MUSLIM HETERODOXY AND PROTESTANT UTOPIA. THE INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ALEVIS AND MISSIONARIES IN OTTOMAN ANATOLIA

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150 years ago, the utopia of the Protestant American missionaries in Turkey consisted in an almost millenarian belief in a new social and symbolic order, promoted not by a miraculous deus ex machina but by their own evangelistic, educative and civilizing efforts. Penetrating all the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the carriers of this impressive Puritan model of successful work, self-confident behavior and the socioreligious subversion of the existing order made a major impact on the Christian minorities and on other communities heterodox to the authoritative Islamic orthodoxy—groups which thought there would be much to win and little to loose if fundamental change took place.

The most important heterodox group in Anatolia—beside those grouped in the recognized non-Muslim millets—were the Alevis. This is the term for a number of different communities whose common characteristics are the adoration of Ali, the fourth Caliph, as Paraclete; their refusal of the Sharia; and an age-old history of marginalization under the Sunni Sultans. The term "Alevi" is almost identical with "Kızılbaş"/kızılabas.2 Still at the end of the

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1 For my vision of Alevism I am indebted to discussions with Hamit Bozarslan, Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. For the stylistic polishing of my text I am very grateful to Paul Jenkins, University of Basel/Basel Mission. I would also like to thank Michael Ursinus, Heidelberg, and Werner Ende, Freiburg, for their helpful comments on this paper.—For a more comprehensive study on missions, ethnicity and the state in the eastern provinces of Turkey see Der verbesserte Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938. Zürich: Chronos 2000.

2 The Kızılbaş opposed their integration into the Ottoman state body during the 15th and 16th centuries. The latter turned out to be, with Selim I, definitely

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20th century, "Kızılbash" remains a term of invective in many people's daily language. The partial replacement of that term by "Alevi" in about 1900 did not effectively change the deep and often mutual prejudices characterising the relations between this important minority and the Sunni majority in Turkey. Alevi then and now constitute about a quarter of Turkey's Muslim population.

The Alevi revival in Turkey and in the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s has led to many publications about the present-day articulations of Alevism and its socio-religious and ethnic origins. Our information on the Alevi in late Ottoman times is, however, meagre. Because American missionaries continuously documented their contacts with the Kızılbash from the 1850s to the 1920s, their archives prove to be a vital source for the social history of the Alevi in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Interactions between Protestants and Alevi took place during those decades in the regions of Merzifon, Sivas, Elbistan, Dersim, Harput and Malatya.

Important topics to consider here are, firstly, the catalytic and conflictive interactions between the dynamic Protestant movement and heterodox groups in Anatolia; secondly, the impact in this region of age-old neighbourly contact with Christian groups, and especially of the Armenian renaissance and genocide; and thirdly the alleged support the Alevi gave to the "progressive" Unionist-Kemalist power against the Sunni "reactionaries". The first topic is

dominated by Sunnis. The Kızılbash—so called then because of their red headgear—pinned their hopes on the Persian Shah Ismail, and became, in Ottoman eyes, traitors and public enemies. The religious propaganda reviled them as immoral unbelievers without Holy books, *kitâb*, and therefore worse than Christians or Jews. They had to live at the edge of society and in remote regions, notably the Dersim—the Alevi's heartland between Sivas, Erzurum and Harput, renamed Tunceli in 1936—and Elbistan, south-west of the Dersim. Marginality did not mean a complete exclusion, but an inferior status within the system. Without mosques, the villages inhabited by Alevi were clearly recognizable, until Sultan Abdulhamid II (and his "successors" in power till now) constructed mosques for them. Cf. "Kızıl-Bash" in EF, V, pp. 243-45.

3 Ottoman documents, notably those of the Başbakanlık Arşivi (Prime Ministry Archives) in Istanbul, also constitute important sources, but the author has not had the opportunity to evaluate them systematically for this article.
more or less unknown, and the second is almost forgotten (or suppressed) in scientific discussions on Alevism; the third issue leads to frequent confusion.

The missionary contributions to a possible "ethnoreligious construction" as well as to a scholarly understanding of Alevism are other interesting aspects of our subject. If the missionaries tended to overemphasize the Christian elements of the "Kizilbashism" they encountered, Young Turk, Kemalist and Occidental authors who follow their line overstressed the ethno-Turkish parts of its heritage. This article does not participate in the discussion of ethnic origins, but intends to shed light on the socioreligious distinctiveness, as interpreted in the late Ottoman encounter with Protestantism, of the Zaza-, Kurmandj- and Turkish-speaking Alevi groups with which it is dealing.

**Protestant mission, Muslims and millets**

The role of Christian missions in Ottoman Turkey is a delicate topic, notably because mission was concerned with minorities and had a vision of integrating them into a new form of society which was in some ways diametrically opposed to the ideas of the ruling groups. From the standpoint of the rulers, instead of homogenizing society and strengthening its unity, missions were differentiating society in religious, ethnic and social terms. Missions worked above all with religious minorities such as the Armenians and Assyrians, heterodox groups such as the Alevis and Yezidis, and with the poorer classes.

