous detailed studies based on Ottoman archival documents, manuscripts in *ocaks'* possession, observations of local practices, etc., enriching our knowledge of the various *sürek*. The foundation associated with Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) published, in the period when Ali Bardakoğlu headed the Directorate (2003-2010) a series of lavishly produced "Alevi-Bektaşî Klasikleri", under the general editorship of Osman Eğri. These were facsimile editions of major Bektashi classics – including the works attributed to Hacı Bektaş, an elaborate version of the *Buyruk*, and a Hurufi text, Vîranî Baba's *'İlm-i Cavîdan* – and they prepared by editors with a good knowledge of language and Sufi terminology. This represented a serious improvement after the earlier amateur transliterations of manuscripts.

From the 1990s onwards we find Alevi authors present among the growing community of international scholars focusing on Alevi studies. The development of Alevi studies since 1990s is perhaps best reflected by the collective volumes in the next section of the bibliography. Most of these volumes are based on conferences on one or more aspects of Alevism, and the editors usually made an effort to include the most active researchers. All authors making significant contributions to the field are represented in at least one of more of these collective works. All of these volumes include Alevi authors among their contributors. These volumes also document the changes Alevi communities were undergoing due to urbanisation and the emergence of an organised diaspora: shifts in authority and forms of organisation, and adaptation of ritual and other traditions to new environments.

The bibliography ends with a select list of publications since 2000, which does not claim to be truly representative and no doubt reflects personal interests. A high proportion of the authors listed are themselves Alevi, based in Turkey or in the diaspora, or moving freely between Turkey and Europe or North America.

The increased participation of Alevi in the public sphere became itself subject of analysis. Harald Schüller's study of Turkey's political parties (1988) was perhaps the first that paid attention to the Alevi's voting behaviour. It was followed up by two studies of the left-leaning Birlik Partisi that had targeted Alevi voters in the 1960s and 1970s (Ata 2007, Sabır 2008). The volume edited by Ayhan Yalçınkaya and Halil Karaçalı (2020) has contributions on the Alevi's engagement with the Left and socialist movements' engagement with the Alevi. Haydar Gölbaşı documented the emergence and activities of the first legal Alevi associations (2007). The most comprehensive study of the Alevi movement at the turn of the millennium, with attention to the great variety of rural and urban communities, the effects of migration, political participation and cultural associations is perhaps Élise Massicard's book (2005, 2012). The story of how the Alevi diaspora, especially in Germany, organised itself is told by Martin Sökefeld (2008). Besim Can Zirh demonstrated how Alevi associations and *cemevleri* in the diaspora responded to a need of space for non-Sunni funerary practices (2012).

Many of the authors based in Turkey and publishing in Turkish journals have focused on the edition and analysis of texts, or minor contributions to the history, beliefs and customs of various Alevi groups. Many documents and much detailed knowledge on local groups have become available. Though none of these articles is listed below among the significant contributions, together they represent considerable advances in our knowledge of living Alevism and its history. Differing from the common study of classical texts, Zeynep Oktay's studies of such authors as Kaygusuz Abdal and Virani Abdal (2017, 2020) stand out for their methodological sophistication.

Several studies have contributed to a much better understanding of the *ocak* system and the roles of the *dede* (as well as to the changes in both due to urbanisation and international migration). Ali Yaman, himself the son of a well-known *dede*, was probably the first to study the Anatolian *ocak* system and the roles of the *dede* in considerable detail (2004). Several other *ocakzade* published monographs, of varying quality, of their own *ocak*. A work that deserves special mention is the elaborate documentation by Coşkun Kökel of a single *ocak*, the Güvenç Abdal Ocağı, and its history, geographical distribution, shrines and other sacred sites, and detailed photographic records of the *erkan* (rites), in nine heavy tomes (2013).

