

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Introducing the Community

This study is a documentation and analysis of change in ritual in the village of Sarylar, on the west bank of the Euphrates River near Yavuseli, Gaziantep. It is based on material collected during the months of May and June 1989 consisting of field notes, recorded interviews, and photographs, as well as comparisons with complementary material collected on subsequent visits to Turkey. The research problem posed was identification of ritual change within the consultants' memory and some tentative ways of situating such change within the socio-economic context.

Sarylar is a pistachio farming village reachable by a daily local bus leaving from the market in the center of Gaziantep. Almost everyone living in the village cultivates the nuts as a cash crop. Other occupations include the few paid officials and school-teachers as well as one or two shopkeepers. Goats, sheep, poultry and a few cows complete the economy. Horses are far fewer than donkeys, and although there are a good many tractors that began to make an appearance in the 1970s, there were no automobiles in the village in 1989. Some families are fortunate enough to have gardens of vegetables and fruit trees on the river bank, but the climate is too arid for such agriculture in other places in the immediate vicinity. Although some land is rented, it appears that most of the land is owned by the families who cultivate it.

The social organization that Naess (1988:175) reports to be diminishing in importance in Dereköy seems to be in very strong evidence in Sarylar. The village continues to be spatially and socially organized in well-defined groups which could be called endogamic patrilineal, patrilocal clans (*sulale*). These social groups have their own names and quarters. The western third of the village is taken up by the predominant Ali U?a?y with about 420 houses. At the very center of the village there are 32 houses belonging to the Bekir Eyli. On the east side there are 100 houses of the (page 132) Deveçili. The northeast quarter is held by about 190 houses of the Hydyr U?a?y. The cömeler have 150 houses on the southeast.

Although these numbers of households were given to me as residents of Sarylar, in fact, a high percentage of people are non-resident. My consultants suggested that about 50 families are living in Adana, from 200 to 250 in Gaziantep, 200 in Germany and about 50 in other places.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

Only about 400 families remain in Sarylar.

The household is enclosed by a wall with one gate. Within this area the main house is built with any additional outbuildings. Generally the one structure houses everything. In the poorest homes there is only one story, but as soon as possible a second storey as living quarters is added and animals remain on the ground level. At least two rooms of living quarters will be found. Cupboards containing bedding and cylindrical woolen pillows are built into the wall. Furniture consists of carpets and such pillows for sitting. The houses are always scrupulously clean, having run-off vents at the juncture of wall and floor for easy washing. The family tends to sleep on a terrace or roof during the summer season when there is no rain.

Meals are served on the large trays typical of the Near East, and are eaten from common dishes, although spoons instead of fingers are used. Hospitality is common and guests are received with tea and cologne on the hands. Men and women come in close social contact as a group in the household, but one to one contact in public is brief and groups in public tend to be separated by sexes.

Marriage is within the clan if possible. Men resident in the city may marry Sunni women, but no Alevi girls from Sarylar are given to Sunni men. Marriage tends to follow the Turkish legal standard, and I noted only one case of bigamy in the village. The roles of men and women are clearly outlined, and although women have a much higher profile in the local Alevi villages than in the Sunni villages nearby, their position is obviously inferior to the men's. Upon meeting a man on the road, a woman must dismount and walk past. When a man enters a room, a seated woman must rise.

In sum, Dengler's (1978:231) remark on the role of women in Ottoman Turkey describes the present village situation very well. "Turkish women most certainly had some role among the various heterodox Islamic groups, but never one comparable with that of males. Indeed, the women in these groups who gained importance did so because of the reputation and position of their husbands." He goes on to point out that women might attain sainthood, but there was "no institutionalized mechanism offering (page 133) a permanent life option in the religious world" (Dengler 1978: 241). It will be noted below in the ritual text (Appendix) that all of the leadership roles are taken up by men, while women are given the ritual representation of some female figures important to Shi'ism and some status in the role of celibate initiates in Bektashi lodges. Even the latter role does not appear to exist in the village.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

There is electricity in the village and many homes have refrigerators, electrical cooking devices, television sets and cassette recorders and radios. On the other hand, in contrast to most of the villages around there is no running water. The residents attribute this lack to their having voted against the reigning party in elections. Water must be carried on donkeyback from a spring at the riverside three kilometers from the village. There are cisterns in the village, but this water is not used for consumption. Some of the cisterns are quasi-public and others are to be found within the household enclosure.

In contrast to the surrounding Sunni villages, there is no mosque in the village, nor in any of the three neighboring Alevi villages. There is a house of prayer, as is noted in the inscription above the door, but this *tekke* have fallen into disuse since the death of the last resident *dede*.

Although the village

tekke,

which is not a convent in the Bektashi fashion, but a mere building for gathering, was used long after the disbanding of the dervish orders by Turkish law, it is no longer in a usable condition, and no rites are conducted there presently. Although the sectarian identification of Alevi seems frustrating, it is possible to make some headway in determining the religious tradition of the people in question. Once we have faced the fact that the term is an umbrella for heterodox Islam in Turkey which presents a good deal of variety as well as some recognizable common denominators (Momen 1985: 45-60), the problem does not seem so crucial. Some of these common denominators are an Alevi identity, a certain depreciation of Sunni Muslim practices, adherence to the imamat of Ali, and a strong emotional attachment to the martyrs of Kerbala. Undoubtedly there are beliefs and practices which are peculiar and common to all Alevi, such as the avoidance of the hare, respect of the threshold, and perhaps the

müsahtiplik

(ritual siblingship) and the Shi'ite emphasis on Cafer-I Sadyk.

