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Alevis Vs. Alawites In Turkey: From The General To The Specific

(Based On Field Studies In The Town Of Hacibektaş And Hatay Province)

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Abstract

In view of its geographical location and the ethnic, religious and cultural heterogeneity of its population, modern Turkey is of special interest both to orientalists and to a wide range of people interested in global political and social affairs. In this context, the subject of *Turkish Alevism* and *Turkish Alevis* has acquired particular relevance in recent years. However, Turkey's *Alevis* are often confused with the '*Alawites (Nusayrîs)*' of Syria, leading to a gross distortion of the concept of Turkish Alevism. The '*Alawites (Nusayrîs)*' are concentrated mainly in Syria, where they constitute around 12% of the country's population, though there is a small community of approximately 350,000 people in Turkey. They live predominantly in the southern provinces of Hatay, Adana and Mersin, and are ethnic Arabs. This paper is based on the findings of field studies carried out in the town of Hacibektaş and in Hatay province and aims to highlight the regional aspects of the *Alevi* and '*Alawite (Nusayrî)*' communities in Turkey (the '*Alawites of Syria*' are not reviewed here). The focus is on the characteristics of the two faiths, their forms of worship and the traditions of social organization within the two communities. The similarities between the two faiths are summarized and their distinctive features are highlighted.

Keywords: Alevis, '*Alawites (Nusayrîs)*', Islam, Shiism, Sufism, Turkey.

Introduction

Information on the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis can be found only sporadically in Soviet and Russian oriental studies, and somewhat more frequently in Western literature. Turkish scholars have produced the most numerous and varied works on Alevism, underpinned by a lengthy history of research in this field.

The most noteworthy of the Western orientalists is I. Melikoff, author of many works on Alevism and Bektashism. P. Andrews, M. Dressler, K. Kehl-Bodroghy, H. Schüler, D. Shankland, K. Vorhoff also made significant contributions to the study of Anatolian (Turkish) Alevism.

Research into the Alevis by Turkish scholars began only in the 1920s with the publication of articles and studies by Mehmed Fuad Köprülü, Ziya Gökalp and Baha Said. During the period

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of formation of the Turkish nation it became traditional to interpret Alevism (alongside Bektashism) as an inalienable part of Turkish culture and Anatolian folklore – a tradition that persisted right up to the 1980s. Since the 1980s a huge amount of work has been done on Alevism in Turkey. These studies vary in terms of quality, objectivity and content. One of the leading scholars in this field in Turkey today is A.Y. Ocak.

The Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs)² have been much less studied than the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis. This is partly explained by the greater conservatism of the former group. In the West, L. Massignon and T. Olsson have contributed to the study of the Nusayrîs, while probably the most comprehensive study on the history of the Arab ‘Alawites is by M. et-Tavîl³ - a member of the ‘Alawite community. His book was first published in the 1920s. The most notable of the Turkish authors on this subject is H. Türk⁴.

Key theories concerning the emergence and development of the Alevi and ‘Alawite faiths

On the issue of when Alevism first emerged in Anatolia, it is often difficult to define this to the nearest century. Thus, two crucial periods should be mentioned: the 11th -12th centuries, when some of the Turkic (Oghuz and others) tribes arrived in Asia Minor; and the 15th -16th centuries, when the Shiites’ anti-Ottoman struggle in Asia Minor and Azerbaijan reached its apotheosis.

In reality, up until the 16th century, perceptions of Islam by the Turkic tribes of Eastern Anatolia were largely conditioned and driven by pre-Islamic beliefs (of various origins, including elements of Shamanism, Buddhism and possibly Manicheism). The influence of Sufism should be considered separately. This phenomenon can be described as a kind of religious syncretism, or eclectic mixing of different religious outlooks. But as an independent phenomenon, the Kizilbash movement (or “Alevism”, as it was later named) emerged only in the 16th century and was strongly influenced by the Safavid dynasty. In the 15th century, the power base of the Safavid sheikhs consisted of the western Turkmen (Oghuz) tribes of Iran and Anatolia. The disgraced Sheikh Junaid (1447-1460) began to promote Shiite ideas amongst these tribes. It is known that he was also strongly influenced by the ideas of the Hurufites. Following Junaid’s death, his newborn son Haidar (1460-1488) was venerated by his followers as the earthly embodiment of God. Haidar’s warrior *mourides* were given the

² In this article the terms “Arab ‘Alawites” and “Nusayrîs” are used interchangeably.

