Religious Authority in Transnational Sufi Networks: Shaykh Nazım al-Qubrusî al-Ḥaqqânî al-Naqshbandî .................. 241
Annabelle Böttcher

The Modern Dede: Changing Parameters for Religious Authority in Contemporary Turkish Alevism ................... 269
Markus Dressler

Index ........................................................................................................................................... 295
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THE MODERN DEDE
CHANGING PARAMETERS FOR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY
IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH ALEVISM

Markus Dressler

Introduction

While Turkey is beginning its membership negotiations with the European Union, Turkish Alevis try to capitalize on the European pressure for reform. Most Alevis welcome the understanding of the European Commission that Alevis form a religious community deserving recognition. While publicly asserting their identity as a cultural-religious community, they debate internally the features constituting it. One of the central topics in this internal discussion is the future role of the dede, the traditional leader of the Alevi community.

The Alevi internal debate on dedelik, the dede institution, is part of a larger process of reconceptualization of the Alevi tradition. The first phase of this process, which got under way in the late 1980s, was characterized by organization and institution building and by the Alevis’ desperate desire for recognition. By now, the legitimacy of a distinct Alevi identity is widely acknowledged, and the debate on Alevism seems to have entered a new phase, in which questions concerning its internal organization and its representation have come to the forefront. I hold that contemporary Alevism faces two major challenges that seem to be of crucial importance for its future development.

1 I thank the editors, especially Gudrun Krämer, for their thorough critique of an early draft of this paper. I discussed a later version at the Study Group on Modern Turkey at Harvard University, which helped me to clarify some important points; in particular I want to thank Aykan Erdemir. Further thanks are due to Ali Yaman, who critically read this paper and shared with me his valuable insights, and to Carole Woodall for her very helpful comments.

The first challenge concerns the representation of Alevism vis-à-vis Islam and the state. Alevis are currently intensifying their endeavours to receive official recognition by the state. This accentuates and deepens the Alevi internal struggle as to whether and how they should be incorporated in the state structure. The fierce debate circles around a couple of highly contested issues: Which organizations and spokespersons can legitimately represent Alevism? Should Alevism be treated as an Islamic sect or as a religion in its own right? Is Alevism a religion at all or should it rather be regarded as a particular Anatolian philosophy and culture?

The second challenge can be described in terms of changing authority structures and new demands for religious leadership. In the context of the traditional Alevi village, the authority of a dede depended on a combination of qualities: descent, social skills, as well as ritual, mythical, and doctrinal knowledge. Ideally, the dede would have all of these qualities. Thus, in the pre-modern setting, the authority of the dede encompassed both political and religious spheres of life. In fact, these spheres were not differentiated but interconnected in Alevi worldview and practice. In the course of the 20th century, however, the traditional community structures dissolved through secularization and urbanization. The rapid social change contributed to a decline of the dede's authority, which coincided with the emergence of a new type of Alevi leader. These new Alevi leaders run the modern Alevi organizations and represent Alevism in public. Currently, Alevi elites in Turkey as well as in the European diaspora debate the skills and kinds of knowledge a "modern" dede should have, how he should be trained, and which functions he would have to fulfil.

This article describes the present Alevi debate on the modern dede and analyzes it in the context of the contemporary reformulation of Alevism in terms of culture and religion. I argue that dedelik, the institution of the dede, is being secularized, i.e., the role of the dede is constrained to ritual contexts increasingly defined as "religious" in opposition to "non-religious" functions such as representation of the community. While this means a limitation of the dede's authority, it

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also indicates new respect, and—as I will try to show—possibilities for an extension of his influence.

In order to clarify the significance of the current attempts to reformulate the dede institution, I will first give a brief account of the traditional dedelik and the changes it underwent in the course of Alevism’s transformations in the 20th century.

Authority in Traditional Alevism

The office of the dede is a core institution of traditional Turkish Alevism. The designation “traditional” is not meant to suggest any inferiority in comparison to the attribute “modern;” neither is a necessary evolution from “the tradition” to “the modern” implied. By the term “traditional Alevism” I simply mean Alevism as it was practiced before secularization and urbanization impacted on the Anatolian and Thracian countryside, thereby altering its social structures and boundaries. In this sense, the notion of traditional Alevism is a historic reconstruction mainly based on Alevi accounts of the 20th century and a very limited amount of relatively recent anthropological research. One should keep in mind that the term “Alevism” (Alevilik) itself is distinctively modern. It emerged only in the early 20th century, reflecting the evolution of a new trans-regional identity linking previously only partially connected groups which shared similar narratives, beliefs, as well as social and ritual practices. These proto-Alevi groups lived fairly separate from Ottoman society and had only limited access to written culture.

Despite these methodological provisos, I nevertheless maintain that the term “traditional Alevism” has heuristic value. For one, the

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1 By far the most comprehensive study on the dedelik is the dissertation of Ali Yaman, published as Alevilik'te dedelik ve ocaklar, Istanbul 2004.
2 “Turkish Alevism” is here understood geographically. The barely researched Alevi communities of the Balkans, mainly Albania and Bulgaria, are not included. Although this article focuses mainly on Alevis who define themselves as ethnic Turks, a considerable amount of Alevis are Kurdish (approximately 15–20 % of the population of Turkey are estimated to be Alevi, roughly one third of them speaking Kurdish dialects).
3 With “proto-Alevism” I do not want to suggest an evolutionist frame for the development of Alevism; the term is rather an expression of the awareness that the notion of “Alevism” is a modern invention, and that one has to be careful with projecting modern concepts on pre-modern realities.
various Alevi accounts of "traditional Alevism" (geleneksel Alevilik) as well as anthropological research show that even Alevi communities without any direct connections and living far away from each other appear to have a great amount of commonalities concerning community structures, practices, and beliefs. I use the term "traditional Alevism" to label these transmitted commonalities. The notion of traditional Alevism is therefore an ideal type signifying a not yet secularized and urbanized Alevism as it emerges from the collective memories of Alevis themselves, as well as from historical reconstructions.

