



Transmitting the Tradition: An Analysis on Master-Disciple Relationship in Alevi Community of Turkey

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Abstract

The phenomenon called "Globalization" has been discussed within the all social science. For almost of all Anthropologists, the global issues cannot be avoidable to conduct their ethnographic researches in any fields. Globalization is a process of international integration arising from the interchange of products, ideas and other aspect of culture. After 1990's the interpretation of a complex set of disputes and exigencies settled into a conventional narrative of paradigm shift, in which the intellectual past became essentialized as "traditional Area Studies" and "Classic Anthropology." A Crucial theme is that the global/local nexus is one of unpredictable interaction and creative adaptation, not of top-down determinism. Theoretically, globalization studies have become the focal point for the convergence of interpretive Anthropology, critical Anthropology, postmodernism, and post-structuralism, which are combined with a tough empiricism.

In this paper, I examine the relationship between master and disciple in the Alevi community in Turkey from the framework of Anthropology of Globalization. Traditionally Alevi Dede gives their disciples religious traditions and practices such like how to organize Cem ceremony and other rituals. To transmit their religious knowledge, religious masters called Dede visits villages where Alevi consist of the majority of the population. Then Dede give his disciple called Talip some kind of religious education. In the past Alevi communities in Anatolian villages were generally situated in remote areas where the infrastructure was not sufficiently installed. Even in Alevi villages there were no Dede.

However, the situation has changed within the recent two decades. People can access to the remote areas by transportation system and internet access is also available everywhere in the countryside. In this paper, I try to reveal the current situation of master-disciple relation of Alevi community and describe how they transmit some kind of religious education to their disciples in the global era through an Anthropological analysis. At the same time, I investigate the whole of social change in Alevi communities in Turkey.

Keywords: Alevi communities, Dede, Anatolia

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Introduction

The Alevi population consists of a sizable proportion of the Republic's population – it is not clear exactly because the census does not ask for detailed religious affiliation. Nevertheless, one may suppose that there are between ten and fifteen million Alevis in Turkey today¹. There are both Kurdish and Turkish in terms of ethnic background, and they are from the religious point of view markedly “heterodox”. They emphasise Ali within their ritual obeisance, and are markedly mystical in their interpretation of Islam's creed (Shankland, 2006: 81).

In the past, the difference of the religious approach has often led the Alevis to be persecuted by the Sunnis. The situation is more complicated however, in that whereas only a proportion of the Sunni population are persuaded by the Republic secular reforms, the vast majority of the Alevi population support them strongly. In part this is because they appear to offer the possibility of full citizenship without discrimination by religion. The way that the Alevi's understanding of religion has adopted and changed, parallels the Republican reformulation of Islam. In other words, they have been prepared to internalise their faith, to regard religion as primarily a question of private moral values, and are not at all interested in reorganising society along the lines of a religious model.

The Alevis are traditionally almost entirely rural. In a rapidly modernising Anatolia, they do not appear to have created their own centres. With the sole exception perhaps of Hacibektaş, a small town in the central Anatolia. Many Alevis regard as the resting place of their founding saint, they in no case form the majority of the inhabitants of a town (and even in that case they do not form the majority of the government officials within the town). Instead, they form sub-sections of the larger towns dominated by the Sunni form of mosque-worship, living in their own distinct parts of the community, in often rather uneasy relationship with the rest of the town.

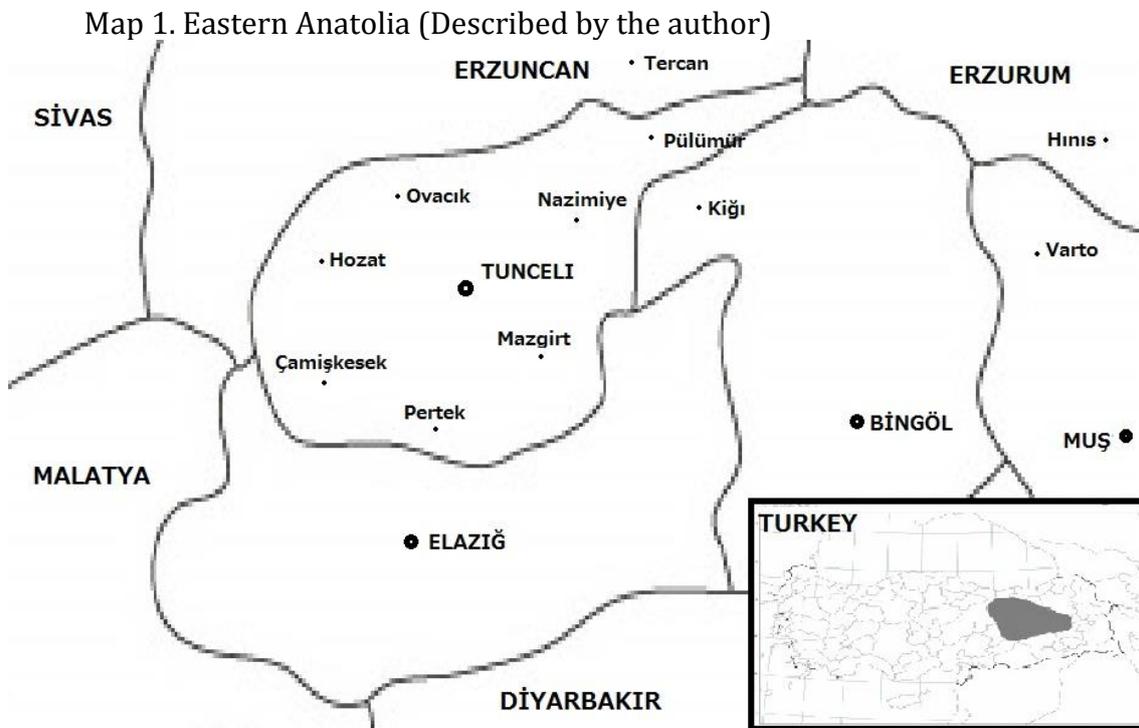
However, it seems from a most suggestive article by Bumke, that Kurdish Alevis suffer twice over. By being neither ethnically nor religiously part of the dominating group Sunni, Turkish group, many appear to turn to extreme socialism, they appear to be the largest refugee community from Turkey, in Europe particularly Germany. In Turkey, along with their Sunni-Kurdish counterparts, they ap-