³ This article references a Turkish translation of this book - et-Tavîl, Muhammed Emin Galib, *Arap Alevilerinin Tarihi, Nusayrîler*, (Çev: İsmail Özdemir), Çivi Yazıları, İstanbul, 2000.

⁴ This research was strongly inspired by his recent work. See Hüseyin Türk, *Anadolu’nun Gizli İnancı Nusayrîlik*, Kaknüs Yayınları, İstanbul, 2013.

name “Kizilbash” (redheads) for their red headgear decorated with 12 elongated triangles symbolizing the 12 Shiite Imams. This headgear was also called *taj-i-haidari*. In 1487, Haidar’s youngest son Ismail was born. He would go on to become the all-powerful Shah of Iran and founder of the Safavid dynasty (Averyanov, 2011: 67-68).

Melikoff likewise states that Alevism only fully took shape in the 16th century. Yet back in the 15th century, the Karakoyunlu dynasty was supporting heterodox teaching amongst the semi-nomadic Turkmen. Belief in reincarnation, in the manifestation of God in human form, veneration of Ali and the 12 Imams as a single godhead, mourning for the martyrs of Kerbala⁵ and the cult of martyrdom were all typical of this extreme but, at that time, un-named Shiite creed, and influenced the development of Kizilbash doctrine in the 16th century (Melikoff, 1998: 162).

Thus, historically, the terms “Alevi” and Kizilbash” referred to one and the same social and cultural-religious phenomenon. The word “Alevi” became widespread only in the 20th century, first replacing and then completely eclipsing “Kizilbash” (a term tinged with contempt).

The contemporary Turkish researcher R.Çamuroğlu reaches the same conclusion on exactly when Alevism arose, maintaining that the Alevis as a religious group did not exist before the 16th century. In Anatolia, there were various heterodox groups that were in contact with one another. But with the spread of the Safavid dynasty the essentially syncretic views of these groups began to acquire more distinct legal and conceptual outlines (Çamuroğlu, 2008: 11).

There is a widespread but mistaken tendency to equate the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis to the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs).

It should be mentioned that the term “Nusayrî” is not widespread amongst the community itself, while being widely used in academic literature. Members of the order who live in Hatay province in Turkey and write about the “Nusayrî” belief call themselves “Arab Alevî” (Güler, 1994; Sönmez, 1994; Rende, 1994).

The Nusayrî order is a movement within Shiite Islam. In the opinion of S. Prozorov, the Nusayrîs, like the Druze, are a regional subdivision of the Ismaelites (Prozorov, 2004: 298). But not all researchers agree with this. L.Massignon, for example, believed that the Nusayrîs could be classified as “Twelvers” (the main branch of Shiism) (Massignon, 1981: 110-114). This approach appears more convincing.

⁵ The third Shiite imam Husayn and his supporters were massacred near Kerbala on 10th October 680 (10th of Muharram, year 61 of Hijri calendar).

The Nusayrî order assumed its final shape in the 10th-11th centuries and is named after its probable founder – Iraqi theologian Abū Shu‘ayb Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-numayri, who lived in the second half of the 9th century. He was the protector of the 11th Shiite imam Hasan al-Askari, who also lived at that time (he died in 874). The movement subsequently became confined to the northwestern part of Syria.

However, there are other interpretations of the etymology of the term “Nusayrî”: 1) a version of the Latin term “nazerinî”, which referred to early Christians; 2) the village of Naṣurâya in Kufa; 3) Nasrânî (an Arabic term for Christians); 4) a Shî‘ite martyr named Nusayr 5) and Nusayra mountain, which later gave its name to the entire area from Mount Lebanon to Antakya, where the ‘Alawites used to live (et-Tavil, 2000: 81).