In traditional Alevism, dedelik, the office of the dede, comprised social and religious leadership functions. Irène Melikoff sees in the dede a continuation of the pre-Islamic Turkish Shaman, the kam-ozan. Conceptualizing Alevism as "Islamicized Shamanism" allows her to explain the miraculous powers attributed to the dede, as well as his role as healer and mediator. Whether of shaman origin or not, these skills, as well as a concept of distinguished descent, sёy, form the backbone of the dede’s authority. Descent is the main social marker in traditional Alevism. The Alevi dedes are revered as evelad-t resul, or sёyid, either term indicating descent from the Prophet Muhammad—in Alevism, as a rule, through Muhammad’s daughter Fatima and Ali; the charisma of the family of the Prophet (the ahl al-bayt) is believed to be passed on from generation to generation. The dede lineages are called ocak. Ocak literally means hearth and distinguishes a holy lineage. The ocak lineages are complemented by non-ocak

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8 Melikoff, Hadji Bektach, chap. 1.


10 A very good description of the socio-religious organization of traditional Alevism based on an analysis of written primary sources as well as field research conducted in the early 1980s is provided by Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Die Kızılbas/Aleviten. Untersuchungen über eine esoterische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Anatolien, Berlin 1988, pp. 167–79. For a more recent description of Alevi village life based on fieldwork conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s see David Shankland, The Alevis in Turkey. The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition, London 2003, chapters 4–6.

11 Reputation and authority of different ocak, and, indeed, different types of ocak vary significantly. For a detailed description see Yaman. Dedelik kurumun, pp. 94f.
lineages, whose members are called *talib*. *Talib* cannot become *dede*, since this is a prerogative of male *ocak* members. Which member of an *ocak* embarks on a career as *dede* depends on his social standing in the community, his religious knowledge, and his leadership qualities.\textsuperscript{12} The relationship between members of an *ocak* clan and those *talibs* who recognize the members of this *ocak* as *dede* is referred to in terms of parents and children.\textsuperscript{13} Intermarriage between the two groups was considered incest and strictly forbidden, and the bonds between particular *dede* and *talib* families used to be hereditary.

The main role of the *dede* was to lead the Alevi rituals, especially the *cem* ceremonies, the major form of communal Alevi worship. His descent granted him the religious charisma required for the performance of the rituals as well as for instruction on the requirements and rules of the mystical path. In addition, the *dede* was acting as mediator and judge.\textsuperscript{14} Traditional Alevis would not consult sharia courts but solve conflicts within their communities; the *dede* had the right to sanction unruly behaviour and expel those community members who violated its basic rules.\textsuperscript{15}

The tight social boundaries of traditional Alevism and the dominant position of the *dede* were important factors allowing Alevis to remain fairly autonomous at the margins of Ottoman society. There were signs of an erosion of traditional Alevism's social structures already in the second half of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{16} This erosion has been a gradual process that took place with differing speed and intensity depending on the location. In general it can be said that it was not until the mid 20th century that the damages in the community structures seemed to have become irreversible.

\textsuperscript{12} Shankland, *Alevis in Turkey*, pp. 104f.
\textsuperscript{13} Yaman, *Dedelik kurumu*, pp. 94f.
\textsuperscript{14} Mechanisms of conflict resolution are incorporated in the *cem* ceremony clearly showing the conflation of ritual and judicial practices in traditional Alevism.
Breakdown and Comeback of the Dedelik

The social structures of traditional Alevism were affected by the secularization politics of the early Turkish Republic (founded in 1923), e.g., the ban of all tarikat (Sufi order) activities in 1925. Although Alevism is not a Sufi order in a technical sense, some Alevis are associated with the Çelebi branch of the Bektashi order, which was also banned. There are accounts of how dedes were discriminated against by local state representatives in the early years of the Republic. However, as Ali Yaman argues, the efforts to prevent the dedes from visiting their associated talibs had only limited effects and should not be seen as the main reason for the decline of the dedelik.17

Much more significant was the economically motivated exodus to the urban centres in the middle of the century, which often cut the close dede-talib relations and thus undermined the social network of traditional Alevi communities.18 With the younger Alevi generations turning to leftist ideologies in the 1960s and 70s, the dedes’ authority was further damaged. Sometimes dedes were portrayed as charlatans exploiting ordinary people. From the viewpoint of the dedes, Ali Yaman characterizes the time from the 1960s to the late 1980s as a period when the dedes were “temporarily out of duty.”19 At the same time, a new Alevi middle class evolved in the cities. The breakdown of the traditional hierarchies made possible the emergence of a new urban Alevi elite, i.e., individuals who assumed leadership functions in secular organizations drawing on an Alevi constituency.20 This new elite is the backbone of the new Alevi public presence as a forceful social movement.

