

HELEN HAAS

Alevis in Contemporary Izmir:
Imaginaries, Beliefs
and Practices regarding
Hacı Bektaş Veli



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1 INTRODUCTION

From a religious point of view, Turkey is mainly known as a Sunni Muslim country where mosques with high slender minarets dominate towns and villages. The regular calls for worship from the tops of the minarets through the air only confirm this understanding. However, behind the mosques are *cemevis* – the houses for the Alevi religious gatherings known as *ayin-i cem*. While mosques have the privilege of being supported by the state and thus are seen and heard in urban and rural landscapes, *cemevis* have been waiting for recognition as distinctly Alevi places of worship without concrete results at the Turkish national level. Since Alevis have not yet been recognized as a religious group in Turkey, their gathering houses (*cemevis*) are not recognized as places of worship.

Alevis have faced this non-recognition policy by organising associations that articulate, represent, and implement the interests of the Alevi religious minority. Building and managing *cemevis* have been one of the effective ways of uniting and mobilising local Alevi communities. These buildings, which have become centres for Alevi self-expression in religious, cultural, social and political matters, are built jointly by collecting funds from community members without receiving support from state institutions. Although these *cem* houses are essential in the light of different aspects of Alevi community life, their religious function and aims as Alevi places of worship are seen as crucial by Alevi organisations for Alevi sustainability and recognition.

During a *cem* gathering, Alevi values and principles are expressed and lived – love and devotion towards the Prophet’s family (*Ehl-i Beyt*), unity and consent of the community, equality between the genders – with men and women participating together and both being addressed as *can* (soul). While in Buca (one of the largest urban districts of the Izmir Metropolitan Municipality), I had the opportunity to observe Alevis’ preparations for joining the *cem* gatherings. One of them was a woman in her early forties. She fasted the whole day from eating and drinking while preparing *lokma* – dedicated food for common use, to be shared between the participants. She washed her body and wore clean clothes. At the same time, she engaged in soul-searching and examining herself inwardly to find whether she had any conflicts within herself or with anyone in her family or the community. She concluded that earthly needs and desires are significant obstacles in spiritual self-development; however, awareness of them helps one become a better person. Thus prepared, she participated actively in the *cem* gathering by joining the *semah* ritual with other souls (*can*).¹

Next to the *cemevis*, a new phenomenon that has emerged since the 1990s, there are tombs of saints that have been part of the Anatolian religious landscape for centuries. A spiritual leader (*dede*) of Alevis told me that Anatolia is a land of saints and, thus, miracles and hope. He also noted that there is no Alevism

¹ Fieldwork notes, 21.03.2019.

without the tombs of saints.² Is this an exaggeration? In Hacıbektaş and Oğulveren, I could observe confidence and commitment expressed through individual ritual activities in the vicinities of the saints' tombs. A young woman testified that she could be genuinely herself and live her Aleviness (*Alevilik*) during visitations to a saint's tomb³. The earth and pebbles (*teberik*) from the tombs are kept at homes as reminders and sources of saintly protection and guidance.

The above-mentioned religious practices are incompatible with the understandings of 'orthodox' Sunni Islam and are thus sources of tension and misunderstandings. Hüseyin Gökçe, the chairman of the Alevi Culture Association in Buca, asked me, 'Who has the right to formulate and direct the religious life but those who live it?' Asking this, he expressed his most profound concern about being left unrecognized and even oppressed by Sunni-affiliated state institutions. Despite difficulties, Alevi have been able to unite and strive for greater recognition and opportunities in Turkey. One of the key figures in the movement towards unity among the Alevi of different backgrounds is Hacı Bektaş Veli⁴, a medieval Anatolian saint whose teachings are present during the *cem* gatherings and whose tomb is often compared to Mecca by the Alevi.

1.1 Aims and content

This dissertation is about an Alevi community living in Buca (Izmir) and its members' imaginaries, beliefs and practices regarding Hacı Bektaş Veli, a 13th Century Anatolian saint. The focus of this study is, on the one hand, on the transforming Alevi community, which is concentrated around the organisation and activities taking place in the Buca *cemevi*, and on the other hand, on individual community members. By focusing on the Alevi as a religious minority group, I pay attention to the internal diversity of Islam represented in Turkey and emphasize the 'alternative' ways of being Muslim besides 'orthodox' Sunni Islam.