Gölpynarly (1987: 12, 180, 189) emphasizes the formative role of the Safavid era on the Kyzylba?. He also associates them with the Ahl-I Haqq (1987: 183). Noyan (1987: 13) points out the ethnic and linguistic boundaries of the sect, contrasting the Turkish-speaking Alevi with the Arabic-speaking sects. He gives the common doctrinal basis of the Alevi (page 134) as the association (*ba?lylyk*) of Allah, Muhammed, Ali; the celebration of the *cem*; adherence to the twelve imams; and maintenance of the Caferi school of law (Noyan, 1987: 14). Yürüko?lu (1990: 139) similarly defines the Alevi.

Perhaps the clearest placement of the Alevi among Islamic sects is to be found in Moosa. He treats them along with extremist Shi'ites in what he calls the Ghulat sects, that is, those which are extremist in their doctrines about Ali and divinity. Throughout the book he equates the Bektashi, the Kizilbash (Alawi) and to a certain extent the Shabak (Moosa 1988: 50, 120, et passim). More importantly, Moosa agrees with Gölpynarly in equating the modern Kizilbash with

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

the earlier Safawid order of dervishes (Moosa 1988: 21-35, 121). The fact that the ritual given here in Appendix includes so many texts from the Safawid period seems to confirm this.

A general profile of the Alevi faith of this village can be attempted. Besides the prophets common to all Islam and the imams common to all twelver Shi'ites (Momen 1985: 23-45; Tabḫ taba'l 1975: 190-211), the most referred to saints in Sarylar are Hacı Bektaḫ, a local saint Hacı Küreḫ and his son Saat Küreḫ. Although there is a high regard for Mevlana Celaleddin, I was unprepared for the high profile of this figure in Dereköy according to Naess (1988: 179, 180), especially for the use of the Mevlevi style of whirling in the

semah

that he describes. The whirling in Sarylar tradition is more like that described by Birge (1937: 199) for the Bektashi and Erseven (1990: 105-118) for the Alevi.

The institution of *müsaḫiplik* (ritual sibblingship) seems to have followed the same course as that described by Naess (1988: 181) for Dereköy. I found no young people who had been initiated into it. Another similarity with Naess's community is the lack of richness of detail as compared to Birge's descriptions of the *cem*. The *cem* described later in this study is considerably simpler than Birge's descriptions, although a good many things are merely implied in it, but go undescribed, such as the appropriate blessings (

dua

) at the various steps. Again in agreement with Naess, no one in Sarylar would admit to the use of

raky

in the

cem

, and were it not for its extensive use on the one large sacrificial occasion I observed myself, I would also have had occasion to doubt its use altogether. The general use of alcohol in Sarylar did not seem less than what I observed in Hacı Bektaḫ Köyü. A description of its ritual use will follow.

Also in agreement with Naess (1988: 181), I found a complete ignorance of excommunication as a form of punishment. In fact, the punishment described for Dereköy seemed out of line with what I heard in Sarylar, where confession and attempts at reconciliation and restitution seem to (page 135) have been the rule. In general the traditions described for Dereköy seem closer to Sarylar than anything else found in the English literature. I suggest that this is because we are both dealing with purely village tradition without any ties to urban Bektashiism or other orders.

I would suggest that the village Alevi adhere to a fairly coherent tradition with local variety

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

dependent on the specific configuration of saints contributing to belief and practice and other contingent circumstances.

Alevi Traditions in Sarylar

Many things point to Sarylar as a community of Kizilbash Alevi with historical roots in the Safawid order of dervishes. In addition, I found that the Sary Kyz tradition (Î apolyo 1964: 293-297) was told in the village in justification for the name of the village. The Alevis claim that they are discriminated against by the Sunni society. On the other hand, my observation was that cooperation with Sunnis on everyday matters was consistently cordial. In that sense the discrimination is likely to be similar to that practiced against Blacks in America, and contrasts with the harsher discrimination experienced by refugees and guest workers in Europe (note Naess 1988: 194).

In order to elicit what the people themselves considered essential or particular to their faith, I asked them to explain to me how a Sunni would have to change to become an Alevi. Only three things were mentioned, the twelve-day fast of Muharrem, belief in the twelve imams, and the sitting circle prayer (*halka namazy*). It seems significant that they did not remember to mention avoidance of the hare.

When I asked the same question concerning Christians, they responded that a Christian would have to believe in one God, in Muhammad (peace upon him) and all of the prophets, all of the sacred books, in angels, in the day of judgment and in destiny. In terms of practice a Christian would have to begin fasting and praying. It was significant that mention is made of the traditionally accepted Sunni five pillars of faith and two of the pillars of practice, leaving out alms and pilgrimage. Neither was the taboo on eating pork or drinking alcohol mentioned.

When I inquired about the use of alcohol, one man quoted an ayat from the Qur'an to me to the effect that God is merciful. So although it appears that perhaps a majority of Alevis in Sarylar use alcohol, some of (page 136) them only on ritual occasions, it is not general to suggest that alcohol is permitted. Rather, it is said that God is merciful.

A contemporary Bektashi apologist, A?ur Erdo?an (s.a.: 106), notes that the prohibition of alcohol refers only to its excessive use, thus leaving room not only for the ritual use of alcohol,

but the social use as well. In this he agrees with Moosa (1988: 123, 149).

One of the first points brought up spontaneously by my consultants was the matter of eating the hare. Hare avoidance is very important to all of the Alevi I have met throughout Anatolia. It was said that the hare exhibited the characteristics of nine different animals forbidden as food. In fact only four are mentioned. The hare has the loose skin of a cat, the short tail of the pig, the long ears of a donkey, and the crest of a dog. Erdoğan (s.a.: 88) makes the same comment. Other local consultants suggested that the reason for this taboo was that the female rabbit's menses is extremely bloody or that the meat of the hare when cooked turns mostly to blood.