¹ As David Shankland mentioned that the question of the absolute number of Alevis in Turkey is extremely difficult, because there are so many claims and counter-claims. Based partly on his detailed research of one particular area and partly on general (though of course much more limited) experience of Turkey as a whole. His own thought is that the vast majority of popular claims, which may suggest that the Alevis are up to 30 per cent of Turkey's population, are exaggerated. It is perhaps overlooked that there are great regions of Turkey where there are no Alevis at all. Of course, until a reliable survey has been conducted, all such Turkey's population (in the region of 70 millions), even if the figure does turn out to be nearer 15 percent. It would still mean that there are nine million Alevis in the Republic, a mass easily large enough to be of highly significant social and political importance (Shankland, 2006: 81).

pear to be increasingly crammed into ghettoised communities in the outskirts of Istanbul and other large cities (Bumke, 1989). According to van Bruinessen's notion, he uses the term "Kurdish Alevi" as shorthand for all Kurmanci- and Zaza-speaking Alevi, irrespective of whether they define themselves as Kurds or not (van Bruinessen, 1997: 2).

The identity of the Kurdish Alevi is defined primarily through religion, secondary by tribal definition, and thirdly through language. Affinities with other, Kurdish speaking Alevi are perceived as being greater than those with Sunni Kurds, permitting occasional intermarriage and substantiated through a set of ritual practices carried out with the Turkish liturgy. The same polarity between Alevi and Sunnis exists among Kurds as among the Turks. This was demonstrated when Sunni Kurds helped the Turks suppress the Alevi revolt in Dersim (the province of Tunceli with the adjacent districts of Tercan sub-province in the province of Erzincan and Kiğı sub-province in the province of Bingöl) in 1916 (Bumke, 1989).

The heartland of the Kurdish Alevi consists of Dersim. The Dersimis, themselves, perceive a cultural difference between the Zaza-speaking tribes of western Dersim (Ovacık and Hozat with part of Çemişgezek and Pertek), and the Dersimi tribes proper of eastern Dersim (Pülümür, Nazımiye, Mazgirt), and among whom are both Zaza and Kurmanci speakers (van Bruinessen, 1997: 3-4).



Further west, we find another important Kurdish Alevi population: the Koçgiri tribal confederation, in and around Sivas. The Koçgiri claim a relationship with

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the tribes of western Dersim, although they presently speak a Kurmanci dialect instead of a Zaza dialect. There are several other small Zaza- and Kurmanci speaking enclaves in Sivas, who also claim Dersimi origins. Another indication of their relationship with Dersim Alevi is the presence of *seyit* (notably Kureyşan) living in their midst. Kureyşan, perhaps the most important *seyit* lineage of the Dersimi Alevi, have the largest concentration in Mazgirt and Nazımiye, but there are also sections of them in Kiğı, Hınıs and Varto, Pülmür, and Sivas (van Bruinessen, 1997: 4-5).

The aim of this article is to offer a contrasting analysis of the saint veneration of the Prophet's family and of the religious ritual practice in the Kurdish Alevi Community in Eastern Anatolia. In order to do this, it avails itself greatly of the work of Professor Matin van Bruinessen.

Van Bruinessen's work is perhaps particularly appropriate for an analytic study in that the length of his research is quite unparalleled in Kurdish ethnographic work. He conducted his first study in 1974, travelling around Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey¹. This was the basis of his doctoral thesis, of a number of articles². Conditions, then, were often difficult; the winter that he spent in the village was ferocious. The village had no paved roads and the track it did have, was often blocked by snow; running water and electricity had not yet been installed.

The Alevi in Varto Sub-Province

I have conducted field research in Varto a sub-province of eastern Anatolia, living in one rural community for a period of years between 2006 and 2008. Unlike van Bruinessen, the conditions I experienced were not difficult. The whole village had running water and an electricity supply that was intermittent but enough for radio, television, and light. The road, though not then paved, was possible for motor transport for all, but one or two days of the year. Even internet access was available for almost of all villagers; they could communicate with their relatives living in the big cities in Turkey, and in the migrant communities of Europe.

There has emerged prominent popular movements such as that of membership in a religious brotherhood, nominally banned, but now tolerated as a Cultural Association (Kültür Derneği) in the Republic of Turkey. The Alevi have in recent years organised this Cultural association within the country, as well as among migrant communities in Europe. At the same time, Alevi intellectuals and community leaders have set out to define the Alevi ritual, tradition, history and tenets. For instance, the place of Alevi worship *cemevi* in the centre of Varto was established by the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association in Ankara.

¹ He submitted the doctoral thesis titled *Ağa, Şeyh and the State: Social and Political Structure in Kurdistan* to Utrecht University. See van Bruinessen

² See van Bruinessen (1991; 1992; 1995; 1996; 2003)

The dispersed small communities' hierarchy between men, mystical religious tenets, close link between master and disciple and the closed religious rituals are an admirable way to maintain social control in an isolated rural society but do not modernize easily. In these individual preoccupation groups, the religious leaders lose importance and the descent groups which are essential to the organization of religion in village life cease to be relevant to their lives.

In the sub-province where I worked, there are ninety-seven villages centred on the sub-province centre. Alevi and Sunni largely live apart from one another: there are forty-nine Alevi villages and forty-six Sunni villages. Another two villages consist of both Sunnis and Alevis. There is little inter-marriage between the Sunnis and the Alevis, and even in the two villages of mixed sectarian population, each sect lives in separate village quarters. Nearly all of these things are different from the Alevi village that I studied and similarly, the others in its immediate vicinity. The Alevi villages are in the northern part of Varto sub-province, and the Sunni villages are in the south of sub-province centre in general.