Members of the progressive Ottoman elite and Western missionaries agreed in the conviction that the Ottoman Near East should benefit from Western superiority in technical and educational matters, and in public health. In the provincial towns missionaries built up prestigious schools, among them revolutionary new institutions for girls’ education, as well as hospitals. These provided a model which millets and the state were strongly motivated to emulate. As the Greek, Jewish and Armenian millets were most successful in emulating the given model, the incentive impact it gave to the Muslim community increased. Most authors, Turks and others,
agree on the benefits of the educational and public health models missionaries brought to Asia Minor. They do not agree on the disintegrative or “separatist” consequences which Turkish nationalist ideology asserts this impact had.

The first missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) learned early on the impossibility of evangelizing members of the Ottoman state-supporting Muslim majority (ümmet or ʾüss-ı sultanat). The resistance in this group to changing their religious orientation was partly due to the strong legal and social sanctions against conversion in force in the Ottoman state, but not only that. Like the Jews, for deep historical and mental reasons, the Muslims remained on the whole impermeable to the enthusiastic approach of the Protestants. Therefore the ABCFM concentrated its work on the Assyrian, Armenian and Greek minorities and kept in contact only with Muslim marginals. Its eschatological view of history during the first half of the 19th century is related to four expectations of great import to the Ottoman Middle East: 1. The future global spread of the Gospel. 2. The return of the Jews to Palestine and their “restoration” (acceptance of Jesus Christ). 3. The fall of the Pope. 4. The collapse of Islam. The above-mentioned Muslim resistance led to the missions developing a conceptual instrument for using the oriental Christians as agents for “leavening the Levant”. So Protestantism first had to bring about a spiritual and educational revival of the “flaccid” Oriental churches before moving on to evangelizing non-Christian populations.

Christian minorities, but also some heterodox groups, were thus assigned a privileged place in the missionary scheme of salvation. Alevism seemed to be an open door to “reach [Sunni] Islam” not least available to the missionaries. The majority of the people, on

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the other hand, the Sunni Muslims, were seen as a group corrupted by a misguided faith and the abuse of power privileges. Only after they, too, had accepted enlightenment could they take part in the blessings of eschatological progress. The missionary focus on minorities had far-reaching consequences. The ABCFM contributed decisively not only to furnishing them with what appeared to be a place in the future, but likewise to constructing a collective past, in accordance with Western concepts, and to upgrading their spoken idioms by elevating them into a written language and used for publication. All that contributed to the cultural and national “renaissance” of peoples such as the Armenians and Assyrians, and to the beginning of such a renaissance among the Alevis. The missionary discovery and description of an astonishing diversity of ethnicities and the attempt to integrate them into a universal eschatological order fundamentally challenged the old Ottoman world. The egalitarian principles of the Tanzimat (Ottoman Reform) era of 1839-1876, which theoretically encouraged the missions to challenge the old order, were only very partially realized in Central and Eastern Anatolia.

The missionary impact on the millets in late Ottoman Turkey was ambiguous, notably in the eyes of the Greek and Armenian nationalists and the traditional dignitaries. The missionary aim was not national reconstruction but the insertion of renewed communities into the utopian plan of building up the global “kingdom of God”. Conflicts with the traditional elites (which felt their positions threatened) and with the rising nationalist leaders (who saw culture and religion as means to the goal of national strength and union) were unavoidable. The creation of a separate Protestant millet in 1847, confirmed by imperial firman in 1850, was an inevitable development, but not a long-term project devised by the ABCFM. The ABCFM had intended to “revive” and not to split the established communities.

The constitution of this new community was important as a modern model for redefining collective social relations. Unlike the Catholic millet (created 1831) and the traditional millets, all headed by patriarchs, it separated millet membership and church affiliation. The representative of the millet was not an ecclesiastic.
He was elected by an assembly of deputies representing the local Protestant communities. There is no doubt that this "democratic" constitution had a major impact on the minds of the people with regard to their civil rights."

A long-lasting love story between Alevis and Protestants

The relationship between the missionaries and the Alevis begins in the 1850s, shortly after the establishment of the Protestant millet. It was one of mutual sympathy, shared values and of common hope for a new age. The reality, however, fell far short of the great expectations. But missionary enthusiasm for this people and curiosity about them remained constant. Henry Riggs, born in 1875 in Sivas of missionary parents, wrote in 1911: "The more one learns of this strange and attractive religion, the more the question is forced upon him, What is the source of this religion, and what is the history of these simple, ignorant people, who possess so much that their wiser neighbours have not?" It is amazing to hear a member of the expansive missionary movement before World War I referring to a non-Christian religion in these positive terms!