After the Turkish Republic was founded on the secular ideology of Kemalism, the former religious culture, including poetry, rituals and ideas, were reinterpreted in the language of secular humanism and integrated into the Turkish national agenda. Medieval saints and mystics such as Hacı Bektaş Veli, Yunus Emre and Mevlânâ were construed as humanist mystics whose ideas were considered progressive and suitable for modern times. Mark Soileau argues that their commemoration in publications, media representations and state-sponsored festivals in the framework of Turkish nationalism and humanist values such as tolerance, love and human rights established them as humanists in the minds of most modern Turks, unless another ideology has intervened (Soileau 2018:85–87). Through this dissertation, I aim to research and highlight the contemporary Alevi

² Interview D42-9, 16.03.2019.

³ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁴ Instead of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî I use a form of the saint's name, Hacı Bektaş Veli, which is common in scholarly literature in English.

view of Hacı Bektaş Veli and show how he is imagined and interpreted through beliefs and practices performed in religious life. I will research whether he is still seen as a miracle-working saint, humanist or both. In doing so, I will focus on the imaginaries and beliefs of Hacı Bektaş among Turkish and Kurdish speaking Alevi in one of Turkey's most secular province centres – Izmir.

In light of these objectives, I will give an overview of the Buca Alevi community through the organisation and activities in its *cemevi*, research the person of Hacı Bektaş Veli through the eyes of the Alevi living in Buca, and follow in the footsteps of the Alevi to the visitation and commemoration festival to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli in the town of Hacıbektaş.

As Roland Grimes notes in his book *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, ideally, every scholar of ritual would wish to research every aspect of a complex phenomenon. Still, in reality, we are 'forced to focus our research by foregrounding some things and backgrounding others'. He also says that the background does not disappear even when it goes out of focus but shapes how focalized objects are interpreted. (Grimes 2014: 232) By researching the imaginaries about the saint, I foreground individual understandings, expectations, and experiences regarding Hacı Bektaş Veli. At the same time, I consider the origin of the individuals from distant provinces, participation in the local Alevi organisation in Buca, and current social and political circumstances as influencing factors in forming these individual views. Since I focus on individual Alevi, I pay less attention to general Alevi history and current circumstances; however, when I do so, it is motivated by the aim of providing a context for the broader understanding of the Alevi 'world', which frames individual experiences of being and acting as Alevi. Also, it would be impossible to see the veneration of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a single phenomenon without seeing it in the broader context of the cult of saints in Islam, as well as situating the visitation (*ziyaret*) to Hacıbektaş in the broader context of pious Islamic travels connected to personal notions of well-being and spiritual growth.

The first part includes introductory chapters encompassing research aims and methodologies and a general introduction to the topic. The second part, *Buca cemevi and its community*, which gives an overview of the emergence and activities of the Alevi community in Buca, also sets the background for the third and fourth parts. As a diverse community from various provinces outside of Izmir, it includes Alevi of different backgrounds and thus represents a community where achieving unity has been an important goal. I show how this relatively young and diverse community has managed to organise and maintain the local branch of the Alevi Cultural Associations and build the *cemevi*. This includes studying the role and function of the *cemevi* as a particular Alevi place for different gatherings, especially for religious gatherings. Why is it so important for the community to have the *cemevi* as the Alevi place of worship while they consider themselves Muslims and there are so many mosques in the neighbourhood? What makes a *cemevi* a *cemevi* or a community an Alevi community? Community members' understanding will answer these questions of belonging and identity. Since there are various understandings of Alevism and being an Alevi among the wider Alevi community in Turkey and diaspora (as listed, for example, by Markus Dressler

(2022)), I research the perceptions of Buca community members about the nature of Alevism. I show how communicating religious belonging, values and principles through the visuality and the activities of the *cemevi* have made the community noticeable in public and confident in achieving its goals.