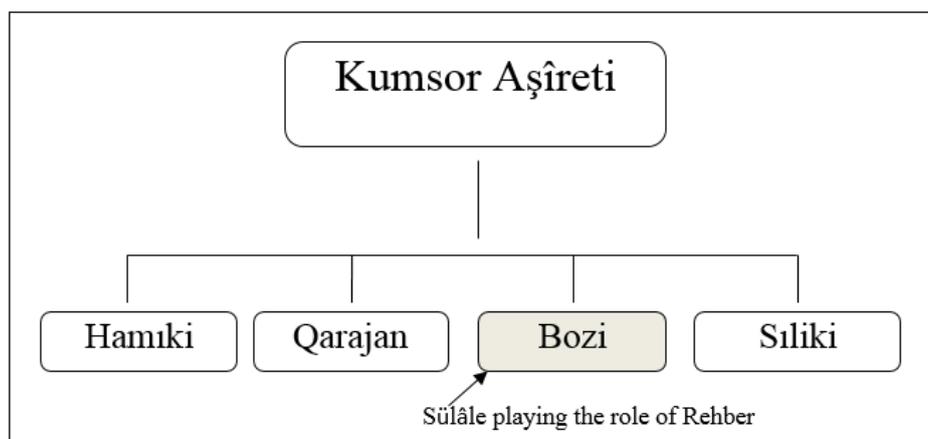
Almost all Alevi communities belong to specific tribal sections such as Lolan, Hormek and Kumsor. The villagers say that these tribal groups are relatives with each other and that they differentiate themselves from Sunni Kurds surrounding their communities. A village invariably consists of more than one village quarter, or *mahalle*: Taşçı has four mahalles, each nucleated, and none containing more than fifty households. Villagers living in Taşçı belong to the Kumsor tribe. Kumsor (Kızılbaş in Turkish) means "Red head" which derived from Safavid Dynasty of 16. century.

In case of the Taşçı village where I worked, all of the villagers are members of the Kumsor tribe. The Kumsor tribe has four family groups (*Sülâle*). Bozi *Sülâle* traditionally plays a religious role in the community as a religious guide (*Rehber dede*) who is appointed by the *Pir dede* outside the village (see Figure 1). Villagers of another *Sülâle* are pupils called "*talep*".

Traditional spiritual leaders of the Alevi people, known as *Pir dede*, are defined as descendents of the Holy Lineage (*Ehl-i Beyt*), the *Pir dedes* obtaining their spiritual power by claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad through one of the Twelve Imams. It is very important for the *Pir dedes* to be descendants of the "Forty Anatolian Saints" (*Anadolu 40 Erenleri*). In the case of Varto, almost all *Pir dedes* claimed to be descendants of Hacı Kureyş.

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Figure 1. The Structure of Aşîret and Sülâle in Taşçı village (Described by the autor)



Ocak: the Genealogy of Ehl-i Beyt

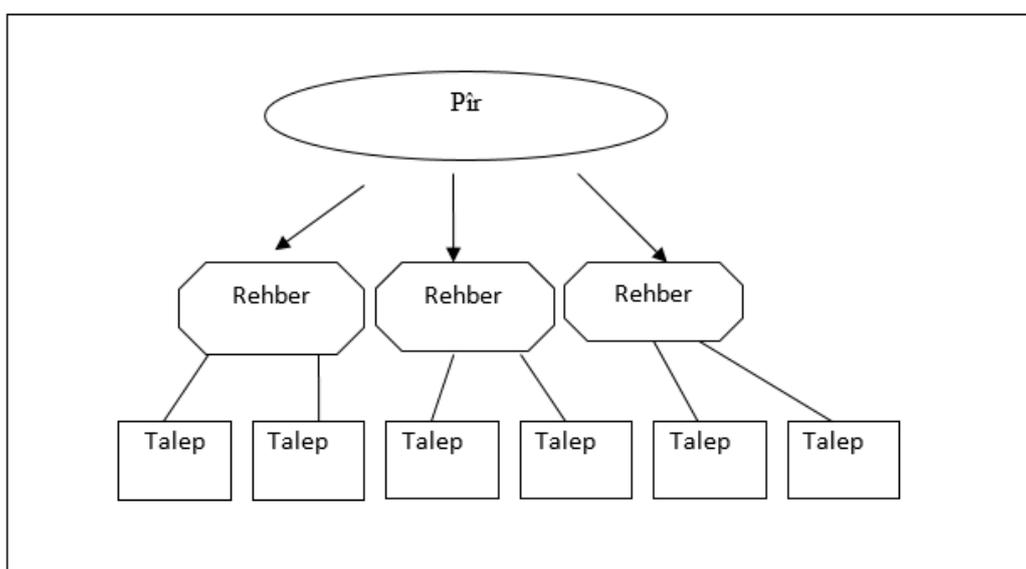
Among the various internal boundaries which criss-cross Kurdish Alevi society and which allow (or oblige) it's members to be categorised according to gender, generation, membership of a particular family/household, tribal segment, village, tribal confederation. The only one is described by Alevi villagers in religious term the *seyit* (Holy man), traditionally the central focus of their religious organisation and practice. They are, by virtue of their presentations to descent from one of the Twelve Imams, believed to be endowed with miraculous powers (*Keramet*) and with knowledge of the "Way (*Yol*)" of the Alevis.

Therefore they are set apart from the mass of ordinary villagers belonging to one of the other of few dozen tribes (*aşîret*) in Tunceli. Relations between aşîret-household and *seyit* (who must ideally be endogamous) are hereditary on both sides. *seyit* lineages have parcelled out among themselves in the entire Kurdish Alevi population. Each segment being allotted a set of groups of *talep* in several *aşîret* to whom they function as *rehber* (who they introduce to faith), and another set to whom they are *Pir* (who lead along the Way, by mediation of disputes, prayer etc.).