This taboo is demonstrated by Birge (1937: 173) not to be of Asiatic origin, and thus seems to conflict with Moosa's assumption of pagan Turkish origins for the practice (Moosa 1988: 149). Birge rejects White's suggestion that the origin of the taboo against eating the hare is found in Leviticus 11,6 by pointing out that the camel is not forbidden on the same grounds. Birge's argument is weak on several accounts. Firstly, there are Alevis who state the aversion to come from the Tevrat or Leviticus 11,6. The fact is that the camel is explicitly allowed by the Qur'an, whereas the hare is not mentioned. It is perfectly consistent to continue the tradition of avoiding the hare on the basis of the Tevrat and discontinuing the taboo against the camel on the basis of the Qur'an. One need merely appeal to the principle of abrogation in both cases consistently. The emphasis of the Alevis on the four books and their use of Tevrat far beyond that found among Sunni Muslims (note for example Koç 1988) so that particular customs may well be taken from that source. Finally, other features, such as the extensive use of the star of David above springs and on kitchen utensils in Hacı Bektaş Köyü, indicate the possibility of a Jewish or occult strand in a tradition already swollen from syncretic origins.

Jewish traits are suggested by the somewhat special relationship to the Sabbath, to give another example. Sapolyo (1964: 291) notes the practice of Friday night *cem*, which in itself is not completely unusual in a number of Sufi orders, although Thursday night

dhikr

are much more common. Although the practice is completely unknown to the younger generation, older people pointed out that the Sabbath was observed by the avoidance (page 137) of sexual activity and commercial exchange on Friday night and Saturday, while field and housework were not affected. Justification for this was given from the Qur'an 62,11. "And when see they merchandise or sport, they break away unto it, and leave thee standing. Say thou, 'What is with God is better than sport and than merchandise, and God is the Best of sustainers.'" The other Qur'anic texts and the hadith literature on the subject were not alluded to.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

On the other hand, assuming that Jewish traits do actually exist among the Alevi, it seems unlikely that they should have the strength and tenacity of the trait of hare avoidance. The problem remains enigmatic.

The second matter brought up by consultants was the matter of *müşahiplik*. This was described briefly with the formula, you share everything with the *müşahip* but your darling. The initiation rite is essentially that described below, including a sacrifice and a witness to the *dede* of the desire to be so initiated. The role of the *müşahip* is vital in the marriage ceremony, since he witnesses the marriage at the occasion of the *dede*'s blessing. When I posed the question about Shi'ite timed marriage (*mut'a*) no one had heard of such a thing. It was explained that "marriage is holy also for the Alevi people, divorce is a big shame for our morality and religion." It was suggested that this was a lie concocted by Sunni people against Alevi.

As I arrived among the Alevi at the close of Ramadhan, the matter of fasting was also brought up. Fasting during Ramadhan is not practiced. The fast of Muharrem was described as being harsher than the Sunni fast, since it was broken only for about four hours in the evening between sunset and midnight. Thirst was pointed out as being in memory of Kerbala. The fast is broken on the afternoon of the twelfth day with *şerbet* made of water and boiled grape juice, and the avoidance of water, milk, meat, eggs, all animal products, and onions. Three days prior to the beginning of Muharrem a non-obligatory, preliminary fast may be practiced, *kar?lama orucu*. Early morning prayer is performed at the *tekke* on the twelfth or last day of the fast. The typical form of Alevi prayer is called *halka namazy*, circle prayer, and is essentially the standard Islamic erect sitting position used between and after prostration.

The following recipe for *a?ure* was given, including twelve ingredients to represent the twelve imams, pistachio, walnut, water, sugar, sesame, beans, cinnamon, bakla (black beans), boiled grape juice, hulled wheat (boiled, sun-dried, and stone-hulled with water), raisins, chick peas and finally figs if one of the ingredients is unobtainable. *A?ure su* is distributed to neighbors with a pail and spoon reciprocally. (page 138)

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

The *tekke* is the center of religious activity in the Alevi village. It is a simple, one-room structure open for daily prayers as well as the *cem*. Gathering at the *tekke* is the occasion for the transmission of religious traditions through the telling of stories, the recitation of folk poetry, singing to *saz* accompaniment, seeking the blessings of the *dede* for any and sundry occasion. The daily prayers were reported to be voluntary and conformable to Shi'ite practice, preceded nevertheless with ablutions identical to the surrounding Sunni practice. Prayers were formally offered in the Shi'ite way of combining Dhohr and 'Asr in the afternoon and Maghrib and 'Isha in the evening. Friday prayer was also performed. Since the *tekke* is no longer in use I was not able to observe this and rely on consultants' reports. I was not able to verify whether *namaz* continues to be practiced by people in private, but have the impression that it is rare if it occurs at all.

The educational aspect of the *tekke* was high in the past. The earlier generation included an elite who were capable of reading and understanding the Qur'an in Arabic, if what consultants say is true. Now tradition is carried on in evening conversations before or after the favorite television programs, and few, if any in the village are literate in Arabic.

The Veneration of Local Saints

Naess (1988: 182, 183) describes the breakdown of Alevi rituals in Dereköy. A similar process has taken place in Sarylar. Naess attributes the breakdown to several factors. These are the rise of community factions around competing *dede*, the action of young people with radical ideas who damaged the *tekke*, Sunni pressure from without, and fear of persecution and the resulting outward conformity to majority practice.

The process of change in Sarylar can be described in similar general categories, but the actual details of events are in many ways contrasting. The first problem is the lack of a *dede*. In Sarylar this did not come about through quarrels, but from the fact that the *dede* died and his son moved away to Gaziantep for the economic advantages, leaving a leadership

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

vacuum. There has not been a resident *dede* for decades.