In the third part, *Hacı Bektaş Veli: imagining a saint in contemporary Izmir*, I focus on the diversity of imaginaries related to Hacı Bektaş Veli through interpretations of his personage, life and deeds. Also, I will research the importance and meaning of Hacı Bektaş Veli among contemporary Alevi living in Buca. Taking the *Velâyetnâme* (the saintly stories), sayings and a visual depiction of Hacı Bektaş as sources of knowledge and memory, I will research his person and meaning in the community's imaginings through members reflecting on these sources. I will seek answers to the following questions regarding Hacı Bektaş Veli: Who is Hacı Bektaş Veli, and what is his role and meaning for Alevi today? How is the saint imagined among Alevi living in Buca? Why is he important for them? Is there anyone who could be compared to him? How is his miracle-working power understood today? By answering these questions, I will present an imagined vision of the saint as seen by the Alevi living in Buca.

In the fourth part, *Hacıbektaş: sacred town and its visitation*, visitation (*ziyaret*) to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli in the town of Hacıbektaş will be unfolded through the eyes of the Alevi living in Buca. I will show how beliefs regarding the saint are lived and expressed through ritual practices by individuals. Bowman and Valk have noted that 'as beliefs and perceptions are difficult to grasp and define, understanding becomes easier if we look at expressions of belief in behaviour, ritual, custom, art, and music, in textual and other forms' (Bowman and Valk 2012: 12). While the third part researches the imaginaries and beliefs and their articulation by participants, the fourth part focuses on how these are materialised through expressions during visitation and commemoration of Hacı Bektaş. I will show how inward beliefs are lived through outward practices in connection to the sacred environment of the tombs and related objects in Hacıbektaş. The materiality of visitation, including spaces, objects and ritual performances, is mainly approached as expressions of beliefs, and my attention will be mainly on visitors' aims, expectations and experiences during the visitation within the sacred space, including meaningful objects regarding a particular entity – Hacı Bektaş. Meyer and Houtman have pointed out the relevance in the religious studies of grasping "how practices of religious mediation effect the presence of these entities (God, gods and spirits) in the world through bodily sensations, texts, buildings, pictures, objects, and other material forms that involve bodies and things" (Meyer and Houtman 2012: 6). Bearing this in mind, I will research how the sacred space and objects in Hacı Bektaş are approached, understood and experienced by the visitors.

My approach is individual-centred, not place- or object-centered; however, the use of places and objects as ritual prerequisites is considered and discussed. Coleman and Eade have emphasised the importance of the individual during visitations:

The pilgrimage site creates a ritual space for the expression of perceptions and meanings the pilgrims bring to it. As such, the social space of pilgrimage is constantly constructed and shifts according to who is visiting. (2004: 6–10)

This thesis focuses on the ‘one who is visiting,’ the individual whose aim is to live and experience the site with its particularities. In this light, I will not base my approach on theories about pilgrimage but on personal views and experiences. For this purpose, I highlight individual bodily performances and their meaning–constructing motion that provides the places with a sacred charge, while also helping to live out and express the avalanche of perceptions and expectations accumulated and waiting to be released during the visitation. I will research the sacred site as a space where the visitor’s relationship to the saint, his teachings, and his miracle-working power achieve completeness resulting in spiritual calmness and satisfaction.

Choosing these aspects of the visitation for focus enables us to highlight the variety of individual aims, expectations and experiences, and understand the role of such experiences in constructing personal and common Alevi identities and worldviews. The importance and meaning of Hacı Bektaş Veli will be unfolded through expectations and ritual actions, as well as confirmed through fulfilling experiences.

Since this study is situated within the framework of vernacular religion, an inductive approach was applied without setting preliminary hypotheses. I made it one of my methodological aims to grasp, as closely as possible, highly individual views and personal understandings of the issues concerned. Researching individual imaginaries and beliefs about the saint, I entered into close cooperation with community members by interviewing and participating with them, enabling the inductive approach to lead the research process towards generalizations.