Since *seyit* tends to live close to their *talep*, members of the dozen or so Kurdish *seyit* lineages have spread, originating as they say from Tunceli, and setting in the entire area inhabited by Kurdish Alevis. Moreover *seyit* in turn are also linked to a *rehber* and a *pir*, the former being *pir*, the latter *mürşit* or *pir-i-piran* to their own *talep*. This network encompasses the whole of Kurdish Alevi society, with nodal points in some *seyit*, who being recognised as particularly endowed with *keramet*, stand out from among other *seyit*.

The Alevi society is not all born equal. Alevi society has three distinct ranks, in the region where I worked. In descending order: *Pir* (*Seyit*), *Rehber* and *talep*¹ (see Figure 2). These ranks are distributed on the basis of the patrilineage (*Sülâle*) into which people are born. Alevi lineages are usually shallow: they rarely have more than fifty households and often far fewer. Many households have migrated, but about thirty of the hundred households remaining in Taşçı are regarded as being part of this *Rehber* lineage.

Figure 2. Ocak: Master-Disciple Relation (Described by the author)



All but four of the forty-nine neighbouring Alevi villages also possess *seyit* lineages. No single founding figure is held as ancestor of all the *seyit* but *pir* may trace patrilineal ties with certain other local *seyit* lineages, thus forming a network of holy lineages linked by descent; only very rarely do non-*rehber* lineages trace such lateral descent ties. All lineages, whether *rehber* or not, are subordinate to a particular *rehber* lineage. Villagers refer to the subordinate lineages as *talep*. A *talip* lineage is never beholden to more than one *rehber* lineage. A *rehber* lineage however, may have many *talep* lineages. The most renowned *rehber* lineage (Bozi) in Taşçı has *taleps* in many local villages perhaps encompassing forty lineages in total (see Figure 3).

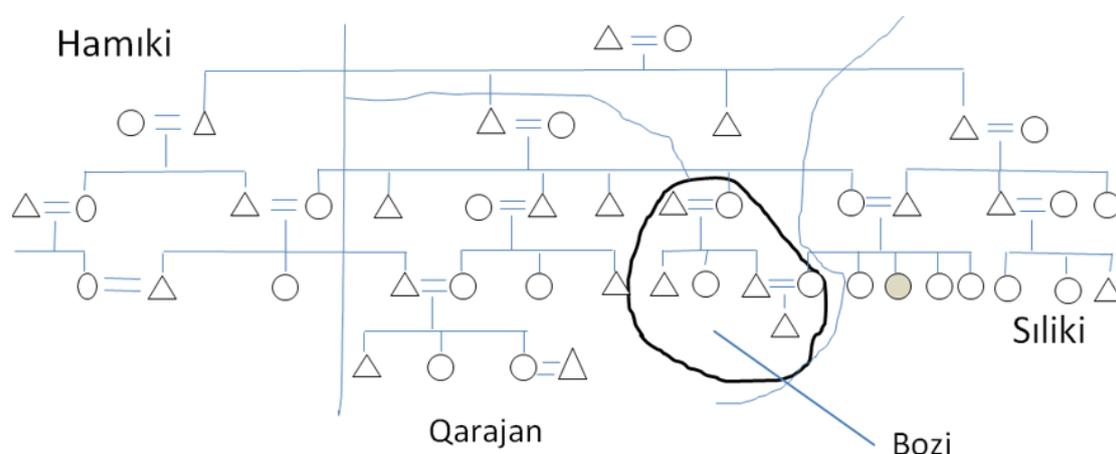
Unlike the Turkish Alevi's case, all the Alevi of the area in which I worked, whether dedes (included *pîr* and *rehber*) or not, do not regard themselves as affli-

1 The terminology varies slightly in different parts of Anatolia. Bumke (1989), Gökalp (1960; 1989), Mélikoff (1975), Yalçın (1989) and Shankland (2003) provide accounts of life in Alevi villages. Allowing for these differences in nomenclature, they appear to support the ethnography that I offer here.

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ated to the Bektashi tarikat. However, many go as far as to say that there is no difference between Alevi and Bektasi teachings. Their prayers and songs often celebrate Haci Bektasi Veli, saying that he is their *pir*, saint. They venerate a number of men as being the descendants of Haci Bektas Veli himself. Though there are no *seyit* living in Taşçı, there are some just only *rehbers*.

Figure 3. Ocak: Sülâle Relationship in Taşçı Village (Described by the author)



Ideally, the leaders of the Alevis are the *Pir*, the true descendants of *Ehl-i Beyt*. However, as they live far from the village and come rarely, in practice their duties fall to the *dedes*, who are accepted as being their local representatives, *rehber*. Often, *rehber* lineage claims also a certain independent degree of sanctity. For example, one lineage claims that it is descended from a follower of Ahmet Yesevi's school in Horasan. Lineages may also claim that they are bestowed with *keramet*, the ability, given by God, to perform miracles. The *dede's* duties are usually summed up as to 'enlighten', *aydınlalma*, according to the teachings of the Alevi/Kizilbas way. This embraces both spiritual and temporal authority; only *dedes*, are permitted to pronounce Alevi prayers or lead Alevi ceremonies and, within the overall framework of the religious ideology, they are given the authority to mediate in dispute.

Tribal genealogies are differentiated into *Seyit* and non-*Seyit*, certain *Seyit* families have established the customary right to provide religious leaders: they must ideally be endogamous to maintain this status. The remaining population is bound to them by a declaration of faith, as *talip*, "aspirants", through a *Seyit*, *Rehber* "Guide", who is responsible in turn to a "*Pir* (elder)". Those Kurdish Alevis living outside Tunceli are guided by a *rehber* living in the neighbourhood. This resource to the *Evlâd-ı Resûl*, "descendants of the Prophet" thus serves to unite the group,

and replaces a common tribal genealogy. What this is, is a group nothing more than *Ocak*.

Tribal allegiance formally demonstrated by a tribute to an *aşîret reisi* “chief”, have now weakened due to the loss of these leaders’ political authority, though tribal differences are still celebrated in an epic tradition. The close ties between religions and temporal authority have led to a disaffection of the younger generation from the religious hierarchy, with a concomitant readjustment of religious commitment within the community towards an egalitarian brotherhood. They find, however, that this is repudiated by outsiders who, from a Sunni point of view, still regard them as deviants.