Today, the dedes are “back in duty,” but their duties are being newly negotiated. From the late 1980s onwards, Alevis put more emphasis on the religious dimension of Alevism.21 In the aftermath

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17 Yaman, Dedelik kurumu, pp. 50, 117.
18 Cf. Shankland, Alevis in Turkey, pp. 135f.
19 Yaman, Dedelik kurumu, pp. 115 ff.
of the coup d’état in 1980, the parameters of Turkey’s religio-political discourse were redefined.\textsuperscript{22} The left, political home for many Alevi in that period, was largely destroyed and lost its appeal. In an attempt to depoliticize the public sphere, Islamic institutions and symbols were fostered by the military elites. The presence of religious symbols in the public sphere increased considerably, roughly along the lines of the so-called \textit{Turkish-Islamic Synthesis}, an ideology that was fostered by the military elites as well as by civilian politicians like Turgut Özal, Turkey’s prime minister from 1983 to 1989.\textsuperscript{23}

The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis aimed to reconcile a universalistic Muslim with a particularistic Turkish identity. It was committed to a re-defined Kemalism articulated in terms of a conservative modernism, which was Islamic but secularist and committed to a nationalism directed against perceived separatist threats, be they ethnic or religious. Alevis did not subscribe to this new ideology, which defined Turkish Islam as Sunni Islam, and which paved the way for intensified efforts in assimilating them. The establishment of mandatory religious education based on the Sunni faith in schools, and the increase in mosque construction in Alevi villages—mostly against the will of the inhabitants—were manifestations of this policy.

Seeking for a place within the parameters of the new discourse, Alevi returned to their cultural tradition, which they increasingly formulated in religious terms, thus to a certain extent appropriating the discourse of post-1980 identity politics. Alevi began to forcefully confront Turkish society with their demands for recognition of Alevism as an identity significantly different from mainstream Sunni Islam. Public discussions on the nature of Alevism emerged. \textit{What is Alevism}, and \textit{What do the Alevi want?} became widely debated questions. Advocating their difference from Sunni Muslims, Alevi activists developed answers for both a curious public and the Alevi community itself. Starting to write about Alevism, they engaged in Alevi historiography and embarked on a scripturalization of Alevi beliefs and practices. At the same time, they started an organization building


\textsuperscript{23} For a concise account of the military coup and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis see M. Hakan Yavuz, \textit{Islamic Political Identity in Turkey. Religion and Global Politics}, Oxford 2003, pp. 69–75.
process, creating new Alevi networks and spaces. In this context, the dedes gained new respect and began to play an important role in re-connecting Alevism with its traditions.

For the survival of Alevism as a religious tradition with more than merely folkloristic appeal, the question of how to sustain the dede institution gained importance. How should dedelik be redefined in the context of a modern, mainly urban Alevism? Today, especially in urban environments, the mediating functions of the dede seem to be gone; they had been tied into the social relationships of traditional rural Alevism, and have widely vanished. There are significant sociological differences between traditional and urbanized Alevi community structures. In the urban context the cem ceremonies conducted in the cemevis ("cem house") of the new Alevi organizations usually disregard traditional dede-talib affiliations which had in a traditional setting been a prerequisite for the ceremony, since they defined the ritual and social boundaries of the community. In an urban cem, the presiding dede does not necessarily know the participants, which usually make up a random mix of Alevis from all sorts of different backgrounds.\(^24\)

The current discussion on the dedelik originated in an urban context, but its repercussions are also felt in the countryside.\(^25\) Many Alevis still regard the dedes as authoritative carriers of Alevi traditions. The dede is still regarded as indispensable for the main Alevi rituals. I have not heard of any cem ceremony held without a dede presiding. However, his role as main source of Alevi knowledge is contested by non-dede Alevis, and by new community organizations, which provide social and cultural services.\(^26\) Non-dede Alevis, who publish on Alevism covering a wide range of themes such as mythol-

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\(^{25}\) There are still Alevi villages where parts of the social structures of traditional Alevism are maintained. Some villages still, or again, have regular communal rituals like the cem, and to varying degrees acknowledge the leadership of resident or visiting dedes. But as the study of Shankland shows, the authority of the dede is also in the village curtailed by the secular state institutions, which compete with the dede in authority. Additional pressure is felt through emigrated villagers who not only support their left behind families, but also bring back the ideas discussed in the new urban Alevi centers, thus making the urban transformations of Alevism indirectly felt in the villages. Cf. Shankland, Alevi in Turkey, passim.

ogy, history, beliefs, and practices, contribute directly to the production of new Alevi knowledge. The dedes play only a marginal role in the leadership of Alevi organizations which are mostly led by talib Alevis: intellectuals, journalists, businessmen, lawyers, and engineers. The new Alevi elite has the organizational qualities needed for the management of Alevi associations, and the communicative skills to use the opportunities that emerged with the privatization of the Turkish media in the 1980s. Familiar with the cultural codes of the Kemalist middle class, these new secular elites represent Alevism in public; they give press conferences, participate in talk shows, and speak at conferences. Hence, the leaders of the largest Alevi associations have gained “media charisma,” i.e., their public presence reaffirms their authority and adds to their standing within the Alevi community.

İzzettin Doğan: Prototype of the modern dede?

Only very few dedes are engaged in Alevi institution building and public representation. However, there is one prominent exception. This is İzzettin Doğan (b. 1940), a professor of law at Galatasaray University of Istanbul, who is the president of the Cem Foundation, a Kemalist and state-loyal Alevi association with its headquarters in Istanbul. Doğan’s success has several reasons: his relative closeness


29 According to the informed estimate of Ali Yaman, only a minority of those having leadership functions in the modern Alevi organizations belongs to a dede lineage. Yaman, “Anadolu Alevileri’nde otorite,” p. 339.


to the Turkish state and its elites, his successful networking, and his
descent. The combination of these qualities endows him with a
charisma that is rather unique among the contemporary Alevi elite,
and that helped him to emerge as the most influential contemporary
Alevi leader, receiving by far the most extensive media coverage.33