Manuscript documents in the possession of various other *ocak*, which had long been

kept hidden from outsiders, were published and analysed. Mehmet Şerif Fırat (1948) may have been the earliest to publish such documents, later followed by Nejat Birdoğan (1992) and others. A more systematic contribution was made by Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, who published numerous *şecere*, *icazetname*, *siyadetname* etc in the possession of East Anatolian *ocaks*, thereby demonstrating the great importance of the Wafa'iyya and Kurdish influences in the genesis of Anatolian Alevism (2010, 2020). Significant anthropological and oral history research on authority relations in the complex *ocak* system were carried out by Erdal Gezik (2013, 2025).

In earlier studies of Alevism, there has been a disproportionate focus on the Tahtacı, who were described in more publications than any other group: von Luschan 1891, Hasluck 1921, Yörükan 1930, Atabeyli 1940, Yılmaz 1948, Yetişen 1950 and 1986, Sevgen 1951b, Roux and/or Özbayrı 1964, 1970, 1972, 1987, Çağatay 1970, Kehl 1988a, Grønhaug 1974, Halk Kültürlerini Araştırma ve Geliştirme Genel Müdürlüğü 1995. Other Turkish Alevi communities and the *ocak* serving them have received much less attention, except in the general surveys by Eröz (1977), Birdoğan (1992) and Türkdoğan (1995) and some of the detailed articles in *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi* and other journals. Rıza Yıldırım's 2018 book on "traditional Alevism" (i.e., Alevism before urbanisation) is one of the few that focus on the Amasya-Tokat-Çorum-Sivas region, where the author and his collaborators carried out interviews about beliefs and practices in hundreds of Alevi villages.

The Kurdish Alevis were the object of warm interest on the part of missionary authors and later of efforts by Turkish nationalists to redefine them as security risks or as "authentic Turks" but remained on the whole long underrepresented in the scholarly literature. The balance is now being redressed by authors mostly based in the European diaspora, who have been bringing out the distinct features of Kurdish Alevism or the religion of Dersim, *Raa Haqi*: Gürdal Aksoy, Munzur Çem, Dilşa Deniz, Erdal Gezik, Ahmet Kerim Gültekin, and others. The approach of this younger generation of scholars is typically anthropological rather than literary-historical.

Endnotes

[1] There are several overviews of these missionaries' relationships with the Alevis: Hans-Lukas Kieser, "Muslim heterodoxy and Protestant utopia: The interactions between Alevis and missionaries in Ottoman Anatolia." *Die Welt des Islams* 41(1), 2001, 89-111; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "Alevilik hakkındaki 19. yüzyıl misyoner kayıtlarına eleştirel bir bakış ve Ali Gako'nun öyküsü." *Folklor / Edebiyat* VIII (29), 2002, 301-324; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The emergence of the Kızılbaş in Western thought: Missionary accounts and their aftermath." In *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage*

in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of F.W. Hasluck 1878-1920, vol. I, ed. David Shankland. Istanbul: ISIS Press, 2004, pp. 329-353; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "Reflections on the 19th century missionary reports as sources for the history of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash." *Kurdish Studies Archive* 8(1), 2020, 46-74; Zeynep Türkyılmaz, "Anxieties of conversion: missionaries, state and heterodox communities in the late Ottoman Empire." PhD thesis. Los Angeles: UCLA, 2009; Markus Dressler, "George B. Nutting: Letter to the Missionary Herald (Turkey, 1860) and Baha Said Bey: Alevi Communities in Turkey (Turkey, 1926)." In *Religious Dynamics under the Impact of Imperialism and Colonialism: A Sourcebook*, ed. Björn Bentlage et al. Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 325-338.