After Muhammed bin Nusayr, the second prominent leader of the order is considered to be Huseyn Hamdân el-Hasîbî. He wrote the second most important text for the ‘Alawites after the Qoran - *Kitabu’l Mecmu’*, and died in 346 (according to the Hijri calendar) in Aleppo. His tomb is a place of pilgrimage and is highly venerated (et-Tavil 2000:154). It should be underlined that, until recently, the Anatolian (Turkish) AleviS traditionally had no spiritual texts other than the Qoran. All the information concerning their beliefs and ritual practices was transmitted orally, since they had no written tradition. It was only in the 20th century that the process of scriptualization of religious knowledge began.

Et-Tavil argues that there are seven currents within the Nusayrî community: 1) el-Cerrâne; 2) el-Gaybîyye; 3) el-Kilâzîye; 4) el-Haydâriyye; 5) el-Mâhusiyye; 6) en-Neyâsifa; and 7) ez-Zuhûrâtiyye (et-Tavil, 2000: 232-333). However, there are no prominent differences between these currents. They are mainly indications of adherence to a tribe or a specific sheikh. In fact, there are only two groups within the Nusayrî community: Haydâri and Kilâzî. The Kilâzî group was organized in 1011 (according to the hijri calendar) in the village of Kilâzî in Antakya, by sheikh Muhammed bin Kilâzî. The Haydâri group was formed by sheikh Ali Haydar, who lived in Antakya (et-Tavil, 2000, 333). Even today, especially in rural areas, there is a ban on intermarriage between these two groups. The main difference between the Haydâri and Kilâzî groups in terms of belief is bound up with the question of where the place of Imam Ali is. Haydâris believe that the place of Ali is on the Sun, while according to the Kilâzîs it is on the Moon (Türk, 2013: 39).

Without analyzing this issue in any more detail, it can be stated that in terms of the time at which they emerged, their geographical spread, the existence of sacred texts and the ethnic

roots of the adherents, Anatolian (Turkish) Alevism and the Nusayrî belief (Arab ‘Alawism) are two distinct phenomena.

	Anatolian Alevis	Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs)
Time of formation	By the 15th-16th century	By the 10th-11th century
Geographic spread	Asia Minor	Syria
Sacred books other than the Quran	None	Kitabu’l Mecmu’
Ethnic roots of the adherents	Mainly of Turkic origin	Arabs

Method

Comparative-historical method based on the written sources, as well as ethnographic fieldwork method have been used for this research. Before exploring the specific aspects of the doctrines of the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis and the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) there is one essential point to note. This paper is about the “traditional” forms of the two beliefs. The role of tradition in modern Turkish society has changed a lot and in this context the phenomenon of “modernization of Alevism” should be mentioned. The “idealized models” of the two beliefs have little in common with contemporary reality, yet they help to conceptualize scientific understanding of the subject and to analyze more profoundly the nature and specific features of Anatolian (Turkish) Alevism and Arab ‘Alawite (Nusayrî) teaching, as practiced in modern Turkey.

Findings

Anatolian (Turkish) Alevi doctrine is based on the cult of devotion to Imam Ali and his family. The *God-Muhammed-Ali (Hak-Muhammed-Ali)* trinity⁶ is central to this. The Alevis revere the Qoran as a sacred book but reject the external rituals it prescribes. Inherent to Alevism is a faith in the transmigration of the soul, or reincarnation, which they call *tenasüh* in Turkish. In addition, Alevi doctrine is rooted in the concept of the manifestation of God in human form – so-called “*embodiment*”. The Alevis believe in the manifestation of the divine being not only in man, but also in animals and in some inanimate elements of the natural environment. They call this “*the unity of creation*” or *vahdet-i vücüt*.

⁶ All the terms in this article are given in Turkish pronunciation.

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The principle of *takiye* – concealing faith, or religious disguise - is also inherent in Alevism. But it is worth noting that this is primarily because the Alevis have been subjected to pressure from the authorities over the centuries, putting them in permanent fear of their lives. Takiya is a practice that has enabled the community to protect itself against external danger.

Together with devotion to Ali, the Alevis worship all 12 Shiite imams as a single divine being and believe in the coming of the 12th imam, Mahdi. The cult of martyrdom and mourning for the martyrs of Karbala are also central to the Alevi religious tradition.