İzzettin Doğan enjoyed the privilege of an elite education at
Galatasaray Lisesi in Istanbul, a prestigious private high school where
classes are held in French. Already in his youth he got acquainted
with the worldviews and cultural codes of the secularist upper mid-
class; this certainly helped him to bond later on with Kemalist
circles.34 Politically, Doğan tries to counter the prevalent image of a
naturally leftist Alevism. In 1983, he was among the founding mem-
bers of the Nationalist Democratic Party, which was sponsored by
the military after the coup d'état.35 Doğan’s self-proclaimed goal in
joining this nationalistic party leaning to the right was to force the
political centre to recognize Alevi issues. However, he left the party
after only three months, realizing that this was an unrealistic objec-
tive.36 Henceforward, he has abstained from direct involvement in
party politics; rather, he tries to convey an image of political inde-
pendence, which allows him to engage in a dialogue with parties
across the political spectrum including the religious right—an inevit-
able source of harsh criticism from leftist Alevis.37 Doğan can be con-
sidered a moderate, pragmatic Kemalist, committed to an inclusive
Turkish Nationalism. His commitment to Kemalism and the state
enhances his stand within Turkey’s state centrist political discourse.

Striving for leadership of the Alevi movement, İzzettin Doğan tries
to conquer the symbolic territories of Alevi imagery. One example
is visual representation. While it is common among Turkish Alevis
to display Atatürk’s picture next to those of the Alevi saints Ali and
Hacı Bektaş,38 the Cem Foundation takes this practice one step fur-
In its publications as well as at its organized public events, the portrait of Doğan is added to this arrangement, thus, one could argue, elevating Doğan to the phalanx of Alevi saints. The symbolism of this particular arrangement is important. Ali and the 13th century Anatolian saint figure Hacı Bektaş represent the Alevi tradition. In Alevi imagery, Ali symbolizes the struggle for justice, while Hacı Bektaş represents Alevi ethics and secularism. Hacı Bektaş is further imagined as a pre-modern founding father of Turkish nationalism. The portrait of Atatürk, the very symbol of Kemalism, underlines the commitment to Turkish Secularism and Nationalism. İzzettin Doğan tries to establish himself as the modern heir of these Alevi founding fathers; claiming to represent the values they stand for, he tries to partake in their charisma. From this self-assigned position he promotes an understanding of Alevism as Turkish Islam in line with the country's secularist and nationalist principles.

One reason for why it is possible for Doğan to engage in such highly loaded symbolism is his descent. In the province of Malatya, his father Hüseyin Doğan dede was both a powerful regional leader of the Baliyan tribe and a prominent dede as representative of the Ağuicen Ocak, which is one of the most prominent ocaks of Anatolia. As both a tribal and religious leader, Hüseyin Doğan had considerable political influence, reflected in his service as Member of Parliament throughout the 1950s. He was initially a member of the Republican People’s Party but then joined the ranks of the Democratic Party—a move causing a lot of resentment among leftist Alevis who associate the Democratic Party with reactionary Islamist politics. Like his father, İzzettin Doğan is a controversial figure in the Alevi community. It is clear however, that Doğan has inherited and draws on the charisma ascribed to his father.


41 He distinguishes this Turkish Islam from the Arab Islam, which he sees expressed in Sunnism. See Ayhan Aydin, İzzettin Doğan’ın Alevi İslam inancı, kültürü ile görüş ve düünceleri, Istanbul 2000, p. 80.
In the context of urban Alevism, traditional dede-talib bonds may weaken, allowing charismatic dedes like İzzettin Doğan to attract supporters who do not belong to lineages traditionally affiliated with them. When the traditional dede-talib affiliations become less salient, opportunities for competition between dede lineages arise. An example of this is found in the correspondence between a group of Alevi talib now living in Istanbul and their efendi from Hacı Bektaş, a representative of the şebiyan, whom they recognize as their highest authority. The exchange took place in 1991 and was initiated by a letter of the talib, in which they convey to the efendi a list of suggestions for how to improve the situation of Alevis in contemporary Turkey. In their letter, they encourage the şebiyan to supervise Alevi communities more closely and to develop a centralized Alevi network. They further demand the organization of national dede conventions, suggest control of the education of the dedes and the establishment of dede training programs. In his response, the efendi explains: "You say that the dedes must always be licensed. The majority of dede say, 'My ancestors came before Hacı Bektaş' or even 'He [i.e. Hacı Bektaş] had no descendants anyway'. There are those who say, 'My ancestors are older'. How is it possible to discipline those who wish to act in this way, who do not know the truth?"

The efendi’s criticism of independent ocaks which challenge the authority of the şebiyan, targets Alevi dedes like İzzettin Doğan. Doğan stresses the prominence of his Ağuçen Ocak, tracing its lineage back to Muhammad and Ali (through Ali Askır, son of the fourth Shiite Imam Zayn al-Abidin). Doğan claims that his ocak had been established in Anatolia already at the very beginning of

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13 The şebiyan branch of the Bektashi order claims superior authority over other Alevi lineages based on its alleged direct descent from Hacı Bektaş Veli, the patron saint of the Bektashi order. A considerable part of Alevi ocaks recognizes the şebiyan as their main authority; their dedes in exchange receive formal authorization by the şebiyan.
14 This is a reference to the internal dispute amongst the Bektashis as to whether Hacı Bektaş had progeny or not. While the hbabvan branch believes that he stayed childless, the şebiyan branch holds that he had children. The şebiyan (the efendis) claim direct descent from Hacı Bektaş.
15 Shankland, Alevis in Turkey, p. 151.
16 Shankland, Alevis in Turkey, pp. 149–52.
17 As Doğan recounts, Ali Askır was saved from the Kerbela massacre and then raised by Turkmen Shiites. The line of Muhammad had thus continued in a Turkish environment. Aydınlı, İzzettin Doğan‘in Alevi İslam, p. 46.
the Turkish invasion in the 1070s. At the time of Haci Bektaş Veli's arrival in the 13th century, the Ağuçu Ocak would already have professed Alevism in Anatolia for at least 200 years.48