In the 1850s the missionaries of the ABCFM were probably the first people from outside to enter the close endogamous community of the Kızılıbash and were perhaps the first non-Alevis to be admitted to the secret religious assemblies called djem. They were deeply touched by this "unique people", its whole-hearted hospital-

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8 The first letter dealing with the Kızılıbash was probably that of George Nutting, Arabkir, 24. 10. 1854. He wrote to Rufus Anderson, the secretary of the ABCFM in Boston: "There [Çemîşgezek] is a sect of nominal Moslems scattered through this region of whom I think you have not heard. They bear the name Kızılıbash, which means literally 'redhead'. [...] They never or almost never go through the Muslim forms of prayer; nor do they keep their fast. They are a people by themselves. A peculiar people and open to the Gospel. [...] The Turks seem to regard them very much as they do the Koords, as worthless heretics, and not worth caring for." ABC 16.7.1 (Archives of the ABCFM, Houghton Library, Harvard).
ity, its fine tenderness during the djem, and its persistent wish to be instructed by the missionaries. They were surprised that the Kizilbash declared themselves to have the same faith as the missionaries and that, with no hesitation, they willingly participated with the visiting missionaries in their prayers and Bible readings. They were pleased to know that powerful Kizilbash chiefs offered protection to the young Protestant communities in their local conflicts with the Armenian Church or Sunni neighbours. They marvelled to hear about a Kurdish Kizilbash chief near Çemisgezek who had proclaimed himself a Protestant and continued stubbornly to do so—without ever having been in direct contact with the mission. This Ali Gako and other Kizilbash in the regions of Harput und Sivas, who began to call themselves Protestants, had mostly learned from their Armenian neighbours about the new Protestant movement. Serious problems between missionaries and Alevis, especially conflicts with dedes (hereditary priests) who felt uneasy vis-à-vis Puritan self-assurance appear to have occurred only seldom. “Superstition” was, however, a frequent matter of discussion, and the attendance at missionary schools led to tensions within the families.9

The attempt by several Kizilbash groups to redefine their identity and social role touched vital interests of the Ottoman state. In a letter from Adiyaman, the missionary George Nutting suggested a special charter (firman) for the Kizilbash based on the Hatt-i Hümayun of 1856. Nutting’s idea was no more than wishful thinking, however. The state was strictly opposed to extending to the Kizilbash the protection offered by the new Protestant millet. The people involved definitely needed protection, but British diplomacy would never have been ready to press for an engagement of this kind.10


10 “The Moslems do not consider them as Moslems, and the only reason why they should oppose their evangelization is that now they have often opportunity to oppress them in various ways, in respect to taxes, etc., and they fear that when
The missionaries found themselves compelled to reduce their contacts with the Alevis to a minimum in the 1860s and 1870s. Notably in the region of Sivas, they came to fear for the lives of their native employees and of the Alevis concerned. The ABCFM could not help the Alevis to any improvement in their precarious social position. Repression by local officials and Sunni neighbours as a response to their Protestant inclinations intimidated them. Only a handful of Alevi children could attend the mission schools. Yet many Alevis continued to avow that they were “Protes” (Protestants), a term which meant for them modern social and scientific progress in accordance with the precepts of their religion of the heart.

The young post-Tanzimat Sultan Abdülhamid II, traumatically marked by the Turco-Russian war in the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia (1877-1878), began to carry on a socio-political strategy in the 1880s orientated towards the “restoration of the Ümmet” i.e. of Islamic unity in the face of the real danger of final disintegration of his Empire. Within the eastern provinces, his defensive “Islamist” politics proved, indeed, to be aggressive. They were by no means synonymous with the promotion of social and religious equality which the men of the Tanzimat had declared to be their policy. Abdülhamid, however, implemented more effectively than any reformist before him centralizing and modernizing concepts in administration, telecommunication (telegraph), education and health. He tried actively to integrate the Alevis and other heterodox groups such as the Yezidis into the Ümmet, i.e. to Sunnitize them. He succeeded in reintegrating the Sunni Kurds by giving numerous tribes the status of privileged cavalry units, the so-called Hamidiye (Sunni Kurds had been frustrated by the pre- and early Tanzimat state which destroyed the age-old Kurdish autonomies). Abdülhamid founded an elite school for sons of tribal chiefs (Mekteb-i Ashiret) and sent out his own Hanefi missionaries, in order to mobilize the provincial Muslims for his politics. It seems they become Protestants we shall inform the powers above them of their oppressions, and bring them to punishment, or prevent such wrongs”, Nutting wrote in the Missionary Herald, 1860, pp. 347. Cf. 1857, pp. 144-145; 1858, p. 110; 1861, pp. 71-73 and 100-102.