While Alevi identity and belonging, as well as Alevism as a belief system, have undergone and are still going through significant processes of formation and change, this research provides empirical material on the current state of the chosen themes on the example of the Alevi community in Buca (Izmir). This original material about a particular Alevi migrant community established in Izmir in a particular time frame provides insights that may be valuable comparison data in future periods. Besides Alevi studies, I presume that this case study based thesis may contribute to pilgrimage studies and the general understanding of the cult of saints in the contemporary and secular environment, as well as give an insight into specific Alevi understandings and principles about the importance and significance of Hacı Bektaş Veli and visitation to his tomb in Alevi’s lives.

1.2 Methodologies

1.2.1 The concept of vernacular religion

The research was conducted following the approach of vernacular religion, or religion as individuals live it. There is a long history in official discourse in Turkey of seeing Alevism as a ‘popular’ religion compared to ‘orthodox’ Islam or a deviation practiced by ignorant village people (Dressler 2013). In this light, the concept of vernacular religion that folklorist Leonard Norman Primiano introduced in his article ‘Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife’ in 1995 seems particularly relevant and appropriate in the context of Turkey and Alevism. Primiano suggested this term and approach in order to shift the focus from the two-tiered model of ‘folk’, ‘unofficial’, or ‘popular’ religion juxtaposed with ‘official’ religion (Primiano 1995: 38) to ‘religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret and practice it’ (Primiano 1995: 44). He also argues that it is impossible for the religion of an individual not to be vernacular since religion inherently involves interpretation (Primiano 1995: 44). According to this understanding, both religious experts and lay people have their individual ways of understanding and living religion in their particular settings as humans. Consequently, the focus of the approach of vernacular religion is on the people who live the religion, on their personal and private dimensions of belief, and not on religion as an abstraction. Therefore, religious traditions and related institutions are also based on the vernacular religion or religion as it is understood and lived by the people involved in these traditions and institutions. The vernacular religious approach understands religion as a continuous art of individual interpretation and negotiation of any number of influential sources. (Primiano 2012: 164) Based on this understanding, my approach to Alevism is neither as a folk religion nor as ‘heterodox’ Islam, but to religion involving imaginaries, beliefs and practices that are both individual and shared and subject to change and adjustment. In the Islamic context, this also implies that the focus is taken off how Islamic a particular community is, or the ‘purity’ of their Islam, and instead research religion as understood by a particular minority community – Alevism living in Buca – on an individual basis.

A related concept to vernacular religion is ‘lived religion,’ which emerged in the second half of the 1990s. Nancy Ammerman, one of the pioneers of the concept of lived religion in religious studies, notes that it concerns ordinary people, not religious professionals, and it is about everyday life, not what happens in institutionalised religious settings. This approach pays special attention to marginalized groups outside official or recognised religions and religions beyond traditional institutions and beliefs (Ammerman 2016: 7), thus highlighting the religiosity and experiences of lay people, ordinary people, and various alternative movements at a personal level. The lived religion approach promotes the abandoning of predefined understandings of religion as starting points of analysis in favour of an emphasis on the activities and interpretations of individuals (Knibbe

and Kupari 2020: 159). Alevi as a marginalised religious group is in the focus of this study.

In the literature, lived religion is treated variously as a term, a concept, an approach and a field of study – or all of these (Knibbe and Kupari 2020: 166). My application of lived religion is, first of all, an approach employed to research individual imaginaries, beliefs and practices of Alevi without any presuppositions. In this way, this study merges similar and overlapping understandings of vernacular religion and lived religion. Although the primary focus of the lived religion approach is on ordinary and lay people, not on the clergy of ‘high’ religion, I also include in my research the religious experts of Alevism, the *dedes*, since according to the vernacular religion approach all people have their specific personal views and experiences about religion. Also, it would be difficult to classify the *dedes* as clergy in a classical sense as they are not recognized as religious leaders by the state, and they usually get their income from ordinary employment, not religious activities.