The correspondence between the efendi and his talib had an interesting epilogue. Confronted with the talibs' demands to assume a more pro-active leadership role, to centralize in order to concentrate resources, and to exert more control over the education and the activities of the dedes, the efendi could only express his sympathy with these demands, but had no concrete suggestions about how to achieve these tasks. Eventually, the respective Alevi group joined the Cem Foundation, whose leader is, as I showed, directly competing with their efendis from Haci Bektaş. With funding obtained through Izzettin Doğan, the community managed to build and run a cemevi, in which several of them found employment.49 It appears that the Cem Foundation as an Alevi organization, representing Alevi interests vis-à-vis the state and trying to allocate resources for Alevis, simply had more to offer than the efendi from Haci Bektaş, and thus appears to have won this contest in religious authority.

With the Cem Foundation, and his influence in a number of further Alevi organizations sponsored by the Cem Foundation, İzzettin Doğan has built an infrastructure that allows him to popularize his vision of Alevism and to claim leadership of the Alevi movement. However, the Cem Foundation and İzzettin Doğan are strongly disputed within the Alevi community. Doğan claims to represent up to 99% of the Alevi population.50 This is an illusionary number and directly contradicts similar claims by the Alevi Bektashi Federation.51

48 Aydn, Izzettin Doğan’ın Alevi İslam, p. 53. Doğan further stresses the authority of his ocak as compared to dikme ocaks, i.e. ocaks which became established through the authorization of another ocak (as representative) but can not trace back their ancestry to Muhammad themselves: "There are of course not that many dede who are [in fact] descendents of the prophet. Whilst the number of dedes is small, there are many who profess dedelik." Aydn, Izzettin Doğan’ın Alevi İslam, p. 54. Although his descent is critical for his charismatic appeal, Doğan does himself not profess dedelik; this is at least partly due to the fact that his wife is not of Alevi descent. Instead of his, his younger brother is continuing the active dedelik of the lineage.

49 Shankland, Alevis in Turkey, pp. 151f.


an Alevi umbrella organization, which unites 450 organizations, including not only organizations from Turkey but also the powerful Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany.

**Training the Modern Dede**

A recent poll in which 400 Alevis from the countryside as well as the city were asked about their opinion on the dedelik supports the general sense of urgency expressed in Alevi publications. While 71.9% of the interviewees saw the dedes as not sufficiently qualified, 73.5% were nevertheless of the opinion that the institution was necessary for the development of Alevism. These numbers may be of limited statistical value, but seem an accurate reflection of the general mood.

One major concern is the dedes’ state of education. Mehmet Çamur, president of the Şahkulu Sultan Foundation, which is located in a former Bektashi lodge and maintains one of the most vibrant Alevi centres of Istanbul, demanded in 1998 that dedes should be educated at universities: “[T]hey have to study philosophy, they should be familiar with the social sciences, and they have to know the literature very well.” More recently he declared that Alevis should rather keep their affairs in their own hands, independent of state institutions. Accordingly, he announced that the Şahkulu Foundation will soon commence a dede training program.

While there are many members of dede lineages, only a few dedes are actually capable of performing the rituals. Finding such dedes is one of the biggest problems of Alevi organizations that want to offer regular cem ceremonies. Hüseyin Gülen, former president of

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55 Shankland estimates that in the Alevi village he studied roughly 10% belonged to dede lineages. Shankland, Alevi in Turkey, p. 79.
the Gazi Mahallesi Cemevi in Istanbul, estimates the number of dedes still capable of performing the Alevi ceremonies in the traditional way as not higher than 500.\textsuperscript{37} To solve this problem, Gülen encourages the creation of high schools for dedes—alogous to the Imam Hatip high schools, which train students for basic mosque services and qualify their graduates for university admission. This idea was also recently supported by Reha Çamuroğlu, a well respected Alevi intellectual and author of many articles and books on Alevism.\textsuperscript{38}

It is no incident that Alevis living in Western Europe and especially Germany, who have been a driving force in the Alevi revival, participate prominently in the debate.\textsuperscript{59} Even more so than Alevis in Turkey they were confronted with the problem of finding qualified dedes for occasional cem ceremonies.\textsuperscript{60} However, the secular condition of Germany allows Alevis to pursue the issue more openly than it would be possible within the constraints of Turkey’s religio-political discourse.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{Debating Dedeik in Germany}

The Alevi Academy, based in Wiesloch/Germany, has so far offered the most systematic attempt to modernize the education of the dede. In line with the Alevi Bektashi Federation, the Alevi Academy is opposed to an integration of Alevism in the structures of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and prefers to keep the education of dedes outside of the state’s supervision.