The Dersim Kızılbaş participation in the anti-Armenian violence of 1895 deserves attention. It was, as the missionary eyewitnesses stated, "strictly a matter of business". Many Dersimis participated in the raids as raids, but never in the religiously justified and politically motivated mass murders which accompanied some of them. Çemişgezek was protected by influential Dersim chiefs from any violence.\footnote{\textit{The villages near Arabkir; were plundered 6 times,—once by Dersim Koords who seldom kill and do not molest women. The slaughter was by the Turks and Kurds of the vicinuity, who are cruel in the extreme." Report from Harput, November 1895, written probably by Caleb F. Gates. ABC 16.9.9; H. H. Riggs, op. cit., p. 111.}

Protestantism as represented by the ABCFM became a main ideological enemy in the eyes of the Sultan. It was not only a major factor in the renaissance of Armenian and Syriac self-consciousness, but had the ideological potential to initiate an Alevis renaissance, making Alevis more confident in their distinctiveness. George E. White wrote shortly before the Young Turk revolution of July 1908: "Yet in the stronghold of Turkish power, the fair provinces of Asia Minor, about one-fourth of the people are not Mohammedan at all but Eastern Christians, and of the Mohammedan population about one-fourth—some suppose one-third—are not Sunnitic at all but are schismatic [Alevi] Shias. For the present this line of cleavage is kept very much out of sight, but circumstances might easily take such shape that this internal breach would come to the surface as a deadly wound."\footnote{\textit{The Shia Turks", in: *Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, vol. 40, pp. 225-239, London, 1908. citation pp. 225-226.—Abdulhamid saw a similar separatist
For historical reasons, the relationship between Alevis and native Christians was—at least in Eastern Anatolia—much more intimate than that between Alevis and Sunnis. A Protestant-influenced, educated and consolidated Alevi community would have stood side by side with the Armenians and would have ultimately promoted common political ideas such as social equality and regional autonomy. Abdulhamid was the first to make serious inquiries about the Eastern Alevis.\footnote{\textit{Cf.} the reports sent to him, notably by the Ankara Valisi, speaking of the "terrible" political dangers and the loyalty problems the Alevis' "wrong faith" represented. Its adherents were "completely outside of Islam [fümmet]" and Muslims "only by name". "Oz, Baki, Alevilik ile ilgili Osmanlı Belgeleri, Istanbul: Can, 1997, pp. 143-149, citations p. 148.} He already feared the possibility of an Alevi-Armenian alliance, something which was to become a nightmare for Young Turkish nationalists on the eve of World War I. In fact, such an alliance would have gravely challenged the demographic and political predominance of the established system in Central and Eastern Anatolia. Seen from this angle, the missionary work of the Protestants was subversive and seditious (fesad-pezâr), as Yildiz Palace documents stated over and over again from the 1890s. The Catholic mission was not seen in this way at that time. It had got the reputation of being loyal to the government, and it profited from the diplomatic rapprochement between the Sultan and the Pope in the late 1880s.

The Young Turk "revolution" of July 1908 abruptly ended the Hamidian regime, but did not revolutionize its structures and strategies. It brought to power an elite of young patriotic officials and officers of middle class origin. All members of the Committee of Union and Progress (also called Unionists) had been broadly influenced by the European ideologies of the time, notably positivism, social darwinism and racial nationalism. Their declared goal was the establishment of a liberal system to succeed the Hamidian autocracy. Yet their first aim was the gaining of unrestricted na-
tional unity and sovereignty. Nevertheless, a utopian moment seemed near in 1908: the overcoming of religious and ethnic divisions and the common construction of a pluralistic Middle Eastern "Ottoman Nation" with a constitutional system. Perhaps nobody was more willing than the American missionaries to believe in such a future and to contribute to building it. In response to the new situation they firstly began thoroughly to question their anti-Islamic orientation and engage in a project for the whole society, including the Sunnis. At the same time they hoped that the Armenian question would find its solution within a free Turkey and that this would allow relations between the ABCFM and the state to be put on a more friendly basis. The pogroms of the 1890s had seriously damaged them. The Unionists' condemnation of the pogroms, their fraternization with the non-Muslims and their political cooperation with the Armenian Dachnak seemed to confirm hopes of improving relations. American missionaries suddenly gained prestige as "pioneers of progress" and were invited as speakers at the Young Turkish club meetings in provincial towns like Mezere-Harput.\(^\text{15}\)