Another two important principles of the philosophy of Alevism are veneration of the supporters of Ali (*tevella*) and the 12 imams and, conversely, damnation of their enemies (*teberra*). But the tradition of self-torture, which can be observed amongst the Shiites of Iran, is not part of Alevism. Likewise, Alevism does not feature the oath of celibacy, which is practiced, albeit infrequently, by the Bektashis.

In Alevism, the path to knowledge of God passes through the “four gates” (*dört kapı*): *şeriat*, *tarikât*, *marifet* and *hakikat*. The first gate – *şeriat* – consists of the key teachings of Islam, including praying five times a day, haj, fasting etc. The second gate – *tarikât* – is a Sufi teaching that is passed on only to members of the congregation. The third stage – *marifet* – refers to secret knowledge that is inaccessible to the uninitiated. And finally, the fourth gate is the truth itself, or *hakikat*. The Alevis believe that because of their special status and origins, they belong to the “people of the *tarikât*” and are therefore already in the second stage of spiritual development, having bypassed the first. The Sunnis, on the other hand, are “people of the *şeriat*”. For the Alevis, *tarikât* means fulfilment of the prescriptions of their belief without the need for external proof of piety (Subaşı, 2010: 105).

The idea of self-perfection is of key importance in the Alevi faith. Man/woman comes into this world in order to become *insan-i kamil* – i.e. a perfect person – at the end of his/her life and, as such, go to God. As far as the key moral principles of the Alevi faith are concerned, they are formulated quite concisely by the Alevis themselves: “master your own deeds, words and passions” (*“eline-diline-beline sahip ol”*).

Rejection of the external rituals of Islam is one noteworthy feature of Alevism. In particular, the Alevis reject the custom of *namaz*, or praying five times daily. Besides the assertion that the Alevis have a priori passed the first stage in the development of the individual - *şeriat* - there is also a simpler justification that is commonly held amongst the people. Thus, Alevis living in the village of Ortaca in Muğla believe that Imam Ali was murdered during *namaz* in

a mosque. Consequently, all his followers were released from performing namaz and attending mosques (Türkdoğan, 2006: 63).

Another aspect of the Alevis' rejection of canonical prescriptions is the fact that they do not fast during the month of *Ramazan* but hold a 12-day fast in the month of *Muharrem* in memory of the martyrs of Karbala. In some places, however, albeit very rarely, one can encounter Alevis who hold a 3-day fast during Ramazan, while others fast for the entire month. This is primarily due to external influences in big cities. The Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs), meanwhile, consider fasting during Ramazan as a religious obligation. They also fast during Muharrem and celebrate the tenth day of the month – *Aşure*.

According to Nusayrî teaching, God is an indivisible unity of three hypostases: *Mana* (Arab. – “*Meaning*”), *Ism* (Arab. – “*Name*”) and *Bâb* (Arab. - “*Gate*”). This trinity has periodically become manifest in the prophets. The latest embodiment coincided with the founding of Islam, when the trinity was embodied in Ali, Muhammad and Salmân al-Fârisî.

The Nusayrîs believe that Ali is a God who is manifest in all the prophets. Mana is secret knowledge that is transmitted through the Bâb (gate). The trinity of *Ayn-Mim-Sin letters* forms the basis of the Nusayrî belief. Ayn letter is Ali, who is great, unattainable and fundamental. Mim letter is the Prophet Muhammad. And Sin letter is Selmân Fârisî, companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Türk, 2013: 48). Thus, the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis and the Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs) **differ in their understanding of the trinity.**

The Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs) also have a different understanding of Paradise (*Cennet*) and Hell (*Cehennem*). They believe that both Paradise and Hell are within the human body. If a person is good, they live a good life. If a person behaves badly, they have a difficult life. The soul migrates from one body to another until it completes its term. God then sends it either to Paradise or to Hell. Here, Paradise means to turn into light, while Hell means to turn into a plant or an animal.

The Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs) believe that when the Universe was created they were brought into existence as stars/light. However, God sent them to the Earth as punishment for committing sin. Thus, it may be concluded that the Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs) believe that the World is Hell itself, in contrast to the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis and many others who assume that Paradise and Hell are in another World. According to the Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs), in their after-life they may become stars again (Keser, 2002: 52-54), each person being reborn at least 70 times (Eskiocak, 1998).