In 2003, the Academy began an “Educational Program for the Perfection of the Dede,” developed in close cooperation with the

\textsuperscript{37} Aydın and Dalgıçkan, “Üç cemevine kadın.”
\textsuperscript{38} Odabaşı, “Aleviler dedeliği tartıyor.”
\textsuperscript{40} Sökefeld, “Alevi Dede in the German Diaspora,” pp. 171ff.
\textsuperscript{41} In Turkey, Alevi claims still have to be very careful with explicitly religious claims, which in the past often led to investigations by state attorneys who tend to interpret particularistic identity claims, be they based on religion or ethnicity, as separatism. In this discourse expressions of loyalty to the state, e.g., when Mehmet Çamur emphasizes that “[t]he new dède generation has to be respectful towards laicism, democracy, and scientific thinking” (Aydın and Dalgıçkan, “Üç cemevine kadın”)—are a mode of legitimation.
Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany. The objective of this program was to improve the educational foundation of dede candidates. The seminar program covered the following subjects: history of religions, Islamic and Alevi history, the Alevi path and its rules, Alevi poetry, sub-groups of Alevism, format and problems of Alevi education, Sufism, comparative religion, sacred days and principles of Alevism, basic terms of Alevism, Alevi in Europe, the significance of music in Alevism, and historic and religious dimensions of Bektashism. These subjects are studied in weekend seminars taught by non-Alevi and Alevi academics as well as a small number of dedes. The subjects actually taught by dedes indicate the fields of knowledge in which the authority of the dedes is still regarded as indispensable. In fact, dedes were co-instructors of the courses on "The Alevi Path and Its Religious Principles" and "Sacred Days of Alevism and Its Religious Principles." The remaining subjects were taught by non-dedes, and even non-Alevis. As pointedly put by Aykan Erdemir, "[s]cholars who had previously conducted ethnographic research on Alevis were now in a position to teach Alevi religious guides what Alevism was really all about."

The Academy emphasizes that the seminar program is not a sufficient training for an aspiring dede and cannot provide legitimacy for exercising dedelik. It is rather a supplementary education program that aims to combine traditional and modern methods and kinds of knowledge. The program provides insight into the Alevis' conscious efforts to maintain their tradition in the face of experienced existential challenges. The following quote from the program is a good example of the dialectic relationship between the legitimizing force of tradition, contemporary necessities, and an utopian vision of a "modern Alevism":

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63 Aykan Erdemir, "Islamic Nonprofits in Turkey. Reconfiguration of Alevi Belief and Practice," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, November 20, 2003, p. 3. The idea of non-Alevi teaching Alevis on Alevism might be surprising, but does not seem all too strange for Alevis themselves—provided the non-Alevi instructors have received their knowledge through authoritative Alevi sources. This view is expressed by Hidir Uluer, president of the Karacaahmet Sultan Cultural Association, which is one of Istanbul's largest Alevi associations. See Aydn and Dalgakiran, "Üç cemevine kadın."
We are of the opinion that it is impossible to approach the education of religious specialists (dinadamalar) such as dedes...in accordance with the needs of the Alevi society of today if we close the eyes in front of the necessities of our society, and if we apply [instead] traditional understandings, habits and methods...Enormous differences in every regard have come up between the place, function, and the education methods of the superior religious specialists of the past and those of today. We think that the most reasonable way to embark upon this enterprise is to take an approach that comprises the today and the future without breaking with the past, and without destroying the essence of our belief and our values...

Recently, dede Hasan Kilavuz, chairman of the “Dede Commission of the Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany,” pushed the debate with controversial statements regarding the meaning of dedelik in the modern age. In a manner strikingly different from the organizations surrounding the Cem Foundation, which try to establish the notion of “Alevi Islam,” he stresses the incompatibility of Alevism and the dedelik with basic features of Sunni Islam, and vehemently rejects any attempts to reconcile Alevism with the Islamic tradition:

Alevilik is a belief (inanç) in its own right. Alevis possess a belief that sees God everywhere in the universe. Alevi performed their worship and beliefs for a thousand years in a modest and extremely pure form; today, some dedes try to decorate this form of belief with fake pearls. These dedes, which are insecure about themselves, which are carried away by a minority complex towards the Sunni Muslim faith, distance the essence of Alevism from our traditions and customs...We cannot connect the faith of the Anatolian Alevi with the basic principles of the Islamic religion.

Kilavuz further argues that Alevis would not share any of the major religious practices obligatory for Muslims; neither could the fundamental beliefs and practices of Alevism be encountered within Sunni Islam. Sharply distinguishing Alevism from Islam, Kilavuz’ argumentation paves the ground for an understanding of Alevism as a belief or faith (inanç) “in its own right.” He describes the history of

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64 Alevi Akademisi, “Alevi Akademisi Dedeler Yetkinleşme,”
Anatolian Alevism as a history of opposition to Sunni Islam, thus strengthening a particularistic Alevi identity based on a shared memory of resistance against Sunni oppression. Nevertheless he recognizes the need to adjust this tradition to modern conditions. Unlike the “Alevi Islam” protagonists, however, his vision of modern Alevism does not entail recognition of Islamic features in Alevism, and he does not employ the term “religion” (din) for Alevism. Instead he stresses humanistic principles, and argues in particular for an enforcement of gender equality within Alevi practice: “These young dedes have to put aside conservatism and fanaticism and have to lead [our] mothers and sisters (our women), who are well-equipped and rooted in the tradition, to active teaching and service.”

Kılavuz then lists the different positions traditionally limited to men—including the dede position—and demands their opening for women. He further demands a redefinition of the relation between dede and talib. Dedelik would have to be adjusted to present needs. This might also mean an extension of the dede’s duties. For example he proposes that Alevis should have their dedes conduct their burial services instead of calling a Sunni imam, as is common praxis. In fact there appears to be a trend to strive for more independence from Sunni institutions, and funeral ceremonies are one example for that. Usually, Alevis call on the local imam to wash their dead and conduct the ceremonies. But more and more cemevis have their own washing and cooling facilities for their deceased community members. In June 2004, I observed a funeral service at the Okmeydani/Istanbul branch of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolia Cultural Foundation. The ceremony was jointly led by a dede and a Sunni imam. This was obviously a new practice. I was told by participants that usually there would no dede be involved. Further, I was told that the imam sent by the municipality would also be of Alevi descent (Alevi çocuğu, literally “an Alevi child”)—otherwise they would not accept him.

