The Speaking Qur'an (Kur'an-ı Natık) and the Alevis' Relationship to the Qur'an

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Summary
In communities denoted by the umbrella term "Alevi", the saying "the bard's utterance is the Qur'an's essence" highlights how the deyiş and nefes (Alevi and Bektashi hymns) are often revered even more than the Qur'an, considered the divine utterances of God's chosen, members of the güruh-ı naci (saved community). This perspective blurs the line between revelation and inspiration, adapting the Shi'i concept of Kur'an-ı natık (Speaking Qur'an) for Alevi doctrine, where the saz is called the telli Kur'an (stringed Qur'an). Drawing from Shi'i, Sufi, and Hurufi traditions, this understanding frequently deifies Ali, equating him with the Qur'an's esoteric meaning, especially in hymns. While contemporary Alevis show varied stances towards the Qur'an, including beliefs in its falsification and its outright rejection, certain Surahs like al-Fatiha are venerated and recited in Turkish during rituals. This preference for Turkish underscores a focus on esoteric meaning, dissolving the hierarchy between the Qur'an and the words of saints, and demonstrating the Alevi belief that truth lies in the esoteric (sır), often concealed by outward reality.

Keywords: Ali, Deyiş, İlham, Inspiration, Kuran, Nefes, Qur'an, Secret, Sır

Revelation and Inspiration [1]

One of the frequently cited Alevi sayings is, "The bard's utterance is the Qur'an's essence (*Âşığın sözü, Kur'an'ın özü*)." Performed to the accompaniment of the Turkish lute (*saz*) and known under names such as *deyiş*, *nefes*, and *ayet*, Alevi and Bektashi poetry is regarded as a form of divine utterance. Alevi hymns are often held in equal or higher esteem than the Qur'an itself within their spiritual practices,

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due to the notion that they hold the Qur'an's inner meaning.

This perspective stems from the conviction that Alevis are God's chosen people, the *güruh-ı naci* (the saved community mentioned in hadith), who have maintained the true path while the rest of the Islamic community has deviated. Consequently, the *deyiş* and *nefes* are attributed to divinely chosen individuals, the "friends of God" (Perfect Men, *insan-ı kâmil*), who have relinquished their personal will to operate through Allah's agency. This understanding effectively blurs the distinction between divine revelation (*vahiy*) and spiritual inspiration (*ilham*). The Shiʿi concept of the *Kur'an-ı natık* (Speaking Qur'an), where it denotes the Imams, is thus reinterpreted within Alevi doctrine to establish a foundational principle for incorporating Alevi poetry into religious observance. Furthermore, the *saz* (Turkish lute) that accompanies poetic recitations during the *cem* ceremony is reverentially termed *telli Kur'an* (stringed Qur'an). The *deyiş* contain many references to Qur'anic verses, such as *kalu bela* (they said yes, 7:172) and *nahnu kasemna* (we have apportioned, 43:32). The Alevi-Bektashi interpretation of the Qur'an integrates elements from Shiʿi, Sufi, and Hurufi thought. While some poems highlight the unity of Muhammad and Ali, or that of the Twelve Imams, hymns and other poetic works frequently depict the deification of Ali. In these compositions, Ali is portrayed as embodying the Qur'an's deeper, esoteric meaning.

Contemporary Alevism

Contemporary Alevis exhibit a diverse range of attitudes towards the Qur'an. It is important to note the prevalent belief in the Qur'an's falsification among some Alevis, in addition to opinions opposing the Qur'an. On the other hand, even when the extant Qur'an is not revered in its entirety, specific Surahs and verses retain their sacred status and are incorporated into Alevi rituals, most often recited in Turkish. Among these, the *Surat al-Fatiha* and the Verse of Light (24:35) are the most common. This preference for Turkish reflects a profound emphasis on esoteric meaning, where the

divine message itself is equated with its underlying significance. This leads to a perspective that once again dissolves the hierarchical difference between the Qur'an and the word of the saint.

Conclusion

The sacrality of Alevi hymns stems from the sacrality of the singer-poet (*âşık*) and their community, who hold the capacity to unveil, interpret, and embody the Qur'an's inner meaning. The Alevi comprehension of the Qur'an thus illustrates a distinctively Alevi perspective on the interplay between the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*bâtın*), where truth (*hakikat*) invariably resides in the esoteric, in the *sırr* (secret). The outward appearance of reality is frequently perceived as an obstacle, a veil that must be pierced.

Ey sufi nutkuma gel eyle iman
Her sözüm Mevla'nın sözü gibidir
Tıpkı bana benzer Hazret-i Sübhan
İşte yüzüm anın yüzü gibidir

(Edib Harabi, *Edib Harâbî Dîvânı (Karşılaşmalı Metin)*, ed. Yıldız Balaban, Master's Thesis, İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi, 2017, p. 349)

Endnotes

[1] This entry has been prepared on the basis of the author's forthcoming work: "The Speaking Qur'an in Alevism: Poetry and the Word of God." In Esotericism and the Qur'an / L'ésotérisme et le Coran, edited by Wissam Halawi and Bruce Fudge.

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