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In other words, both the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis and the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) **believe in reincarnation**. From this point of view, both orders are deterministic and fatalistic at the same time, **but their understanding of reincarnation and their perceptions of Paradise and Hell are different**.

Perhaps the most pronounced distinction between the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis and the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) of Turkey is bound up with the concept of **Enelhak** (the manifestation of God in human form). While this concept is central to the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis, **it is not shared** by the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) (Türk, 2013: 258).

The role of women in the two communities is also worth mentioning. A key principle of Anatolian (Turkish) Alevism is equality between men and women, which is why men and women attend religious services together. Collective prayers (**cem**) are held to worship God, to achieve spiritual renewal and as a mechanism of social and individual control. In addition to its religious function, **cem** traditionally had an educational function. And in the times of the Ottoman Empire, in particular, **cem** served as a judicial body for the Alevis. The Alevis never applied to the Ottoman courts; instead, personal problems, family problems, and friction arising between an individual and society were all discussed during **cem** (Zelyut, 2011: 281).

Alevism does not recognize polygamy, on the grounds that Imam Ali had just one wife, Fatima. Neither the Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) nor the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis transmit religious knowledge to women. But in the Nusayrî tradition, women are not even allowed to stay near a place of the ritual and, according to some sources, are asked to put cotton in their ears in order not to hear the prayers (Türk, 2013: 83).

The Arab ‘Alawi (Nusayrî) community subdivides into two categories: the uninitiated (**amma**) and the chosen, or initiated (**hassa**). The initiated have their own sacred books, which they interpret allegorically and do not open to the uninitiated.

Mechanisms of social regulation also differ between the two orders. The institution of spiritual brotherhood (**musahiplik**) can be regarded as one of the most important elements of the Alevi cult, binding together members of the community. The conditions for taking the oath of brotherhood are extremely complicated. The institution itself comprises the concept of “kinship in both worlds” – in other words, it also extends to life after death. It is forbidden to give daughters in marriage to the family of a “brother”, as both parties are now perceived as “milk brothers”. The oath of brotherhood is made exclusively between men. Children cannot take this oath before reaching a certain age, yet there is no clear definition of that age. The

institution of brotherhood in Alevism is an important social mechanism, because if one of the brothers dies responsibility for his family passes to the other. If one of the brothers commits a sin the guilt and responsibility for it also extend to the other brother and even to his entire family.

Another important social institution in Alevism is banishment from the community, or *düşkünlük*. According to Alevi custom, Alevis who have given a daughter in marriage to a Sunni or, conversely, have taken a Sunni girl into their family, are declared “fallen” (*düşkün*). All contact with these people ceases and they are banished from the Alevi community. But the degree of “ostracism” may also vary, depending on the sin committed.

People who have committed a “grievous sin” (*büyük günah*) are not permitted to take part in common prayers and festivals. These “grievous sins” can generally be defined as murder, betrayal, adultery, sodomy, theft, and divorce without good reason. A person who has committed one of these sins is deemed a “violator of the oath” (*ikrarını bozmuş*), in other words, somebody who has lost his way. Until their term of punishment expires, such people are banished from the community, nobody talks to them and nobody allows him to come close. This type of behaviour is a moral punishment. Those who are forgiven before their punishment expires can return to normal life. In other words, *düşkünlük* is a form of social ostracism and serves as an important control mechanism for reinforcing the closed nature of Alevi society and preventing communication between it and the outside world (Türkdoğan, 2006: 66). However, given the high degree of integration of the Alevis into the Sunni majority, inter-community boundaries have become largely eroded and are now barely noticeable in the cities. Before they began to migrate to the cities in large numbers, however, marriage within Alevi society was almost exclusively endogamous.

The Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) also have a tradition of spiritual brotherhood, but this is manifested in the institution of paternal uncles (*amcalık kurumu*), which serves as the main means of transmitting religious knowledge to the younger generation. The **Amcalık** tradition involves giving a child to certain men from the community for religious tuition (“amca” means “paternal uncle” in Turkish). Interestingly, it is practiced in different ways by Haydâris and Kilâzîs. Haydâris follow a 3-stage ritual before the child goes to the house of his religious tutor, while Kilâzîs practice a simplified 1-stage ritual. This shows that Haydâris are more traditionalist, while Kilâzîs are more progressive and adapt more easily to contemporary circumstances.