Despite the great shortage of research on the Ottoman Alevis it seems safe to say that few other ethnic groups were more interested in the promises of early Young Turk regime. The slogans "liberty", "equality", and "justice" sounded most attractive for a community that knew neither the privileges of the âummet nor the guarantees of a recognized millet. Marginalized among a Sunni majority in Central Anatolia, in constant low intensity rebellion in their heartland, the Dersim, against the state, the Alevis affirmed publicly in 1908, for the first time since the great Kızılbaşh revolts of the 16th century, their distinct identity and were engaged in opening their own village schools. The emissaries of Union and Progress successfully convinced the Dersimis of the benefits of the new era. Several Alevis joined the Unionist Party. According to the Harput missionary Henry Riggs, pillaging and uprisings ceased in the Dersim.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{16}\) Cf. Riggs, Henry H., Days of Tragedy in Armenia, Personal Experiences in Har-
The honeymoon between the Alevis and the state removed all previous obstacles and gave the missionaries the chance to resume and strengthen their relations with the Alevis. Materially, the missionaries did not do much for them, but morally they clearly supported their aims and brought them before an international public. "Hitherto they have had small part in office or public influence. For the general welfare of the Ottoman Empire, it is much to be desired that this section of the community should obtain its full quota of strength in the commonwealth", George E. White, the president of the Anatolia College in Merzifon wrote in the Contemporary Review. But Alevis as much as Kurds and other natives tended to overestimate the real political weight of the missionaries' verbal support. It probably influenced them more than was good for them politically; the Protestant mission in Anatolia was a private enterprise and had less diplomatic backing than they thought.

The Eastern Alevis' re-alienation from the state

With the diplomatic re-emergence of the unsettled Armenian question and the establishment of a dictatorial Unionist government during the Balkan war in 1913, government suspicion against the Alevis, especially the eastern, Zaza, Kurmandj and Turkish speaking Alevis, increased rapidly. Indeed, for a single-party regime, ready to establish national unity at all costs, the scenario appeared catastrophic. The Anatolian Kızılbaş, in its own eyes a group of "genuine Turks, who have preserved in the purest manner the national tradition", were far from adopting the identity that the Young Turkish ideologues and scholars had designed for


\textsuperscript{17} White, George E., "The Alevi Turks of Asia Minor", cit., p. 698.

\textsuperscript{18} Köprülü, Fuad, "Bemerkungen zur Religionsgeschichte Kleinasiens", in: \textit{Mitteilungen zur Osmanischen Geschichte}, vol. 1, pp. 203-222, Wien, 1922, citation p. 215.—The Turkish and Kurdish speaking Alevis used actually in their \textit{aşim} liturgical texts an old Turkish that was free from the many Arabic and Persian imports characteristic of the Ottoman language.
them. Many of these “pure Turks” happened, in fact, to adopt political and social ideas similar to those of the Armenians. In order to avoid confusion, it is important to keep in mind that despite their religious kinship, Bektashism, which aroused so much the interest among Unionists, and Alevism, are two very distinct phenomena. The first was a religious order largely present in the Balkans, and urban, the second, an ethno-religious community scattered in many Anatolian villages, and rural by nature.

From 1913 the hardliners, who from then on set the tone in the Committee of Union and Progress, saw the Armenians more and more as alien elements and adversaries in an imminent social-darwinist fight. Indeed secular social-darwinist apocalyptic fantasies circulated widely in the pre-war circles of the European intelligentsia influencing the Young Turks and other Near Eastern elites. Unionists interpreted the close relations between Armenians, Alevi and missionaries as the result of unscrupulous propaganda on the part of the Protestants and Armenians. The rulers in the eastern Provinces did not doubt that the Alevi in this region supported the hated international reform plan for the Six Eastern Provinces, the “Armenian Reforms”, signed by the Ottoman government under diplomatic pressure, on February 8, 1914. They feared the Eastern Alevi would vote side by side with the Armenians in the elections scheduled by this plan. And indeed, logically, the Alevi would be involved in, and could benefit from, what this plan intended for the Armenians.

The reforms of February 1914 were intended as a compromise that left no-one as a loser, as Roderic Davison has suggested. There was, indeed, hardly any other way forward if it was really to create pacified and functioning multi-ethnic eastern provinces. After the government’s failures since the Congress of Berlin and such bloody events as the pogroms of the 1890s, the establishment

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of a balanced system under effective international control seemed unavoidable, but this proved to be going too far for the Turkish regime. Its choice to enter the First World War on the side of Germany was co-determined by its intention to abort the Armenian Reforms, seen as a first step to regional autonomy and Russian hegemony.\textsuperscript{21}

The destruction of the Anatolian Armenians in 1915-1916 signifies the brutal end of the 1908 vision of social utopia. The catastrophe was fatal for a whole people, for their neighbours and for the missionaries. The latter not only lost their principal clients, but also most of their confidence and their understanding of what missionaries could do in Turkey. From the 1920s onwards, they were left quite alone with a traumatic memory as eyewitnesses of a genocide, the breakdown of the missionary work of four generations and the large-scale failure of their social and political plans for their beloved Turkey. Silence was the price which had to be paid to enable them to work in the future under the nationalist victors of the Anatolian wars (1919-1922).\textsuperscript{22}

In the first half of 1914, the missionaries, too, had pinned their hopes on the international reform plan, the first efficient reform proposal since the vague promises of article 61 of the Berlin Treaty (1878). In the 1870s the ABCFM had substantially contributed to the internationalisation of the Armenian Question. Its political commitment was then focussed on the rights of the native Christians’, and on the religious liberty of the Alevi Muslims or heterodox people. The Sunni Kurds, the dominant group in the eastern provinces, were in those days outside the missionaries’ interest. The ABCFM’s view of society became broader only after 1900. An important reason for this change of perspective was the haunting question of why the large-