In a rather different way than the tribes, with their emphasis on active opposition and conflicting traditional Alevi views, communities achieved their opposition by being largely closed to the outside world. Unlike the Sunnis, they live in communities which are largely spread apart, each individual settlement usually smaller than those of the Sunni; a number of which are gathered together and defined a ‘village’ by the state. Their social organisation is hierarchical. About 10 percent of men are regarded as being different from others by virtue of their birth into holy lineage. Known as *pîr*, these men lead collective religious rituals which are forbidden to those who are not themselves Alevi. They also act as mediators in disputes, either within the framework of religious rituals, or when invited to do so by their followers (*talep*).

As in the case of Taşçı, if there are no *pir* in the village, villagers invite the *pir* from *seyit* village. The *seyit (pir)* of Taşçı village is Hıdır dede. In the village, Hıdır dede gives a rehber who is a male member of Bozi the right to lead the ritual practices and to mediate the disputes between villagers. Of course, when Hıdır dede himself is in the village, he organises the ritual practices and mediates the disputes.

Hıdır dede is a descendant of Hacı Kureyş. Hacı Kureyş is descended from Musa-i Kâzım. It means that he is descended from *Ehl-i Beyt* (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

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Figure 4. The Genealogy of Hacı Kureyş (Described by the author)

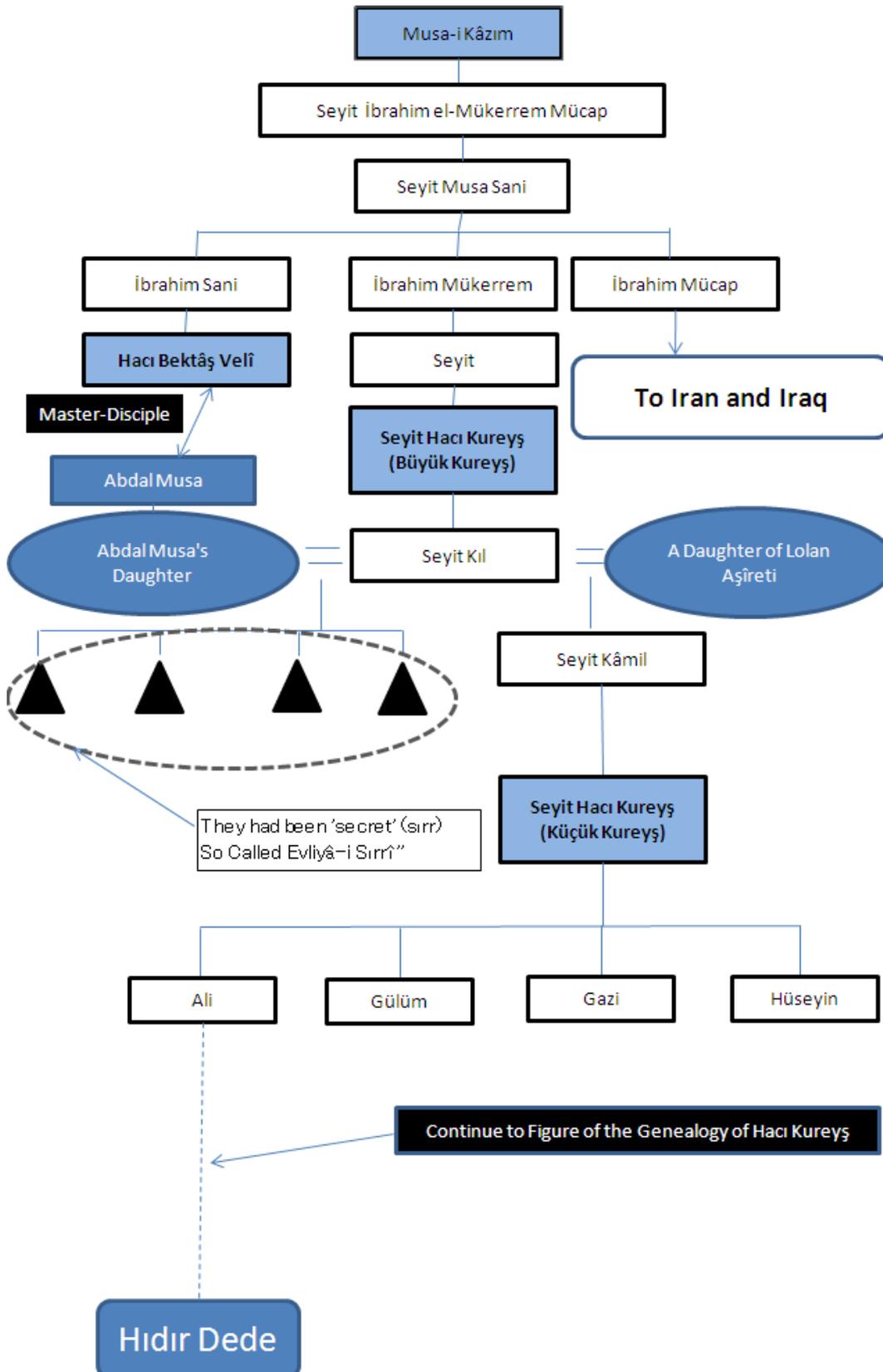
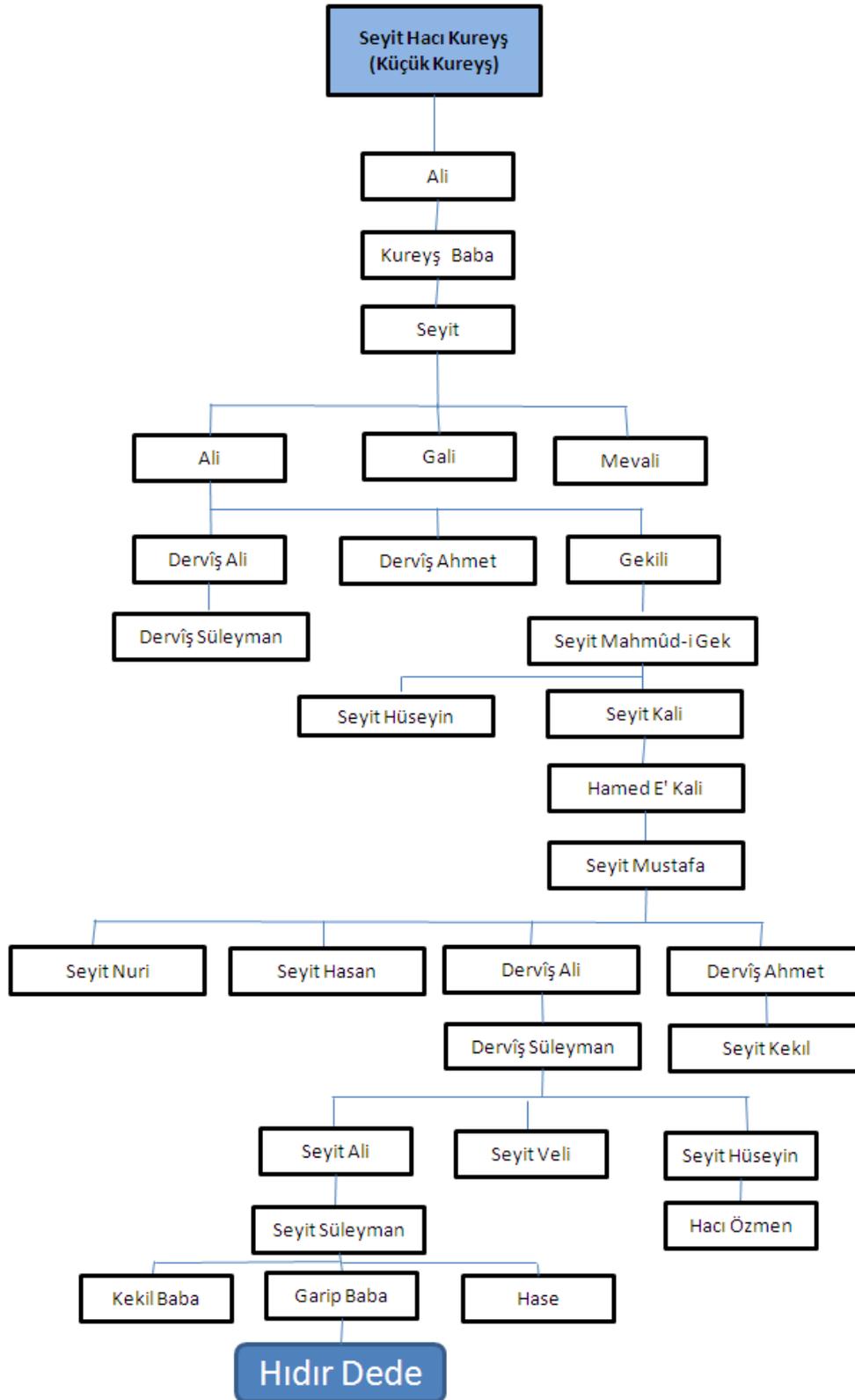