As Knibbe and Kupari have noted, the inductive approach of lived religion does not rely on a specific, fixed theory or method but rather designates a broad research trend (Knibbe and Kupari 2020: 163). At the same time, it has greatly benefited from methods of ethnography. Following the principles of the vernacular religion and lived religion approaches, I did not proceed from a specific theory; however, ethnographic methods such as observation, participant observation, and interviewing were implemented as the primary tools for data collection. Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman posit that the goal of the scholarship is not to produce authoritarian theoretical statements but rather to observe and capture the flow of vernacular discourse and reflect on it (Valk and Bowman 2012: 10). Elsewhere, Bowman has noted that ‘vernacular approach anticipates heterogeneity and individual creativity and therefore does not dismiss or ignore it as methodologically inconvenient or deviant’ (Bowman 2014: 103). Based on this attitude of ‘capturing the flow’ and ‘reflecting on it’ and valuing religious individuality, I made it my methodological aim to take the individuals as a starting point, who shared their lives full of particular personal views, beliefs and experiences.

1.2.2 Research design and methods

This dissertation is based on an empirical case study focused on a particular Alevi community and its vernacular religion. Since it aims to research communal life as well as the beliefs and experiences of individuals, ethnographic research methods such as observation, participant observation and interviewing were chosen for data collection. Qualitative research methods were chosen as they allow the researcher ‘to study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 3). To understand the significance of the 13th Century Anatolian saint among Alevi living in a modern Turkish city, I stepped into the ‘natural settings’ of the research subjects – their towns, villages, sacred sites,

streets, parks, homes and gathering houses, as well as participating in their family and community activities.

I found both observation and participant observation as research methods productive during my fieldwork among the Alevi. As a non-Alevi outsider, I couldn't take a personal part in all the religious rituals I witnessed during my fieldwork. On the other hand, observing without participation was a productive tool for getting acquainted with general situations, patterns and people. Observing during the commemoration festival in Hacibektaş and the Eastern Anatolian villages helped me to understand the conditions behind the 'Alevi world' that I was entering as a researcher and as a person from a different cultural and religious background. While observation was an important method for mapping and understanding general patterns as reflecting on situations 'from the outside', participant observation was a tool for building deeper and trusting relationships between me as a researcher and the researched community, helping me to reflect on situations 'from the inside'. Doing things together in mutual participation helped me to step into the community, becoming one of the 'communication partners' instead of only observing and studying 'from a safe and scientific distance' (Bowman and Valk 2012: 10). Combining observation and participant observation allowed me to step as closely as possible to the researched target group, minimally interfering with the natural course of events as they occur without the presence of a researcher. Keeping the attitude of avoiding a 'safe and scientific distance' and striving for partnership with the researched community helped me build relationships and discover new perspectives for understanding.

Observing and participating in community events such as *cem* and *sohbet* gatherings and concerts drew the general lines of the research and became a routine of the fieldwork. As I intended to reach deeper than that – to the individual level of beliefs and meaning – I also conducted interviews focusing on subjective understandings of the person of Hacı Bektaş Veli as well as aims and encounters during the visitation to his tomb. I prepared a semi-structured interview questionnaire for face-to-face interviews in different localities where the interviewees felt comfortable. The semi-structured interview method allowed me to be flexible in collecting data through opinions and beliefs about imaginaries of Hacı Bektaş Veli and memorates – first-person narratives about personal experiences – connected to the saint. The interview questions were divided into three categories – the person of Hacı Bektaş Veli, hagiographic stories about Hacı Bektaş Veli, and visitation to his tomb in Hacibektaş, Nevşehir. Before proceeding to actual interviews, I also collected personal demographic data. For more specific questions about the history and foundation of the *cemevi* and community life, I conducted two online interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic with the current and former headmen of the association while I was already in Estonia (in 2020).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed into a written form that allowed me, in addition to listening, also to read the interviews in print. Before proceeding to the analysis process, I listened to and read the interviews over and over in order to grasp the ideas, beliefs, imaginaries, feelings, experiences and the ways they were expressed by the informants. I analysed the interviews according to the

qualitative content analysis method, the advantage of which lies in obtaining information directly from subjects without being guided by predefined categories or theoretical starting points (Laherand 2010: 292). I chose this method for analyses because it is based on an inductive approach, where, in the course of analysis, categories are derived from original data. The semi-structured interview plan with its themes provided the basis for particular topics under which the categories were created.