\textsuperscript{22} Mustafa Kemal’s civil and military cadre was Unionist and almost identical with the preceding one of Talat, Enver and Gemal, Cf. Zürcher, Erik Jan, \textit{The Unionist Factor. The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926, Leiden, 1984.}
scale pogroms of 1895 had happened and how they could be prevented in the future. The Ottoman government categorically put the blame on "Armenian provocations" and accused the American missionaries after the Berlin Congress of being the spiritual fathers of social unrest. US diplomats, normally supportive and proud of their famous missionaries, felt, for the first time, really uneasy about their position. Relations with the Hamidian regime remained volatile. Only the détente in 1908 gave the American missionaries the opportunity to cooperate with the new rulers on the joint building of a liberal Ottoman society. But when the friendship between the Young Turks and the ABCFM broke down in World War I, the missionaries' sense of the objectives they were pursuing had to be revised.

For the missionaries the reconstruction of post-war Turkey was inconceivable without truth and justice. Therefore an energetic political adjustment was necessary. For experienced missionaries from Eastern Turkey like Clarence Ussher, who participated in the peace deliberations in Paris, justice meant three things: first, the return of hundreds of thousands of Armenian and Kurdish refugees to Eastern and Central Anatolia; secondly the reconstruction of this most ravaged area with the participation of all native groups, including the establishment of a secure home under international protection for the Armenians as the most victimized and endangered group; thirdly the prosecution of war criminals, with the logical appointment of new cadres in the Ottoman state, or an amnesty under the condition of collaboration for the above-mentioned new order. Missionaries—the first strangers to return to the provinces—appealed to the Allies for assistance with great pathos, reporting that immediate action in the interior was required to give the new order a chance.24

21 In 1904 they submitted a questionnaire to the Eastern Turkey missionaries with suggestive queries like: "How far have results of training in American schools and contact with American ideas unfitted Armenians here to live quietly under existing conditions?" Personal Papers J. Barton 11:2, ABC.
24 Personal Papers C. D. Ussher, ABC.—For missionaries on the ground, the Greek occupation of Izmir (13. 5. 1919), permitted by the Allies, was a fatal error, the mandate refusal by the US-Senate a deep deception (1. 6. 1919). Cf. Grabill, Joseph L., "Missionary Influence on American Relations with the Near East: 1914-1928", in: AIB, 32, pp. 43-56 and 141-154, Boston, 1968, here p. 148.
We have touched on the renewed sympathy in relations between Alevis, Armenians, missions and the early Young Turkish state. We have seen that, for several reasons, the Unionists of the dictatorial regime after 1913 no longer believed in a common pluralistic future. In their eyes, native Christians could definitely not be assimilated into a unitarian body, but at the same time their determination to incorporate the Alevis increased. In 1914-1915, the Unionist party earmarked some of its members to investigate and make propaganda among the Alevis. A concrete reason for this step were disturbing papers on the Alevis confiscated in the ABCFM’s Anatolia College in Merzifon. In Unionist eyes these papers, probably written by George E. White, were “separatist”, as they highlighted Christian affinities to the Alevis.\(^{25}\) In spite of these and other efforts, the war regime did not succeed in winning over the Alevis. It is true that it succeeded in bringing on to its side Çelebi Ahmed Cemaeddin Efendi, the head of the Bektashi order. But he had no great influence over the rural Alevis. When he was sent to these Alevis in the Sivas, Marash and Dersim regions, he failed completely and could not convince them actively to cooperate with tribal militias against Russia.\(^{26}\)

The war deeply alienated the Eastern Alevis from the state. The gravest reason for this development was the extermination of the Armenians, which the Alevis witnessed. They identified themselves with their neighbours and feared they might suffer the same fate.\(^{27}\) Thus the Dersim became the sole collective place of asylum for thousands of victims of the genocide. Dersims and Harput missionaries worked hand in hand to establish an “underground railway for which our hospital back porch was a station sending people to Dersim”. So they got round the orders of the hated Vali Sabit Bey, himself a Dersimi who had made his career under the


\(^{27}\) Cf. Başbakanlık Osmanlı arşivi, DH.ŞFR 54-A/128, 25. 7. 1915.
new regime. A Kizilbash tribal chief and friend of the German missionary Ernst Christoffel in Malatya attacked a deportation caravan, in order to liberate Armenian friends; from 1915 to 1918 he sheltered all Christians in his territory. In March 1916 some tribes of the Dersim assaulted and destroyed the government buildings of the towns in their neighbourhood and marched toward Mamuretlaziz, the residence of the province governor (vali). Finally a substantial military force with heavy involvement of the local Zaza Sunni Kurds repulsed them. Unionists took revenge, deporting the whole population of the tribes concerned. Tacy Atkinson, a woman missionary living in Harput from 1901 to 1917, was a main responsible for the functioning of the aforementioned “underground railway”. She had to leave Turkey in 1917. In a letter, written in her forced exile in the USA, she expressed both her spiritual and existential hopes for the Dersim Alevi: “How I envy the man or woman who goes, filled with the love of God, to those Dersim Kurds. How I have loved and admired them and how I have prayed that God would give them a chance.”