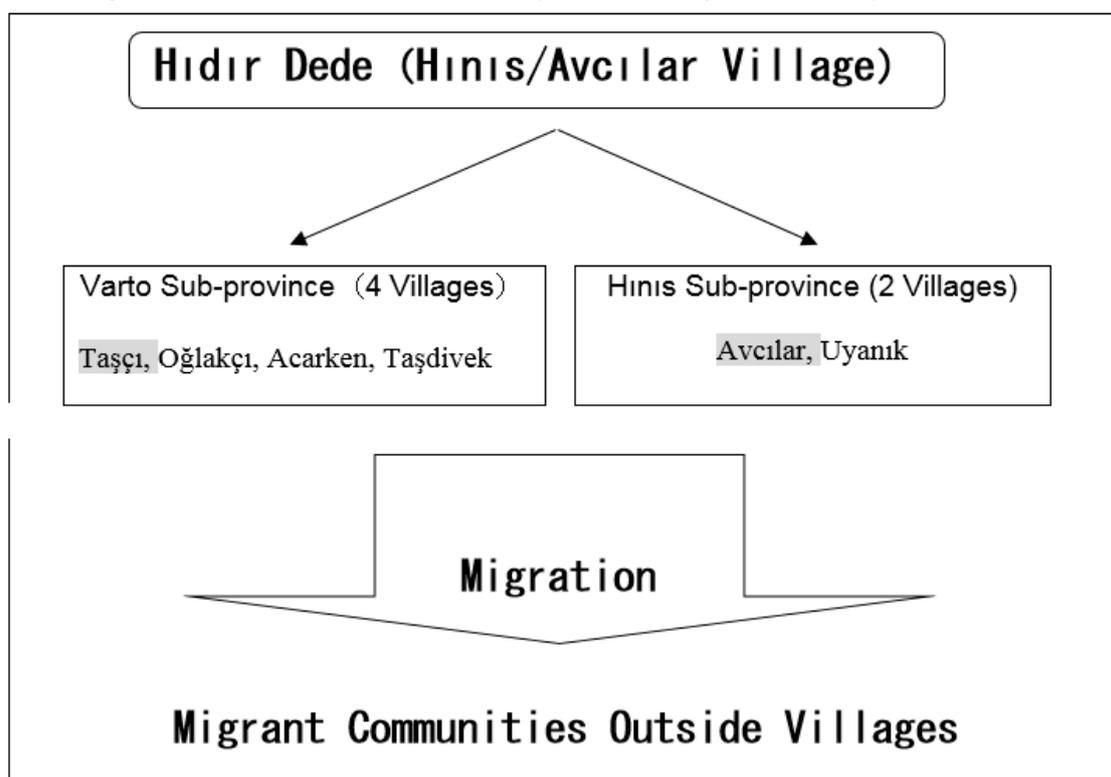
Figure5. The Gelealogy of Hıdır Dede (Described by the author)



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He selects one *rehber* from *taleps* of his *ocak* members in each village. His *ocak* is composed of six villages in Varto and Hınıs sub-provinces (see Figure 6). Relations between *pir*, *rehber* and *talep* are also governed by descent; a whole lineage is a follower to a whole *pir* lineage. Even *pir* lineages must follow another *pir* lineage, meaning there is an overlapping sequence of followers and religious leaders across the countryside.