[2] Rıza Tevfik, known as "Feylesof Rıza", was also in close contact with Browne, who in the last volume of Gibb's History reveals their plans for a seventh volume dealing with the most modern currents of Ottoman literature, to be written by Rıza. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 Rıza became too deeply involved in public activities to continue those plans. Some of his Turkish articles of that period are collected in *Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı, Tekke ve Halk Edebiyatı Makaleleri*, ed. Abdullah Uçman. Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2015. On Rıza Tevfik's life and work, with attention to his association with the Bektashi order as well as Freemasonry, see Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes et franc-maçons en islam*. Paris: Jean Maisonneuve Editeur, 1993.

[3] On the relationship of the Young Turk and Kemalist movements with Alevi and Bektashis, see Hülya Küçük, *The Role of the Bektashis in Turkey's National Struggle*. Leiden: Brill, 2001.

[4] For the journal see: Erdal Aksoy (ed.), *Alevilik, Bektaşilik : Türk Yurdu yazıları*. Ankara: Türk Yurdu, 2018. The works by the most important observer, Baha Said, in *Türk Yurdu* and other journals, were collected and reprinted in: Baha Said Bey, *Türkiye'de Alevî-Bektaşî, Ahî ve Nusayrî zümreleri*, ed. İsmail Görkem (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2006).

[5] Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion: The Making of Turkish Alevi Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Earlier, Ahmet Karamustafa had criticised the Turkish nationalist emphasis on Central Asian origins and heterodoxy in his insightful study of the dervish milieu, *God's Unruly Friends. Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994. More recently, Ayfer Karakaya Stump has taken issue with the Köprülü paradigm, basing her arguments on her study of genealogical manuscripts in the possession of East Anatolian ocaks. See

especially Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, "The Vefa'iyye, the Bektashiyye and genealogies of "heterodox" Islam in Anatolia: rethinking the Köprülü paradigm," *Turcica* 44, 2012, 263-284, and the Introduction of her *The Kizilbash-Alevi in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics and Community*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

[6] Otyam later collected his reports in a series of books titled *Gide Gide*. Some of the Alevi-Bektashi reports were reprinted as *Hû Dost!* (Pencere Yay., 1997), others in *40 Yıl Önce 40 Yıl Sonra: Gelin Canlar Bir Olalım* (Ümit Yay., 1993).

[7] For a recent overview of anthropological fieldwork in Turkey in the 1960s, focusing mainly on US scholars, see Ali Sipahi, "An ethnographic moment in Turkey during the long 1968: Portraits of anthropologists from the Chicago circle and beyond," *Encyclopédie Bérose des histoires de l'anthropologie*, 2024, <https://www.berose.fr/article3265.html?lang=fr>. Sipahi does not mention the British anthropologist Paul Stirling, whose influential *Turkish Village* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965) was based on field research started in the 1950s and who continued revisiting his research sites in the 1970s.

[8] Mehmet Eröz, *Doğu Anadolu'nun Türklüğü*. İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını, 1975; Orhan Türkdoğan, *Alevi Bektaşi kimliği. Sosyo-antropolojik araştırma*. İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 1995.

[9] On the latter party, see the studies by Kelime Ata, *Alevilerin ilk siyasal girişi: (Türkiye) Birlik Partisi (1966-1980)*. Ankara: Kelime Yayınevi, 2007 and Sabir Güler, *Aleviliğin siyasal örgütlenmesi: modernleşme, çözülme ve Türkiye Birlik Partisi*. Ankara: Dipnot, 2008.

[10] See also this later overview of attitudes of socialist groups towards the Alevi: İbrahim Bahadır, "Devrimcilikten dervişliğe: Türkiye'de 1920 sonrası sosyalist çevrelerde Alevilik ve içerdiği anlam," in *Aleviler ve sosyalistler - Sosyalistler ve Aleviler. Bir karşılaşmanın kenar notları*, ed. Ayhan Yalçınkaya and Halil Karaçalı, pp. 86-114. Ankara: Dipnot, 2020.

[11] The journal is available online and in Open Access: <https://abked.de/index.php/abked>.

[12] Also available online and in Open Access: <https://hbvdergisi.hacibayram.edu.tr/>.

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