It is logical, therefore, that in the summer of 1919 Kurdish Alevi tribes were the first “interior enemies” to oppose Mustafa Kemal Pasha’s reorganisation of the Unionist power structures (congresses of Erzurum and Sivas), and to prepare the first Kurdish uprising against the Ankara government—the revolt of Kocgiri-Dersim 1920-1921. But it was Kurdish only in its declared ideology, in its organizational structures it was clearly Alevi, with the participation of several Turkish Alevi villages. It follows from the same

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28 Atkinson, Tacy W., *Account of the events in Turkey during the past three years as I have seen them and as they have had an effect upon our work in the Annie Tracy Hospital*, 1917, ABC 16.9.7. — Such illegal smuggling set missionaries at risk, but it did not place them in a moral dilemma. At their conference in Edinburgh (1910) they had stated that “where Government itself becomes an instrument of violence and massacre, the ordinary principles governing the relations between Missions and Governments cannot be applied, because one of the related terms has ceased to carry its true meaning.” *World Missionary Conference. Reports of Commissions*, Edinburgh, 1910, vol. 8, p. 49.


31 Cf. the author’s “Le soulèvement du Kockri-Dersim et la question iden-
logic that the National Assembly of the Ankara Government, inaugurated in April 1920, did not even count a dozen Alevis among its 360 deputies.

In vain did the Kurdish Alevis try to get political support through the missionaries. Both sides, Alevi Kurds and Unionist- Kemalist officials, overestimated the political influence missionaries were then able to exert. ABCFM contacts with Kurds aroused so much suspicion among officials that such intercourse became practically impossible, as Henry Riggs wrote sadly to James Barton in December 1919. A year later the missionaries of the eastern provinces, from which the nationalist War of Independence was organized, began to be expelled. They were seen as inconvenient observers and “foreign agents”, carrying on a policy of reconstruction opposed to the nationalist one.

The unrestricted continuity, even reimplementation of Unionist structures, cadres and ethnic policies in 1919 was nowhere more manifest than in the eastern provinces. George White was fairly cautious when writing during the War that “the purpose of the ‘Party of Union and Progress’ is alleged to be to create a uniform state, one in Turkish nationality, and one in Moslem Orthodoxy.” In 1925, two years after the proclamation of the Republic, the basis of the new state was Turko-Sunni to an extent nobody could have foreseen.

In 1924 the Sunni Kurds finally realized that the Kemalists were not keeping the promises of autonomy which they had given when they needed Kurdish military support. The “honourable fight for the Caliphate” against “imperialist unbelievers” had been a mere trick, seeing that the Ankara government abolished the Caliphate on 3 March 1924. The Sunni Zaza Kurds around Sheikh Said stood completely alone in their opposition to the newly established state,

and enjoyed neither support from the Kurdish Alevis, who disdained them for their cooperation with the Unionists during the wars, nor from resident international agents, a role which the missionaries in Eastern Turkey had played in late Ottoman times. In the following 13 years the Republic of Turkey established its military and administrative control. Its gravest measure was the destruction, “ethnocide” (Martin van Bruinessen), of traditional Dersim society in 1936-1938. In vain did the Dersim leaders carry an appeal to the League of Nations in Geneva in July and November 1937.\textsuperscript{35}

The only missionaries remaining in contact with Eastern Alevis were some sisters of the German Hilfsbund in Marash. Since they continued successfully to build bridges between Protestants and Alevis—expressed in other terms: to voice effective separatist religious propaganda—, the government expelled them in 1933.\textsuperscript{36}

Conclusion

In the mid-19th-century members of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) were the first outsiders to open a door into the world of the socially marginalized heterodox people in the Anatolian countryside. Protestantism came to appear to many of the latter to be the modern way out of discrimination and backwardness. After the state’s strict prohibition of regular missionary activity among the Alevis in the 1860s, Protestantism continued to play an important catalytic role in the development of a “modern” and more (but not purely) secular identity reinvention pursued by a large number of Alevi circles. Such people began to believe in social and scientific progress, called superstitious practises into question and emancipated themselves from certain


conservative dedes (hereditary priests). We can probably say that in the second half of the 19th century, the American missionaries, in synergy with the Armenians, were instrumental in inspiring the beginnings of the Alevi renaissance which became most visible after 1908.