The second problem was the action of radical young people in Dereköy. Young people in Sarylar have also been influenced by new ideas, but they have not led to radical behavior. Instead, there is an armchair interest in Marxist philosophy on one hand, while the actual values governing (page 139) behavior are extremely Atatürkist and conformist. This results in a superficiality in Alevi religiosity and a neglect of *cem* related rituals. The Alevi religiosity among the young includes a fascination with Turkish folk music to *ba?lama* accompaniment and this has taken place of the more formal *cem*, more often than not enjoyed through cassette recordings. Finally the youth join their elders in continuing the veneration of local saints, the importance of which must have grown as it replaced many of the functions of the *cem*.

The third factor mentioned was outside Sunni pressure. The presence of a Sunni mosque in Dereköy makes this especially visible. Sarylar does not have a mosque nor is there a paid functionary, imam or other, in the community. On the other hand, the people of Sarylar are very sensitive to outside Sunni pressure. They complain that their religious tradition is breaking down precisely because they do not enjoy the same government support in the propagation of their traditions that Sunnis have, nor is there matching time in education and the media.

The final factor, fear of persecution, is a vital one in Sarylar as well. There is a strong fear of persecution and this does affect daily behavior as well as the degree of activity in pursuits perceived to be peculiarly Alevi. Naess (1988: 177) suggested accommodation to Sunni practice by women covering their heads in the nearby predominantly Sunni town. In Sarylar, on the contrary, this choice is an individual matter, the elderly tend to cover their heads, the young do not, whether they are in the village or in the town. I did not document cases of either official or unofficial persecution in the area.

The result of all of these factors is that the more organized forms of Alevi faith requiring the employ of a hierarchy or religious specialist have disappeared from Sarylar because of changes in the religiosity of the people, the direction of development in modern Turkish society, the lack of a resident *dede*, and the unfavorable social climate in general. This has prepared the way for

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

eneration of local saints requiring the employment of no religious specialists to take over most of the former functions of the formal religious practice.

I have identified three local saints who are the objects of veneration in the community. I could not get a name at all for the nearest tomb, which lies on a rise to the northeast of the village. The place is called merely Çyralyk, the candlestand. Inquiry as to the identity of the saint was met with a story describing the advent of the last *dede* to the village. Apparently he was first met on this spot, which continues to be a place of veneration. Once a year on or about May 6 the entire village gathers (page 140) there for sacrifices. Otherwise people visit the spot in connection with private concerns.

At some distance from the village (ca. 15 km.) there are two tombs venerated by people from all of the surrounding Alevi villages. One of these is the tomb of Hacı Küre? and the other is the tomb of his son, Saat Küre?. Saat is supposed to have received the name, originally Sait, from his boyhood miracle. His father went on pilgrimage and while he was gone a funeral occurred in the community. The boy miraculously took *a?üre* to his father. When the father returned home he already knew of the death, because his son had informed him of it in Mecca. The whole journey, both ways, was completed in an hour, hence the name Saat, hour. This story is just like one told about Hacı Bekta?. Note Birge (1937: 36) for the similar story. It is probable that this motif could be collected for a good many local saints in different areas.

The story most current in Sarylar about Hacı Bekta? is a different one, and perhaps a more famous one as well. That is the story of his arrival in Anatolia in the form of a bird, after having thrown the flaming mulberry branch across the miles, where it rooted in omen of his coming. Note Birge (1937: 37) as well as the Vilayetname of Hacı Bekta? (Noyan 1986).

The tree that is supposed to have grown from this firebrand is still growing in front of the supposed tomb of Balim Sultan. I do not know if people still remove bark from it for healing purposes as Birge suggests, but the tree is covered with the small strips of cloth that pilgrims coming in veneration of the saint leave there.

The following narrative is typical as an example of veneration of the local saints. Before the conception of her first-born son, Meryem saw a dream of Hacı Küre? on a horse outside the gate of their compound. The saint addressed her saying that she should have a son whom she should name after the saint. He also promised that the son would be followed with success through life if she took sand from where she saw the horse's hoofs and cleaned the new-born

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

with it. Upon awakening she collected the sand and saved it for the occasion. She did not have occasion to use the sand, however, since it was felt necessary to name the son that was in fact born after the late husband of the father's sister, who was killed in a village quarrel about the election of the headman or *muhtar*. He was hit by a flying stone in the turmoil. The mother and aunt took an offering of two meters of green cloth to the tomb of Hacı Küre? and the grandfather sacrificed a young goat at the tomb in order to make their apologies for the change in name.

An examination of the tombs of the saints shows that such offerings (page 141) may be found there, draped over the raised sarcophagus. Similarly a tree near the tomb serves as a place to leave the strips of cloth brought in veneration. Stones in veneration are left in many places in a container for the purpose, but I observed people in Sarylar licking pebbles and attaching them to the walls of the tomb when making their wishes and vows.

The Rites of Sacrifice in Sarylar Today

Animal sacrifice is current in Sarylar today on four types of occasions. There are the *kurban bayram*, when a sacrifice is performed at home, the sacrifice at the end of the twelve days of Muharrem, the sacrifices of *ziyaret*, veneration at the tomb of a local saint, and finally personal and family sacrifices on the occasion of weddings, funerals, and at special occurrences.

Funerary sacrifice is made for men only. At first glance this may seem to accord men a greater honor, but in fact the male sheep without blemish is to facilitate the man's passage to a comfortable place after death. The man is more susceptible to the punishment of the grave and needs this help, whereas a woman goes directly through to comfort and rests peacefully. So the sacrifice is to facilitate the lowering of the man from Difficulty, *dardan indirmek*.

I was able to observe a large sacrificial occasion at the tomb of Saat Küre?. On Sunday, May 14, 1989, the Ali U?a?y portion of the village joined the people of four other villages to perform the *ziyaret*. This is done each year on the weekend nearest May 6. This year the rest of the village performed the *ziyaret* at the nearby Çyralyk at the proper time on May 7, but the Ali U?a?y were not on speaking terms with the others because of a quarrel about the way the recent election of the *muhtar* had gone. So they

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

joined the other villages.