Figure 6. The Ocak of Hıdır Dede (Described by the author)



The *seyit* lineages regard themselves as descendants from a founder distinguished in the eyes of God possessing *keramet*. *Keramet* is sometimes literally translated as ‘charisma’. In the context used by an Alevi, it is used to mean favoured by God, by virtue of being able to perform a miracle, as observed in Sufism in general. The oral history of *Seyit* lineages invariably includes one or more episodes in which a male figure has performed such a feat. The distribution of these lineages varies: a village quarter consists only of *Seyit* lineages, on other occasions a *Seyit* lineage lives in a village quarter where the other residents are not *Seyit*. Often, a particular *Seyit* lineage claims descent from other similar *Seyit* lineages in the area, forming a network of related lineages laterally across the countryside (see Figure 6).

Every lineage, whether a *Seyit* lineage or not, possesses a *Seyit* lineage with whom they were defined as *talep*. At one level, to be a *talep* implies to be in a rela-

tion of subordination and respect. In practice, a *talep* lineage may call in a *dede* to mediate in quarrels between them, or another lineage. He may also be requested to mediate in marriage negotiations, and if widely respected, requested to comment on matters of significance to the community as a whole. The *Seyits* themselves characterise their task to be: the way, the light, and the inspiration to a community. They sometimes refer to themselves as *rehber* (guide), whilst their followers may refer to their *ocak*, 'hearth'; with implications of being the source of light and warmth of a household.

Religious Ceremonial: Cem

The *ocak* as a ritual group implies a relationship between the master and disciple. Usually, Hıdır dede has more than forty *rehbers*. Each *rehbers* has about thirty *taleps* (four or five families, or *Aile*) around countryside and migrant communities in Europe. *Rehbers* do not need to be descended from the *seyit* lineage but they need to be appointed by a *pîr*. Members of a ritual group have a kinship (*Akraba*) within a village [Figure 3].

On Thursday, the people practice the *Cem* ceremonial at a place of worship called *Cemevi*, in the village. However, as in a case such as Taşçı, not all villages have *Cemevi*, in which case, people often come to the centre of the Varto sub-province to attend the *Cem*. This religious ceremonial is constantly took place at Central *Cemevi* (*Merkez Cemevi*). Only *dedes* descended from the *seyit* lineage are permitted to organise *Cem* rituals.

The Alevis, for example, do not give great importance to praying in a mosque. Whilst they may respect the Qur'an deeply, they rarely draw on it for textual exegesis, claiming that God is already present within all people. They are fond of music, poetry and dance, which they use in both sacred and secular settings.

The principal religious ceremony of the Alevis is the *cem*. At the time that I was researching, in the village there was no special building where a *cem* might be held instead it, but, took place rather in the largest room of Bozi family's house. One couple, a man and a woman, should attend from every household of the village. Worship is not permitted unless all present are at peace with each other.

Accordingly, before the ceremony begins, the presiding *dede* asks whether there is any disagreement. If there are people who have a quarrel with each other, they must come forward to the centre, known as *Ali'nin meydanı* (Ali's Space). As they kneel, the *dede* questions them on their conduct. If others wish to speak, they may do so and heated discussion. After due reflection, the *dede* suggests an appropriate redress. His solution must be approved by all who are present; otherwise the problem is not regarded as settled.

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Religious ceremonial is centred on one main ritual: the *cem*, where both men and women are present. Whilst long and complex, it marks in part the martyrdom of Hüseyin, and peaks in a slow stepping dance, the 'Sema of the Forty,' which celebrates the passing of the mystical secrets to the Alevi from God through Ali. The religious (and theological) aspects of this ritual are rich and interesting. It is significant to note that this ceremony cannot take place unless all present are on speaking terms with all others in the room. In the event of there being disputants, they come forward and kneel on a rug spread in front of the community (*Ali'nin Meydanı*). They face the *dede*, who attempts to bring them to peace. Not with punitive measure, but attempting to encourage people to forgive, to forget, and if necessary, to make amends for their wrong doing. The villagers say that only by praying face to face, and only by being at peace, can they have access to God, a small part of whom lies deep within all.

These dispersed, quiescent communities, closed to the outside world, have local leaders and their own specialised regulatory mechanisms that are modernised only with difficulty. Problems include state requirements saying each village must appoint a village head, a *muhtar*, who will act as a link between the provincial and sub-provincial administration, and the village. Unlike the Sunni Turkish village, in an Alevi village this creates a distinct rival to the *dede*, a source of conflict and disagreement between the representative of national power of the state and the established hierarchy. The closed, face-to-face rituals are ideally suited to resolving conflicts within communities whose social links, economy and possessions are largely coterminous with the village quarters' boundary but are increasingly unable to cope with economic and social links which spread throughout Turkey and even further afield.

The *dedes* are rightly regarded as one of the keys to Alevi society: they are at once its focus, its teachers, temporal judges and links to their religious heritage. From the individual's point of view, however, Aleviness can be more focused. All the villagers were quite clear that to be Alevi was encapsulated in the saying;

'Eline, diline, beline sahip ol'

'Be master of your hands, tongues and loins'.

Glosses on this vary, through the most frequent is 'Do not take what is not yours, do not lie, and do not make love outside marriage'. The phrase is well-known within mystical Islam, where it is called *edep*, the Alevi are distinctive in that they have made it part of the very core of their concept of religious fulfilment.

The Alevi further characterise their way of life through a series of comparisons against the Sunni communities with which they are surrounded. The principal Alevi ceremony is the *cem*, at which both men and women worship together. The

cem celebrates several things at once; its core rituals symbolise the martyrdom of Hüseyin at the Kerbela, but they also include music and interpretation of key themes within Alevi doctrine, such as the *edep* philosophy.