The missionaries’ penetration of the Anatolian countryside, its villages and mountains, was very important. Even before the Russian “Narodniki”-movement and many decades before the Turkish state provided civil services in the provinces, missionaries showed people in Central and Eastern Anatolia the possibilities of modern life. Exploring unknown geographical regions and ethnic or social particularities was the imperative condition for a successful approach towards “unreached peoples”. The Turkish historian Uyğur Kocabaşoğlu stated correctly that “when the Ottoman intellectuals in the first quarter of the 20th century began to discover Anatolia and wonder about it, we can say that American missionaries already knew it well. And because they did so, they probably knew much better than the Ottoman rulers the values, patterns of behaviour, desires, prejudices and expectations of the different ethnic and social groups living there.”

The state finally learned from the missions, using this know-how for a political—centralist and nationalist—purpose: go into the country, make contact with the people and win them over by bringing them schools and medical care in order to gain a foothold, develop and control inter-regional “national” society.

Yet even before Abdülhamid II and the rise of the Armenian question, the Protestant-Alevi connection alarmed the state, which feared for its Muslim unity. In central Anatolia and in the Kurdo-Armenian highlands, the representatives of the government began to side more than ever with the Sunni population. The Ottoman state was not able to play an integrative role in relation to the different religious identities in the region. After a seemingly promising intermezzo, the First World War deeply alienated the Alevi from the regime. Notably those of the Dersim region, the Alevis’

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heartland between Sivas and Elazığ, identified with their Armenian neighbours on their road to extermination. During the War of Independence, an important part of the West Anatolian Alevis, more directly affiliated with the Bektashi order, probably set their hopes on Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who, like the Unionist war triumvirate, cooperated with Çelebi Ahmed Cemaleddin Efendi. But the majority of the Eastern Alevis distrusted his Unionist reorganization, initiated as it was in their provinces. Many expected the establishment of an internationally sponsored new order, overestimating the power of the missionaries to act as its founding agents. Several Kurdish Alevis became early nationalists, believing that a Kurdish autonomy corresponded to President Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the agreements of the Paris Peace Conferences. They were deceived.

Thus the thesis of a categorical loyalty of the Alevis to Mustafa Kemal Pasha is an invention of the Neo-Kemalism that grew up in some circles in the 1960s as a reaction against the Sunni-Muslim revival in the 1950s, and at a time when a majority of the Alevi youth adopted oppositional socialism and secularism. Neokemalist Alevis paid tribute in their discourse to the fact that collective social prestige in the Turkish Republic largely depended—and still depends—on the historical partisanship for the “good” side during the War of Independence.38 For their part the left-wing students in the 1970s idealized the Kemalism as a leftist ideology of national liberation.

After the politico-religious Kizilbash insurrections in the 15th and 16th centuries, Protestantism in the second half of the 19th century encouraged the Eastern Alevis to a peaceful, but potentially very conflict-laden new coming-out as a self-confident community with a claim on equal rights. Actual “conversions” were politically impossible and theoretically not even necessary. Like

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the “flaccid” Oriental Christians, from the missionaries’ point of view the Alevi basically knew the truth of Jesus; only they called him Ali and practised a certain amount of superstition.\(^3\) Thus contributing to a revival of more authentic Alevism could be seen as a success of the missionary “leavening process”.

Puritan Protestantism has introduced some rational secularization in provincial Anatolia, without cutting off traditional roots or breaking up the endogamous isolation of the Alevi society. The Alevi Kurdish movement, even after World War I, still closely cooperated with the dede and seyyids and used Alevi symbols. Only the oppositional materialist socialism of the 1960s and 1970s almost completely cut the young Alevis from their traditional roots, but not their mental ones. In contrast, the Alevi revival of the 1990s strongly revalorizes spiritual sources.\(^4\) At the same time it is founding new organizational structures (associations) in order to create an accepted place for Alevi identity within a “civil society”, be it in the European diaspora or in Turkey. These new Alevi movements do not show a uniform ideological face nor a common attitude toward the Turkish state. But the fact that the Report on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession of the European Union (November 8, 2000) mentions the distinctive Alevi identity is a success of their lobbying against the official rhetoric of unitary culture.

The partial withdrawal from ideology, the self-confident affirmation of a distinctive identity, the spiritual revival and social reorganization in non-traditional terms remind us of elements in the early Alevi renaissance in late Ottoman times. But nowadays Alevis are active in the urban centres and have none of the Protestant stimulation of that time, and none of the illusory hopes to which it led. Some 150 years ago the Kızılbaş, in their encounter with missionaries, laid great stress upon the common denominators


they shared with Christians and their differences which separated them from the Sunni Muslims, and they did this not merely or primarily for opportunistic reasons. Today, by clearly maintaining their distinctiveness from Sunnism, Alevi scarcely call into question their Muslim identity, at least in their acquaintances with Europeans. They like to say that Alevism is the true Islam, freed from its function of legitimizing power. The attraction which this religious heritage exercises nowadays upon Western minds, notably in academic circles, proves that it continues to be an important spiritual bridge between Muslim and Christian culture, as it was in Ottoman Anatolia.