Ağuiçen/Ağuçan

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Summary
The Ağuiçen (or Ağuçan) Ocak is one of the most well-known Alevi ocaks (spiritual lineages) in Anatolia. It stands out due to its wide geographical spread across Central, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia and, in particular, its recognition as a 'murshid' (mürşid) ocak in the Dersim region. Historically, it belongs to the group of Alevi ocaks linked to the Vefai Sufi order originating from Iraq. The lineage of the ocak is traced back to Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn.

Keywords: Ağuçan, Ağuiçen, Dersim, Mürşit, Vefai

Ağuiçen/Ağuçan

The etymology of the name "Ağuiçen/Ağuçan" is not definitively known. According to oral tradition, the ocak was founded by four brothers. One of them, Köse Seyit, is said to have lived a celibate life without marrying. The current branches of the ocak are believed to descend from the other three brothers. A widely circulated legend tells that the youngest of the brothers, Seyyid Mençek, performed a miracle before the sultan of the time by drinking a bowl of poison and excreting it as honey from the tip of his finger.

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Hence, he was given the nickname “Ağuiçen” or “Ağuçan”, meaning “poison-drinker”. An alternative oral narrative links the origins of the ocak to Karadonlu Can Baba, one of the khalifas of Hacı Bektaş. The *Velâyetnâme* recounts a similar miracle performed by Karadonlu Can Baba. This second narrative reflects a broader trend, particularly in the 19th century, whereby certain dede ocaks in Eastern Anatolia were increasingly associated with figures mentioned in Bektashi hagiographies as the influence of the Çelebi branch of the Bektashi order over Kızılbaş-Alevi communities grew.

The historical centres of the Ağuiçen Ocak are located in the eastern and northern regions of the Euphrates River. One of the most prominent among these is the village of Sün in the central district of Elazığ, where the eldest of the founding brothers, Koca Seyit, is believed to be buried. The presence of dede families affiliated with the ocak in this village can be traced back to the early 17th century through documents preserved in the ocak’s private archive. The other three brothers later migrated to the village of Ulukale in the Çemişgezek district of Tunceli. Köse Seyit and Seyyid Mençek remained in Ulukale for the rest of their lives; a local shrine near the village is still visited in their name today. The third brother, Mir Seyyid, left Ulukale and settled in the village of Bargını (now Karabakır) in the Hozat district. The Ağuiçen Tomb located there likely belongs to him.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, some branches of the Ağuiçen Ocak spread from their historical centres in Elazığ and Tunceli to various other regions in Anatolia. This expansion appears to have been prompted by invitations from talip communities who had previously migrated westward or southward. During this period, branches of the ocak settled in Adıyaman (in the villages of Börgenek and Bulam in the Çelikhan district), in Maraş (among the followers of the Sinemilli ocak in the village of Kantarma, Elbistan), in Amasya (in the villages of Şarklı and Tencirli in the district of Göynücek), and in Malatya (in Kırlangıç village, Yeşilyurt district). The memory of this migration

from Elazığ and Tunceli remains vivid in the collective memory of the Ağuiçen dede families currently living in these regions. It is also known that dedes affiliated with the Ağuiçen Ocak reside in Nahırkıracı (present-day Şarabi) village in the Sur district of Diyarbakır, though there is no available information on when this branch of the ocak settled there. Similarly, although Ağuiçen-affiliated dedes and talip groups are also known to exist in the regions of Erzincan and Sivas, detailed information about these branches remains limited. With the possible exception of the Diyarbakır branch, the primary language spoken by the dedes and talip communities of the Ağuiçen Ocak is Kurdish. However, many have since replaced Kurdish with Turkish, and particularly among younger generations, Kurdish is no longer spoken.

Among the documents belonging to the ocak are genealogies (şecere) and certificates of authorisation (icazetname), which trace the lineage of the family to Seyyid Hamis, son of Seyyid Ganim-the brother of Ebü'l-Vefa el-Bağdadi, founder of the Vefai order. According to his hagiography, Ebü'l-Vefa's father was a sayyid descended from Imam Zayn al-'Ābidīn, while his mother was from a Kurdish tribe. Having been raised among his mother's relatives, he was also known by the epithet "el-Kürdī". It is highly likely that the Ağuiçen Ocak's murshid status within the Vefai tradition, which stemmed from their kinship ties to Ebü'l-Vefa, continued as a recognised spiritual authority even after their incorporation into the Kızılbaş movement and among other Alevi ocaks. According to family records, another line descended from Seyyid Hamis-the Zeynel Abidin Ocak based in Mineyik (now Kuyudere) village in Arguvan, Malatya-also claimed murshid status and is thought to share common ancestry with the Ağuiçen Ocak, although the two eventually evolved into separate ocaks.

Izzettin Doğan, the founder and honorary president of the Cem Foundation-one of the most prominent contemporary Alevi organisations-is affiliated with the branch of the Ağuiçen Ocak that settled in Kırlangıç village, Malatya.

Conclusion

The Ağuiçen (Ağuçan) Ocak is one of the most established Alevi ocaks in Anatolia. With historical roots in the Vefai order, it holds a central position within the Alevi spiritual hierarchy, particularly as a murshid ocak in the Dersim region. Legendary narratives suggest the name of the ocak derives from Seyyid Mençek's miracle of "drinking poison". While initially centred in Elazığ and Tunceli, the ocak has spread over time to regions such as Adıyaman, Maraş, Amasya, Malatya and Diyarbakır. Through its connections to the Vefai tradition and preserved historical documents, the Ağuiçen Ocak holds a key place within the institutional and spiritual structure of Alevism.

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