Kılavuz’ provoking positions generated a lively debate. In a recent interview with the monthly magazine of the Federation of the Alevi

67 Fieldnotes, June 1, 2004.
Communities in Germany, Cafer Kaplan, a young Alevi dede living in Germany, who is also a member of the Federation's Dede Commission (in German Geistlichenrat, “council of the clergymen”), strongly supported the proposals of Hasan Külavuz. He stressed in particular the need for dedes to be educated and demanded concrete steps leading to a modernization of dedelik: “If we among us dedes could develop a common system and a common voice, then we could set Alevism on a more solid basis. Therefore we dedes have to create a standard regarding the belief. Thus we could prevent the differences in between our people regarding the belief.”

The need for a standardization of Alevism is also felt in Turkey. Ali Yaman, himself a member of a dede lineage, explains that according to his observations “the idea of a need for standardization increasingly becomes popular among all the Alevi elites and the dedes.” This standardization would mainly affect the form and content of the cem ceremonies.

It is nowadays common among the larger Alevi associations to have dede commissions as part of their organizational structure. The dede council of the Confederation of the Alevi Communities in Europe, the biggest European Alevi umbrella organization, has formulated a “sequence of cem,” thus trying to provide dedes with a blueprint for how to conduct a cem ceremony, the traditional forms of which are regionally slightly different. This dede council has also published a calendar of sacred days for Alevis, providing information for how to celebrate Alevi holidays.

Alevi associations entertaining cemevis will usually employ a dede for ritual and advisory services. Naturally they would look out for one whose religious and political outlook they would see corresponding to their own convictions. A separate, often beautifully decorated room for the dede in charge has become a standard feature of cemevis

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71 Şahin, Alevi Movement, p. 222.


of a certain size. The integration of dedes into the secular Alevi associations and the establishment of the dede council as a new Alevi institution exemplify the differentiation of authority in modern Alevism. It secures the dede's active participation in the Alevi reformulation process while at the same time limiting his authority to a newly defined religious sphere. The more or less systematic incorporation of the dede into Alevi organizations marks a shift in the power relations between dedes and non-dede Alevis, since it "meant that executive directors could not only hire and fire religious guides [dedes], but could also have a say in congregational ceremonies and religious matters." Erdemir gives the example of a hired dede who was fired after he urged women participating in the cem ceremony to cover their hair, a demand found unacceptable by his association.

Alevi internal discussions about modern Alevi education provide us with a further example for the confinement of the dedes' authority. Dedes seem to have only limited influence on the development of curricula for Alevi instruction at elementary schools, which has been offered in some Berlin public schools since 2002. Since fall 2004, Alevism is also part of a new inter-religious, dialogue-oriented class called "Religious Education for All," offered in the state schools of Hamburg. Headed by Ismail Kaplan, the Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany is the driving force behind Alevi school instruction in Germany. It has formed an "education council," separate from its dede council. The Alevis most engaged in the project of Alevi education, such as Ismail Kaplan, belong to the new elite of secular Alevi functionaries and intellectuals. This shows that the dedes are not seen as the main authority for Alevi instruction anymore. Nevertheless, they still have a role in symbolically accompanying and thus legitimating it. The provisionary curriculum of the Federation of the Alevi Communities has, for example, prominent dedes in its advisory committee. Among them are Veliyettin Ulusoỹ,

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74 Erdemir, "Islamic Nonprofits in Turkey," pp. 6f.
75 Erdemir, "Islamic Nonprofits in Turkey," p. 7.
78 Lehrplankommission der Föderation der Aleviten Gemeinden in Deutschland, "2. Teil. Alevitische Glaubenslehre für die Grundschulen. Lehrplanentwurf für den
the current head of the şelebiyan from Hacı Bektaş, Derviş Tur dede, former chairman of the federation’s dede council, as well as Şükrü Ağçagul dede, who was also among the staff of the Alevi Academy’s dede training program. The incorporation of Veliyetvin Ulusoy is of particular importance since many Alevis regard him as the direct descendent of Hacı Bektaş Veli and many ocaks subscribe to him as highest Alevi authority. The symbolic connection to Ulusoy, as well as the fact that the Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany has dedes from Turkey in their dede council, exemplifies the transnational character of the Alevi movement.

**Conclusion: Changing Parameters of Authority**

The transformations of Alevi identity in the 20th century can be summarized in terms of first secularization, then a turn to leftist ideologies, and finally a cultural and religious reorientation. These transformations had far-reaching consequences for the socio-religious structures of Alevism, especially for the position of the dedes. Traditional Alevism was based on the social and religious interactions in the rural village community. Drastic economic and social changes, however, led to a rural exodus, which destroyed traditional bonds of affiliation based on kinship and lineage. As a consequence, Alevism lost much of its pervasiveness as a system of social control. Simultaneously, a broader concept of Alevism that could provide a common identity transcending regional particularities emerged in urban environments. Alevis began to envision themselves through the wider lenses of “culture,” and—increasingly, since the Alevi revival in the late 1980s—“religion.” In this context, the dedes gained new respect and began to play an important role in re-connecting Alevism with its traditions, even if their newly assigned role was much less powerful than it had been in traditional Alevism. Only occasionally do they take up leadership positions in Alevi organizations, e.g., İzzettin

Alevitischen Religionsunterricht,” Köln: Föderation der Aleviten Gemeinden in Deutschland, 2001 [unpublished manuscript]. I am grateful to İsmail Kaplan from the Federation for providing me with a copy of the manuscript.


