



Saturday Recordings and Reimbursement Documents

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Summary

Ras el Seni and Kiddes are two significant ritual days celebrated among Arab Alevis living in the regions of Antakya, Adana, and Mersin in Turkey, expressing the calendrical cycle, collective memory, and continuity of belief. Ras el Seni is celebrated on January 14 according to the Gregorian calendar (the first day of the year according to the Rumi calendar) and symbolizes the beginning of the new year. This day stands out as a ritual period during which social solidarity is reinforced, kinship and neighborhood relations are renewed, special foods are prepared and shared, and practices of mutual celebration are carried out. Kiddes, celebrated in the days following Ras el Seni, is associated with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River and is shaped around themes of purification, abundance, and renewal. Within this context, symbolic relationships with nature (such as the sacred significance attributed to olive and fig trees, and rituals performed with water and plants) occupy a prominent place. Both rituals serve a central function in Arab Alevism in terms of the sacralization of time, the re-establishment of the relationship between nature and belief, and the reinforcement of social cohesion. In this respect, Ras el Seni and Kiddes are not only calendrical celebrations but are also regarded as fundamental ritual practices that enable the intergenerational transmission of belief, culture, and collective identity.

Keywords: Arap Alevi, Hrise, Hriset el Louvz, Kibbeh, Kiddes, Ras el Seni, Yemek Kültürü

Ras el Seni[1]

Among Arab Alevis, there are many celebrations, ceremonies, and festivals that sustain collective memory and social togetherness. *Ras el Seni* is one of them and may be rendered in Turkish as “New Year.” *Ras el Seni* falls on January 14 according to the Gregorian calendar and on January 1 according to the Rumi calendar, that is, the first day of the year. Celebrated in a festive atmosphere, *Ras el Seni* may be regarded as one of the symbols of social transmission, customs, and traditions. Some time before this date, lengthy and gradual preparations are made, and foods specific to the day are prepared. These foods are offered to

visiting guests and relatives.

On this date, *Hrise*, regarded in Arab Alevism as one of the most special and sacred foods of the festivals, is also prepared and distributed, and family members, neighbors, and relatives visit one another. Those who are far away are called and exchanged greetings, one of which is expressed as follows: “*Ras el Seni mbarek 3aleykoun, ila dinna va imanna. Koul 3am bi elf kheyir*”[2] (Happy New Year to you; may it be blessed for our religion and our faith. May every year be with a thousandfold peace and □□□ [goodness].)

Celebratory Foods and Practices

Arab Alevis who come together for celebration and festive greetings prepare large tables with foods specific to this day, such as *Hrise* (a dish made by pounding and cooking meat and wheat for many hours in large cauldrons over a wood fire with large spoons), *Kibbeh* (stuffed meatballs), *Biberli Ekmek* (spiced flatbread), *Ma3moul* (a kind of spiced festive cookie), *Ka3ke* (Antakya pastry, a kind of spiced bun), *Hriset el Louvz* (a kind of semolina dessert with different versions), *Zleybe* and *Sambouske* (fried dough with different versions, which may be preferred either filled, such as with meat, or unfilled), candied pumpkin dessert, *Moushabbak* (ring-shaped dessert), and *Kaytaz* pastry. These tables constitute a mosaic-like example of sharing and cultural transmission. Young children kiss the hands of their elders, and children are given pocket money and sweets.

Sacred places (*ziyara*-visitation sites) are circumambulated, or people enter the visitation site where *bakhkhur*, a type of incense, is burned inside; prayers are offered and wishes are made so that the year may pass well and bring peace and health.

Kiddes

Ras el Seni is celebrated by Arab Alevis in Antakya, Adana, and Mersin in Turkey. The practices, rituals, traditional foods, and visits carried out throughout this celebration are

also performed by some members of the community-in certain villages and regions-on the day of *Kıddes*, which falls five days after *Ras el Seni*, on January 19 according to the Gregorian calendar. While *Ras el Seni* symbolizes deliverance from the □□□ [oppression] of Pharaoh, the new year, and the beginning of the era of Moses, *Kıddes* is the day on which Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River and symbolizes abundance and purification. On the day of *Kıddes*, alongside practices similar to those of *Ras el Seni*, there are also different applications. For example, on the night of *Kıddes*, soil is scattered onto olive trees so that they may be abundant. In addition, basil (blueberry leaf), olive leaves, and bay leaves are placed in a bowl of water at night, and hair is combed in the morning with the water in this bowl; it is believed that the hair will become abundant and healthy.

It is also believed that, during the baptism of Jesus, birds and the olive and fig trees bore witness to it and prostrated themselves. For this reason, it is thought that every year on the day of *Kıddes*, olive and fig trees remain in prostration throughout the night. According to the narrative, because it is believed that the trees that prostrate at night will stand upright again in the morning, animals and similar things are not tied to their branches.

Conclusion

Both *Ras el Seni* and *Kıddes* are examples of coming together, of cultural and faith-based commonalities, of social celebrations, collective memory, and symbolic rituals. *Ras el Seni* is celebrated on January 14 according to the Gregorian calendar, while *Kıddes* is celebrated on January 19. During these celebrations, tables are prepared, festive greetings are exchanged, and certain rituals are performed. These may be considered reflections of the role of shared tables and narratives in sustaining and transmitting social togetherness, of the importance of wishes and sustained traditions in the construction of identity and belief, and of shared sacredness.

Endnotes

[1] The details in this entry have been acquired through long years of transmission, observation, and research conducted as a researcher who belongs to the Arab Alevi community and was raised within this belief, identity, and culture. The Arabic expressions are oral transmissions heard and witnessed during festivals and celebrations, and passed down through family members and relatives, as recorded by a researcher who is bilingual in both mother tongues. Many practices, such as visiting relatives, exchanging festive greetings, preparing food, and sharing it during the celebrations, have also been and continue to be personally experienced by the author. The images included in the entry are likewise photographs taken by the author during these practices and while the foods were being prepared. Instead of a bibliography, this entry relies directly on personal experience, oral history transmissions, and participant observation techniques employed in the author's MA and PhD research.

[2] Arabic expressions have a standard form of writing in Latin letters. In the expression, "3" corresponds to the Arabic sound 'ayn, a guttural sound that has no equivalent in the Latin alphabet. Similar cases also exist. For example, the writing of Arabic in Latin letters as "kh" corresponds to a thick, guttural "h" sound, which is also represented in Kurdish as "X" and pronounced differently. These forms are known among Arabic-literate Arabs who prefer to use Latin transcription.

References & Further Reading

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