May 6 is one of the four festivals celebrated by the Bektashi in general. Serto?lu (1969: 206, 226) gives these as Kurban Bayram, Muharrem, Navruz (March 21) and Hydrellez (May 6) or Hyzrilyas günü as Oytan (1945: 411) writes it. Navruz, the Persian New Year and also the Bektashi New Year, is in fact the beginning of spring. Similarly May 6 is the beginning of summer. Justification for the festival is made on the basis of the birthday of the Prophet, which was three weeks earlier by the solar calendar. The festival is associated with Hyzr or al-Khadir, the name given to the figure with Moses in Qur'an 18: 60-82. This character is (page 142) well-known in legend throughout the Islamic world, representing herbage, greenness, and immortality (Oytan 1945: 66).

People came from all directions in rented buses and flatbed trucks, on tractors, on horseback, donkeyback or on foot, all dressed in their best western style clothing, although they wear tradition Turkish clothing ordinarily. We got up at five o'clock in the morning to get a place on the bus. There were even people sitting on top of the bus. At one point we crossed the Kara Su River and dozens of people of all ages jumped off the drenched themselves, clothes and all, much to the annoyance of the bus-drivers.

At the cemetery we found the tomb of Saat Küre?, a stone building painted a light blue and set among the oaks. The holy area is enclosed by a stone wall. Within this enclosure the sacrifice of about four hundred animals took place, mostly young goats, but also sheep and a few poultry.

Within the tomb the sarcophagus was covered with green cloth. People attached their pebbles to the inside or outside walls of the tomb while making their vows, whereas others tied strips of cloth to the nearest tree. For a while the enclosure was full of people and animals, men with their sons performing the sacrifice while mothers and daughters supervised. There was a busied air of importance. The animals were thrown onto the ground with the neck extended. With one swift movement of the knife the neck was opened and blood spurted out freely. Many people had blood on them.

Each family found a place under the oaks. The animals were butchered in sunlit open places away from where the family activities were going on, and the meat then brought over and cooked. The fresh, raw livers were given as a delicacy to the smaller children. Families gather under their respective trees while preparing the meal. The celebration lasts until evening. Marriages are celebrated, folk dances are performed to the accompaniment of song and *ba?la*

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

ma

and there are general reunions with relatives that might not have been seen for a year or more. The men sit in circles under the trees, singing folk-songs often of the Alevi tradition, sometimes dancing. They drink

raky

(brandy) very slowly, mixed with water or Coca-cola. Such non-alcoholic drinks as well as toys and souvenirs are available for sale. Everyone has brought his own supply of alcohol, which is shared freely. The mood is extremely warm, there is no quarreling or shouting. People go from group to group, enjoying different company for minutes or hours. Men offer toasts to one another and the host at the circle offers bits of meat to his friends around him, each grasping his hand in both of theirs as they accept the meat in their mouths from his (page 143) fingers. There is a good deal of physical contact, though no impropriety to be seen. A couple of loving men on occasion may sink onto the ground with their arms wrapped about one another in a drunken stupor.

It appeared that the use of alcohol was restricted to the men. The women's behavior was less ritualized as well. They just spent their time taking care of the cooking and visiting together. There was a general partition between the sexes, but not to a rigorous point.

I asked questions on the meaning of the sacrifice itself and received the following answers. It is a way of praying. It is a way of showing that we are servants of God. It is a way of giving back to God something that we own, since all things are really His and we have all things from His hand.

It is significant that all forms of sacrifice still prevalent in Sarylar can be performed by the family without recourse to a religious specialist. Even the large group occasion is really an ensemble of family ritual units.

A Description of Ritually Specialized Sacrifice

Although it was not possible to observe a formal *cem* in Sarylar because they are non-existent, I was able to obtain a guidebook of the ritual as formerly performed from the brothers Vakkas and Ali Dönmez, who formerly served as

özcü

or helpers and watchmen in the

tekke

g

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

in Sarylar. Mr Dönmez hoped that I would publish these as he felt it represented a tradition that was past and should be preserved for posterity. He also hoped that it might fall into the hands of such as might revive the tradition.

The ritual as presented here (see Appendix) is an English translation of the explanatory material and an English translation with the original Turkish of the liturgical texts. An appendix of what Mr Dönmez called *gazel* appropriate for use with the *cem* is not included. It should be noted that this ritual is essentially the same as that described in Serto?lu (1969: 257-268) and Oytan (1945: 203-226), although these writers do not include so much of the poetical portions as are found here. On the other hand, they include texts for

dua

that are missing in my recordings and only alluded to in the comments. As it will be seen, the oral transmission of the ritual and the emphasis on oral performance without reference to a written text have led to a deterioration, so that the texts of the poems are often jumbled. (page 144)

The difficulties of translating Turkish folk poetry in the Bektashi tradition are numberless. Despite efforts to gain the help of several well-educated Turks, some of whom should have had specialist expertise in the area, there remain some expressions in the texts that are not at all clear. In the end I must take responsibility for the quality of the translation altogether. I am indebted, however, to Prof. Erkan Türkmen of Seljuk University at Konya for his last-minute review of the material and his corrections of several errors.

It was my desire to achieve translations that could be sung to the same tunes used in the actual *cem*, rather than awkward and literal renditions. Most of the material is of a genre well described by Annemarie Schimmel (1982: 148) "The fourlined stanza in the Turkish tradition, in which the first three lines rhyme while the rhyme of the fourth line continues through the whole poem. This is related to tar?i' in high Persian poetry, in which the two hemistichs of a verse are split into four units, three of them with internal rhyme (a form often used by Rumi). The Trukish popular meters employ syllable counting, they are not quantitative as in the Arabo-Persian literary tradition."