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The Arab ‘Alawites (Nusayrîs) of Turkey celebrate a wide range of holidays, the most prominent of which are Eid al-Fitr (*Ramazan Bayramı*), Eid al-Adha (*Kurban Bayramı*), *Gadir Bayramı* (the day when the Prophet Muhammed appointed Ali as his successor) and *Mübahale Bayramı* (the day when the Prophet Muhammed had a dispute with the Christians). These last two are not celebrated by the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevi. Nusayrî culture is strongly influenced by Christian festivals. Thus, they celebrate the day when Jesus was baptized (*Kıddas Bayramı*) – the 19th of January, the day when Jesus was born (*Milâd Bayramı*), Yumurta Bayramı, which translates as “egg holiday” and resembles the Christian Easter, and other festivals (Türk, 2013: 134).

Hidrellez Bayramı is important for both ‘Alawites and Alevi and is associated with the cult of Saint George, celebrated on the 6th of May. Saint George is often portrayed on a white horse killing a dragon and is viewed as a saint that helps people. Both the Anatolian Alevi and the Arab ‘Alawites of Turkey identify him with Hızır. Likewise, both communities have a strong tradition of *türbe*, which involves visiting holy places associated with a saint.

	Anatolian Alevi	Arab ‘Alawites
Trinity	Hak – Muhammad – Ali	Mana – Ism – Bâb Ali – Muhammad – Selmân Fârisî
The concept of Enelhak	Exists	Does not exist
Collective prayer (cem)	Men and women pray together	Women are not admitted
Fast during Ramazan	Not compulsory	Compulsory
Social institutions	Musahiplik Düşkünlük	Amcalık
Muharrem and Ashura	Highly important	Highly important
Belief in reincarnation (tenasüh)	Exists in both but perceived in different ways.	
Türbe tradition (Grave veneration)	Highly important	Highly important

Results and Discussion

In conclusion, it may be stated that both currents are syncretic⁷ in nature and both doctrines are based on the cult of devotion to Imam Ali and his family. However, they have different understandings of the trinity. As A.Y.Ocak points out, at the root of Alevism lie Central Asian Shamanism and ancient oriental beliefs such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Mazdeism and Manicheism. To some extent, Christianity, Judaism and, of course, the mythology of ancient Anatolia and Mesopotamia, have all made contributions of their own to the religious foundations of Alevism. As far as Shiite elements in the world outlook of the Alevis are concerned (the cult of the 12 Imams, strict division of members of the community by degree of induction into doctrinal secrets, the prohibition on contacts with Sunnis etc.), these appeared only with the spread of Safavid propaganda. As a result, Ocak concludes that alongside Sufi views, Turkish heterodoxy is based on beliefs that have survived from times preceding the adoption of Islam (Ocak, 2010: 281-282).

The Arab 'Alawites (Nusayrîs), meanwhile, emerged as a Shiite group and have borrowed much from Christianity: veneration of Christ as the embodiment of God, veneration of the apostles of Christ and some Christian saints and martyrs, Christian festivals, liturgy, communion through wine etc (Petrushevsky, 2007: 322). They have been less influenced by shamanism than the Anatolian (Turkish) Alevis, though one cannot deny the influence of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism.

Suggetions

In practical terms, the Alevi and 'Alawi (Nusayrî) populations of Turkey distinguish themselves as *Turkish and Arab Alevis*. Ordinary representatives of the two communities do not focus on the differences between the two creeds but underline the importance of Ali and his family in their teachings. Both groups are strongly committed to the principles of the Republic and democracy. Moreover, they do not view themselves as minority groups, but instead profess their national Turkish identity and want to be a part of the Turkish nation. They do not strive for special treatment relative to the Sunni-Muslim majority. What matters for them is recognition of their sub-identity as an integral part of the Turkish nation and equal guarantees of their religious freedom and cultural rights.

⁷ Here it should be mentioned that using the term of syncretism, I don't mean the process of «melting and mixture» in a framework of a static and ultimately essentialist concept of religion. Such an approach, based on one-dimensional notion of sameness and difference, was criticized by Markus Dressler in his book «Writing religion».

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