The ceremonies may last for several hours, and one of features is that all in the congregation must be at peace with one another before worship can begin. If there are any quarrels, the protagonists must either make up their differences, or leave the gathering. This last point is very important with the Alevi men, who contrast their way with the Sunni prayer in the mosque.

The greatest problem about praying in a mosque is that it is possible to be next to a murderer without realising it, something which creates the Alevi prohibition on strangers, and on all present being at peace with each other before the ceremony begins is precluded.

Though the belief of men vary to the extent that they are able, or indeed wish to articulate their religious beliefs. Many men also draw a contrast between the depths of the Alevi, and the supposed superficiality of the Sunni God, is based on fear, but that the Alevis base their faith in love, a love which is within all people and that can be found within them. They illustrate this by saying that in the beginning, God create the world, and gave creatures life (*can*). However, He looked at his work and felt that there was nothing which truly reflected His Being. Accordingly, He gives all humans a part of Himself, this part is our soul (*ruh*). Now, when we pray together in the *cem*, we do so face to face, and through the collective worship, see into one another's' hearts and so become part of God.

Conclusion

The *ocak* has two aspects. One is that Holy Lineage is composed of *dedes*, and the other aspect is of a ritual group that constitutes a relationship between the master and disciple. Both aspects are referred to among the people as one *ocak*. The Alevi people recognize themselves as an Alevi according to their *ocak*.

The saint veneration of the Kurdish Alevi people is based on this *ocak*. This is sustained by ritual practices organized by the *dedes*, including those that celebrate the miracles of saints and the traditions related to their saints. At the same time, while one *dede* is still alive, a tradition concerning the Holy Lineage talked among people gives him sacredness. The sacred of a saint is supported by a shrine dedicated to that saint. There are numerous shrines for the Alevi saints in Anatolia, and people respect these shrines, which are called *Ziyaretgah*. They are crowded with pilgrims during every memorial service.

Research about *Ocaks*, of the Alevis are still unexplored. This topic concerns the tribal relationship, kinship, and genealogy of the saints. The debate about the

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identity of the Kurdish Alevi is still in a state of flux. Within no other group in Turkey is there such an intensive, and self-conscious search for the most appropriate way to define oneself. Oral tradition is directly relevant to the debate about the ethnic identity of the Kurdish Alevi.

People venerate the Prophet's family through practicing the *cem* ceremonial led by the *seyit* or *rehber* appointed by the *seyit*. It is very important to observe the *cem* ceremonial and to research about the genealogy of the saints, for understanding the relationship between the veneration for the Prophet's family and ritual practice within the Alevi communities. Especially the most crucial thing is the reconciliation of disputes among the people in *cem* mediated by the Prophet's family. Its qualification is to be a descendant of *Ehl-i Beyt (seyit)* or his *rehber*. No one is permitted to organise *cem* or ritual practices such as funerals and weddings.

Ernest Gellner suggests that the social base of the rural rebellion lies in the segmentary lineage model. Simply put, this model suggests that lineage groups are divided or coalesce along patrilineal lines according to the place and scale of a disagreement. The more important the conflict the more segments will become involved (Gellner 1969: 29-48, 190-191).

If they are threatened from the outside, the group as a whole may combine together to face the common enemy. At any time, mediators, privileged through being more holy than other lineages, may attempt to bring about reconciliation between opposing individuals or groups. These holy men may also become leaders in times of rebellion. This is the most controversial part of his work. For Gellner (and for the anthropologists who developed the theory), it offers a way to explain how the tribes can organise themselves, and resolve disputes independently of central authority.

Independence from central authority requires mechanisms of dispute resolution, such a group needs figures to judge, or at very least reconcile disputants, and this in turn leads to a particular interpretation of sanctity which privileges and protects those who are held to be those mediators.

Gellner asserts that the societies opposing the state characteristically possess a lineage organisation and mediators who can reconcile disputes, yet who may also lead a rebellion. This model is not in favour in anthropology today¹. Nevertheless, the Kurdish Sunni material in Turkey appears to offer an abundance of material to support Gellner's position. To give the simplest example: soon after Republic was founded, the Kurdish tribal Sunnis in large part combined together, and under the

¹ One of the most consistent critics has been KUPER (1996).

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influence of Shaikh Said a leader from a religious lineage, staged a fierce rebellion that took a large part of the Republican army to suppress¹.

Gellner does not appear to be aware of the Alevis, particularly the Kurdish, sedentary Alevis, who are more quiescent than his model of rebellion would imply. Nevertheless, they do constitute an interesting variant to his model. They possess mediators who depend on inherited sanctity for their authority, and they do largely organise relationships between mediator and follower via patrilineages. However, in contrast to the Kurdish Sunnis, where fierce exchanges lead to conflict and stand-off among men, among the Alevis, to be reconciliatory, calm, to turn the other cheek. This is given a high positive value, and celebrated in their text, poetry and ritual as an auspicious, even a holy thing. It is this peaceful mysticism combined with the patrilineal mediation, something that Gellner only knew to operate in the more confrontational tribal environment, which provides them a mechanism of a social control in their small, sedentary community.

There can be no doubt that such radical social change operates upon the village community in a host of ways: the social order, economic basis of existence, and understanding of the world outside the village, social relation, and material culture. The *ocak* is also changed and manoeuvred according to social and political circumstance. People are trying to be sure concerning their identity as Alevi. Through migration and media like internet, they discover and recreate the genealogy of saints and they practice the religious rituals. Relationship between the veneration for the Prophet's family and the ritual practice is closer through the rediscovery of the genealogy of the saints and the practice of religious rituals.

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¹ See for instance Zürcher (1994: 178): "That a sheikh, a religious leader, exerted great political influence was not at all extra-ordinary . . . The leaders of these dervish orders were often called in to decide quarrels between different tribes, and this gave them prestige, connections, and often considerable wealth. . . Sheikh Sait himself was an influential member of the Nakşibendi order."

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