80 In a recent poll among 400 Alevi from the city and the countryside, 89.8% declared that they saw Alevism in cultural and religious terms. Yıldız, “Alevilerin yüzde 71’i.”
Doğan in the Cem Foundation, and Hasan Kilavuz, the chairman of the Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany’s dede council. The only sphere which is still dominated by the dede is the field of Alevi ritual. Descent from an ocek lineage is still considered a necessary precondition for leading the ceremonies. But even here the Alevi associations curtail the authority of the dede, and the dede is mainly fulfilling symbolic functions and certain assigned duties within a more and more explicitly defined Alevism. However, the differentiation of authority within contemporary Alevism bears also the possibility for a newly increased importance of the dede, especially if the trend to religionize Alevism continues. Then, the dede as a form of an Alevi priest is likely to acquire additional functions such as extended ritual duties, but also as a spiritual counselor and community representative.

For the survival of Alevism as a religious tradition, the question of how to sustain the dedelik is crucial. How can dedelik be redefined in the context of a modern, mainly urban, Alevism? New formulations of dedelik, the office and functions of the dede, are thus among the most visible and most radical changes of modern Alevism.

As I tried to demonstrate, authority in Alevism is becoming secularized insofar as the traditional accumulation of powers and functions in the dede institution became differentiated. Whilst the dedes still maintain their authority in ritual contexts, they are not the leaders of the community anymore, which is now organized and represented by Alevi associations and foundations that are mostly headed by non-dede Alevis. Regarding matters of belief, the dede has to compete with secular sources of knowledge. This shift and differentiation of authority reflects the rationalization and secularization of Alevism. In this regard İzzettin Doğan is no exception. He is, however, extraordinary insofar as he fulfils both traditional and modern pre-requisites for leadership, combining descent of a prominent dede lineage with secular knowledge, political influence, and organizational skills.

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81 The most radical approaches to the reformulation of the dedelik question even the idea of charisma via descent. An example is the position of Riza Zelyut, an Alevi journalist and author of many popular books on Alevism. Instead of descent, he argues, virtues and merit of a person should decide on whether he could become a dede. While this is certainly a marginal opinion, it nevertheless reveals the range of positions possible in the Neviler discourse. Yıldız, “Alevilerin yuzde 71’i.”
The Alevi case shows that authority is not a static condition; rather, the process of ascribing and exerting authority has to be seen as part of a dynamic negotiation in a given discourse—discourse here understood as the institutional context that sets the rules for identity politics and controls the language through which it is communicated. Any authority claim will have to be newly negotiated if its evidence decreases in a changing context. New authorities have a chance to be established if they succeed in making their claims evident and manage to convey their legitimacy to those upon whom they want to exercise their authority. The concentration of authority in the institution of the dede made sense in pre-modern Alevism, when the well-being of the community depended on strict socio-religious borders erected against a hostile environment. The bonds between dede and talib lineages secured allegiances and provided social structure. This has changed in the modern, urban context. Erdemir reports of Alevi who, when asked about their ocak, responded with the names of Alevi organizations: “For them, the Alevi organization they attended was their lineage, and the dede working at that organization was their religious guide.”

This example illustrates how traditional intra-Alevi affiliations give way to less formalized bonds, which appear more suitable to an urban environment. Following the reconstruction of Alevi identities in accordance with criteria based less on kin and descent but on ethnicity, political outlook, religious convictions, and, last but not least, convenience, relations between Alevis, and also boundaries between Alevis and Sunnis have to be re-negotiated.

In order not to get ultimately absorbed by the Sunni majority, Alevis are forced to interact with state institutions, which are clearly inclined to Sunnism. Authority is most likely to be ascribed to those who are believed to best fulfil the requirements for such an endeavour—the judgment will obviously depend on the stance one takes towards state authority. However, legitimacy is achieved not only by means of ideological positioning, but also through the sheer benefits a particular authority secures for those who subscribe to it, as in the above-mentioned case of the Alevi migrants to Istanbul who joined

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the Cem Foundation after their dedes could not offer them any material or organizational prospects.

The differentiation of authority in modern Alevism leads to internal tensions. Traditionalist Alevi fear that changes in the institutions of Alevism betray the Alevi heritage and might in the end only accelerate its dissolution. Modernist Alevi see the opening of the Alevi tradition and its institutions, their reformulation, and the development of objective criteria for dedelik in addition to the requirement of descent as a must for its survival in the modern context. Both traditionalists and modernizers are aware of the severe challenges Alevism faces in its post-traditional period. The debate on dedelik reflects this awareness. It has to be seen as part of an objectification process which manifests itself in new organizational formations (e.g., the Alevi umbrella organizations) and institutions (e.g., the dede councils) as well as attempts to standardize beliefs and rituals. Alevism is increasingly scripturalizing, thus inevitably defining itself much more closely than pre-modern oral Alevism ever did. I regard the creation of the modern dede as part of a reformulation of Alevism as a religious tradition, in the process of which authority is differentiated. The modern dede seems to become a kind of Alevi priest, a religious specialist whose authority is defined by his knowledge and services in the field of ritual. In this “modern” arrangement the dede is assigned the role of the religious leader as expressed in the following quote by İzzettin Doğan: “[The dedes] are leaders of the faith. It is the institution of the dedelik that... guarantees the interpretation of the Koran in accordance with the conditions of the present age.”

References


83 Objectification I understand with Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscator as “the process by which basic questions come to the forefront in the consciousness of large numbers of believers: ‘What is my religion?’ ‘Why is it important to my life?’ and ‘How do my beliefs guide my conduct?’” Objectification describes the process by which “religion has become a self-contained system that its believers can describe, characterize and distinguish from other belief systems.” Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, Muslim Politics, Princeton 1996, p. 38.

84 Aydin, İzzettin Doğan’ın Alevi İslam, p. 51.


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