The main problem in replicating Turkish rhymes comes from the fact that nothing in English corresponds to Turkish vowel harmony. This feature in Turkish lessens the monotony of the rhyme a good deal. I have tried to compensate for this by using a judicious amount of assonance and consonance, with, I think, some success in translating the flavor of the verses.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

Another problem is the replication of the long meter in Turkish, which has eleven syllables. This will seem awkward to the reader who expects the sing-song quality of an English jingle. The eleventh syllable prevents this, so that the rhythm actually comes closer to free verse in English despite the rigorous line length. In any case, the whole liturgy is reproduced here in an English that corresponds to the Turkish formal requirements perfectly. Whether it succeeds in representing the spirit and content of the liturgy, I am not in a position to judge, but hope that it does so.

The content of the poems, though not beyond the grasp of an ordinary person, does present enormous problems. As Schimmel says from long experience, “sometimes, the statements of mystical folk poets defy rational explanation” (1982: 162). She goes on to enumerate several possible kinds of interpretation. These include the expression of pantheistic flights into the timeless and spaceless, the expression of drug-induced trips in some cases, mere use of the paradox that mystics so often love, the means of preserving secret doctrine from outside eyes, a pedagogical device as a form (page 145) of intellectual shock something on the order of the koan in Zen Buddhism. She sees the highest level as an expression of theopathic locutions growing out of the agitation of the innermost hearts of the ecstatic. Finally, it is a mere fact that nonsense verse is to be found in the tradition. All of these explanations are probably valid for the type of poetry we are concerned with here, and I have tried to keep this in mind in the work of translation.

Insofar as the handling of the Turkish text goes, I have not attempted to standardize language or spelling, but left the material as found in Mr Dönmez’s guidebook. For double checking and at the insistence of Mr Dönmez, a cassette recording of the entire book was made, which he recited from memory.

I have been able to identify about one third of the poems from published sources and found them to correspond to Dönmez’ version to about 60 per cent. Discrepancies are in the order of reversals, alternate words with similar meanings, alternate words with different meanings, omissions, additions and alternate spellings. There are also additional verses in Dönmez’ version, perhaps reflecting the tendency to suppress portions offensive to Sunnis in publications.

The following poems are to be found in their respective sources: “Akyl ermaz yaradanyn syrryna” in Oytan 1945: 208; “Kurbanlar ty?lamip gülbent çekilki” in Gölpınarly 1963: 168; “Her sabah” by Pir Sultan in Gölpınarly 1963: 51 and Bezirci 1986: 286; “Devredip gezersin dari fariyi” in Serto?lu 1969: 266 and Köseo?lu 1988: 64; and “Gece gündüz arzumanym Kerbala” by Pir Sultan in Bezirci 1986: 238. None have been translated into English before, insofar as I

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

know, and it is perhaps unfortunate that I am working with a text inferior to the published ones.

Rather than a detailed commentary on the text, I shall content myself with some remarks on the specific use of certain themes and images on one hand and the symbolism present especially as it relates to the understanding of sacrifice on the other.

A number of Turkish words have been left untranslated in most cases since a simple equivalent does not exist in English. Many of these are Turkish forms of words better known in Arabic forms, such as *Kible* (direction of prayer), *Kabe* (house of God), *Miracname* (story of the ascent of the Prophet),

me
ydan

(central ritual area in the dervish lodge),

mümin

(true believer), talip (applicant for initiation) and mürşit (guide into initiation). Particular jargon of the dervish lodge is to be found especially. The word

pir

is generally reserved for a saint, but in this ritual seems to refer to the officiating

dede,

while

rehber,

or guide, seems to refer to the officiating baba. Meclis refers specifically to a council of (page 146) the lodge.

A?ik

refers to uninitiated participants and

Bacı

refers to fully initiated women celibate members of the Bektashi lodge.

Eren, zekir

and

muhip

are words used for the initiated member of the order. It does not appear that a fourfold hierarchy is to be found in the village rite as in the urban Bektashi lodges, and the many terms overlap.

The

tekke

refers to the lodge itself. The

post

is a sheepskin upon which those officiating sit or stand and which forms a focus of some ritual acts. A number of

posts

may be present.

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

Two instruments are mentioned, the *saz*, which is a four-stringed lute with a long neck and bound, moveable frets. The *ba?lama* differs from this in being larger. Sung poems referred to by categories include the *nefes* (literally breath), the *duaz* or *düvaz*, the *?ahlama* (a poem in praise of a *pir*), and the *gazel* (referring to the notable Persian form).

The twelve holy imams according to twelver Shi'ite faith are mentioned throughout in Turkish orthography (Momen 1985: 23-45; Tabataba'i 1975: 190-211). Associated with these are three female figures, Fatma, Hadice, and ?ehriban. A number of epithets are related to Hazret Ali: *Düldül* (also the name of a mount of the Prophet), *Kamber*, *Haydar*, *Murtaza* and of course *zülfi kar*, the double-tipped sword of Ali. The term *dost* is generally applied to Hazret Ali and has as such a meaning far beyond mere friend, as it is sometimes translated. The concept is the *waliya*, divine friendship.

Some words relate to the Kerbala experience, which of course has a great deal to do with the meaning of sacrifice. The name *Yezid* is mentioned on occasion with a curse (Kylyç 1989: 110, 143). It is in fact the practice in the village to drink water from a glass in two swallows, pouring out the drops on the ground and cursing *Yezid*. This small sacrifice of water is in remembrance of the thirst at Kerbala caused by the attack on *Husain* and his followers. Similarly *Mervan's* sword is singled out for a deprecation. (Oytan 1945: 9; Serto?lu 1969: 356, 357).

The words *Yemen* and *Kaf* do not refer to geographical places but the mystical lands attained through the *semah*. *Kaf* is the world-surrounding mountain, home of the mystical bird, the *Simurgh*, symbol of the divine in the work of *Fariduddin 'Attar* and later mystics. The theme of *Yemen* as a symbol of the intuitive knowledge of God as opposed to rationalistic means of attaining truth is mentioned by many *Bektashi* poets (note *Öztelli* 1985: 205).

I have translated the word *hak* as Truth generally, but sometimes as Reality. Neither of these words begin to express the connotation of the word *hak* in Islamic mysticism. The word seems to refer to God as (page 147) the goal of mystical practice and the self which has attained the goal of divine unity. A discussion of the Bektashi concept of God in particular is found in Eyubo?lu 1990: 251). The English literature consistently refers to a Trinity of Allah, Muhammet Ali (Birge 1937: 132). There is some justification for this in such sentences as God is Ali and Ali is God.” Nothing can be more true than the fact that Bektashi concepts of creation as divine emanation constitute a breach with those schools of theology in Islam which make a radical distinction between God and creation. Bektashi thought contains all of the layers of Islamic mysticism from the early voluntaristic to the late pantheistic and even atheistic. But to suggest a parallel between Christian concepts of the Trinity and the Bektashi juxtaposition of the names Allah and Muhammet Ali is a falsification. However, I have found evidence of variation among people with an Alevi identity. I found people of Arabic language in Adana who did say that Ali was a manifestation of God. But these people should probably be classified with the Syrian ‘Alawi or Nusayri. The people in Sarylar, on the other hand, did not hint at anything that might call their belief in the absolute oneness of God into question. This could, of course, be interpreted as accommodation (Note Momen 1985: 66, 67).

Even so careful and contemporary a scholar as Moosa makes the compromised unity of God the test question for defining the Alevi and other sects. The assumption is these sects do have heterodox beliefs about the unity of God, namely in ascription of divinity to Ali or a united Muhammad Ali figure in a sort of trinity. Where this doctrine does not appear, the explanation is that it is being hidden (Moosa 1988: 41, 50-65). The texts of the ritual could extensively be interpreted as confirming that premise. Nevertheless, I was not able personally to elicit anything from anyone in Sarylar that was out of line with orthodox Shi’ite concepts of God (Note Momen 1985:78).

The Christian influence on the formative period of the Bektashi-Alevi is undeniable. Nevertheless there has been a great deal of excess in supposition about remnants of such practices as the eucharist in the sherbet and the sign of the cross in the *niyaz*, for example. A recent work went so far as to say that “the Bektashi represent an extremist Christianizing wing of Sufism” (Baldick 1989: 170). That may be true for the Balkan area, which the author probably had in mind, but seems unwarranted in southeastern Turkey.

Many of the poems include the name of the author in the last verse. There seems to be a preponderance of poems from the Safavid period in this collection, and this may be an indication of the influences particular (page 148) to this community, which lies on the border between the Ottomans and the Safavids. The names mentioned are Teslim Abdal, Asl Shah, Shah Hata, Dervish Süleyman, Kul Hümmet, Kul Hüseyin, and Genç Abdal. Short biographies of these can be found in most of the collections referred to in the book list. The fullest

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

biographies are found in Nüzhet (1930: 208, 232, 307), unfortunately out of print and rare. A longer biography of Teslim Abdal with a collection of poems is found in Şahyn's Kulhak. Fuller biographies of Yunus Emre (1987: 245-304) (note Yesirgil 1963; Aktüccar 1984) and Pir Sultan (note Kudret 1965) are available.

The four books mentioned in the ritual are Tevrat (the books of Moses or the Tanach), Zabur (the Biblical Psalms or Tehilim), Injil (the Gospel or the New Testament) and the Qur'an. The four holy faiths referred to are Judaism, the faith of the Prophet David, Christianity, and Islam.

There are many practices stimulating the mystical experience both in the ritual itself and in the poems. Among these are *niyaz* or prostration, *zıkr* or the silent or audible recitation of the names of God, the *semah* or whirling dervish dance not to be confused with the Mevlevi practice, the *dua* prayer and blessing, the circle prayer, taking the sherbet, the performance of sacrifice and the singing of *nefes*, *duaz*, and *gazel*. The use of alcohol is mentioned in the poems, but not included in the ritual description.

The ritual use of mind-changing drugs such as alcohol has been commented upon extensively. An early reference is found in the Kitab al-Ta'arruf (Kalabadhi 1978: 110, 111). Intoxication is seen to produce an overmastering sense of God's being which destroys one's capacity to distinguish between what pains and what gives pleasure.

The mystical experience itself is expressed in terms of passing through four consecutive gates: the *shariat*, or Islamic law, the *tarikât* or dervish order, *marafet* or mystical knowledge of God, and *hakikat* or the attainment of *hak*, loving unity with the divine.

The symbols of the mystical experience in this ritual are many, but can be divided into those using the figure of ascent, and those using the figure of love. Perhaps the two are represented by nightingales and roses. Figures of ascent are of course in the central poems of the ritual, the poems of the *Miracname* and the two crane poems at the end. The arcs of descent and ascent

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

are suggest by the reference to threshold and the place of the *semah*, entrance into which is symbolic of entrance into the universe as a living human being.

The crane is used extensively in Bektashi poetry as a symbol of the ascending soul, of Hazret Ali, and of the divine (Köseo?lu 1988: 64; (page 149) Yüksel 1987: 89; Özetli 1985: 205; Serto?lu 1969: 265; and even the contemporary Bektashi poets Kylyçaslan s.a.: 77; Yüksel 1987: 89).

A lighter symbol of the same order is that of the swallow. Its importance in the ritual is meager, but the enormous swallow population of the area makes it a symbol which must be especially significant in the daily lives of people who spend much of their time laboriously plowing beneath the swiftly soaring and diving birds.

The *dergah*, place of *semah* or dervish ecstatic dance in the story of ascent is referred to as well. Versions of the ascent are numberless. The one included here is shorter than many, and takes a functional slot in the ritual often taken by the story of the birth of the Prophet in many Sufi orders, although it so occurs on occasion. "On the occasion of the Prophet's nocturnal ascension (on the eve of 27 Rajab) and sometimes on other occasions the mi'raj story is recited in place of the mawlid" (Trimmingham 1971: 208).

Much has been written about the varied ideas that especially Sufis may have about the ascension of the Prophet. Some take the meaning literally, whereas others appeal to a divisible anthropology. The present text seems to opt for the latter, the prophet's *beli* (waist) and *akil* (intelligence, senses) being taken or bound by the angel. The binding of the waist, an important part of the initiation ritual, can thus be seen as a symbol of ascent.

The love symbols are varied. Of course the famous Sufi love symbol of Leyla and Mejnun is apparent. The use of this in Bektashi poetry goes back to Yunus Emre (Gürer 1961: 74). Roses of Erdebil has become a symbol of love mysticism, although it is originally a reference to the role of Shah Ismail and the Safavid order of dervishes. Gölpynarly (1987: 149) notes that pilgrimage to Erdebil has been as esteemed as that to Mecca.

The symbol of intoxication is a part of love mysticism as well. The sip of wine is the same word as taking a breath and refers to the progression toward the goal of union in divine love. This

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

figure appears time and again in the poems of this ritual. Less frequently, but perhaps more touchingly, is the symbol of the bee on its quest for honey.

Finally sacrifice unites the two symbols of love and ascent. Sacrifice is seen as a gift of love and as a freeing of the soul to ascend to the divine. The equivalency of the sacrificial animal and the initiate is apparent in the very first poem of the ritual and is referred to often through out. Such references are not always clear, especially when using such symbols as that of the *dar*, or *dara ?acy*,

the gallows. This is the center of the *meydan*,

the central place of ritual acts. The name Mansur is associated with (150) it, but this does not apparently refer to the murderer of the sixth holy imam Cafer, rather to the patrinyim of al-Hallaj, the great mystic who was executed for saying, "I am al-Haqq (God)." (Yürüko?lu 1990: 120; Gölpynarly 1987: 539).

The positioning of the right toe upon the left is symbolic of presenting oneself as sacrifice, just as is the prostration. "Very important is the detail appearing in all stories of the sacrifice, - the position given to the foreleg of the animal to be slaughtered. It is that of the posture of the qapi or gulbang, described in the chapter on darwishism" (Ivanow 1953: 83).

Roemer (1986: 214) points out the close relation between viewing oneself as a sacrifice and total allegiance to the *mür?it*. "The state which he (Shah Ismail) founded perpetuated the Ardabil religious order ... characterized by the taj-i haidari ... Thereby the name Qizilbash because common usage ... absolute obedience to the murshid was demanded of them. We know that the Qizilbash soldiers fulfilled this obligation Their battle cry is significant: Qurban oldighim pirüm mürshidim! (My spiritual leader and master, for whom I sacrifice myself)."

The figure of the grape cut in pieces and divided is symbolic of self-sacrifice and reminiscent of the practice described among the Ahl-I Haqq by Ivanow (1953: 4). In the renewal of initiation rites there is what is known as "handing over one's head" *sar supurdan* or *sar dadan*. Its sunbol was to cut a nutmeg in pieces and distribute them.

A contemporary Bektashi apologist has written on the subject of sacrifice (Kaya 1989). Although focusing on technical features of how the slaughtering should take place, (note also Serto?lu 1969: 288) the author's main objective is to show how sacrifice symbolically unites the participant to the Ehl-I Beyt or people of the house (Shi'ite source of esoteric knowledge in the

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

family of the prophet), and is symbolically to partake of the lever or mystical spring of which Hazret Ali is the cup-bearer.

Conclusion: Analysis of Ritual Change

Although the mobility of the Alevi *dede* must have meant that Alevi ritual in any given village must have varied between a full ritual life centered on the lodge and an emphasis on individual and family practice, there are some new factors in recent decades that must be associated with definite changes. (page 151)

Two factors especially are to be mentioned. The first is the population drain from the village to areas of economic and educational betterment. The second is the process of modernization. The Turkish government fosters both of these processes through education and the media. For the most part these are perceived as positive developments. The only result that must be seen as negative is the impoverishment of the genetic pool in the village. The results on ritual are merely to be documented and evaluated here without drawing any value judgment.

The first result is the change from a balanced ritual life engaging the individual, the household unit, the *sulale*, and the whole village to a ritual life engaging predominantly the individual and the household unity. This means that the lodge ritual has in practice disappeared and along with it the transmission of the *musahip* tradition. An important vehicle of social interaction and economic interdependence has thus been lost.

On the other hand, increased importance must be found in those rituals that can be maintained on the individual and household level. These are especially concerned with animal sacrifice and the performance of Alevi folk-music.

The *ziyaret*, veneration of local saints, has taken on an additional function. These occasions provide an opportunity for reaffirming community identity with those living outside the village and who return to participate in the annual sacrificial festivals such as May 6.

After living in the village and participating in its religious life, my impression is that the mysticism

Ritual Change in a Turkish Alevi Village

Thomas McElwain tarafından yazıldı.

of the dervish lodge remains as a certain life attitude along with the new views of modernization that have been so well inculcated. Although modernization, at least in the Turkish Alevi context, tends to conflict with the mystical experience of the Bektashi dervish in some areas, a democratized inner core remains. One sentence which I heard many times in the village illustrates the point: "The doorstep is the Kabe."