1.2.3 Dataset and interviewees

I collected the data underlying this thesis in 2018–2019 in Hacıbektaş, İzmir, Erzincan and Tunceli. In May 2020, I conducted two additional interviews with the current and former headmen of the Buca *cemevi*. Observation, participant observation and semi-structured interviews were implemented as methodological tools. Also, spontaneous and informal conversations contributed to the formation of a general understanding in the course of fieldwork. However, in addition to observational activities, I used planned interviews with prepared interview questions as the main tool for data gathering. Not only did the former and current headman of the association welcome and empower me to conduct fieldwork among community members of the Buca *cemevi*, but they also helped me to make first contacts with potential interviewees, who in turn recommended me to additional potential interviewees. In this way, a snowball effect developed, bringing interviewees into the research.

All twenty-one interviewees who participated in the research project did so voluntarily and out of their goodwill. All interviewees were of Alevi background, having been born to Alevi families. The two criteria were being an Alevi and participating in the *cemevi* community life. I did not limit interviewee profiles with further limitations such as gender, ethnicity, or religious caste (*dede* and *talip*). Although I aimed to research mainly religious beliefs and imaginaries of Alevis, I did not exclude interviewees, who assessed their religious views as atheists or theists. Their participation allowed me to have a small-scale comparison of the imagined figure of Hacı Bektaş and related activities.

Although the interviewees currently live in İzmir and participate in the Buca *cemevi*, many were born in Turkey's eastern and central areas. Seven informants were born in Erzincan, five in Erzurum, one in Muş, one in Amasya, one in Bayburt, one in Bingöl, one in Elazığ and four were born in İzmir. The headman Hüseyin Gökçe also testified to this diversity of regional origins, noting that the *cemevi* had gathered people from all over Turkey, both Kurds and Turks.⁵ Although the Turkish language is used as the main language during the various activities of the *cemevi*, occasionally, Kurdish languages (mostly Zazaki) are used in informal conversations and singing. Ethnic diversity is also reflected in the interviewees' self-description. Ten interviewees noted that their mother tongue is Zazaki, one

⁵ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

Kurmanji, one mixed Zazaki/Kurmanji, and nine Turkish. Those who defined their mother tongue as Turkish may also have Kurdish ancestry. The shift in mother tongue perception from Zazaki to Turkish was noted among the younger informants born in Izmir. For example, a young male interviewee, whose mother defined her mother tongue as Zazaki, named his mother tongue Turkish.

Both men and women participated in the research as interviewees. It was noticed how the headmen and the *dedes* encouraged women to participate. As a result, I interviewed eight women and thirteen men. Among the men were seven participants from holy lineages (*ocak*) and six from a *talip* background. Five of the holy lineage persons were active as *dedes* in the *cemevi*. Among the interviewees were also current and two former headmen of the *cemevi*, who all belong to the *ocak* families. As for the female participants, they all came from *talip* families.

The research involved people of different ages – the youngest respondent was 17, and the oldest was 73. The average age of the respondents was 43 years old. The age group distribution was as follows: five participants were 17–25 years old, two were 26–35 years old, four were 36–45 years old, six were 46–55 years old, three were 56–65 years old and one was 66–75 years old.

All participants were literate and had acquired primary school (2), middle school (8), high school (3), or university (7) education. One participant's educational level remained unknown. Many participants were still students during the fieldwork, so the actual information about their educational level is subject to change.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face during the fieldwork in the rooms of the *cemevi* (10), private homes (10), and workplace offices (1). Two additional interviews were conducted online with the current and former headmen after the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. All the interviewees have been provided with anonymity. An exception has been made for two interviewees – the current headman Hüseyin Gökçe (code D49-01 and D50-22), and his predecessor Hüseyin Akçay (code D62-10 and D63-23), who both requested the usage of their names openly. Based on their leadership position and representation in the community, their request has been taken into account, and their names have been made public. The other active *dedes* will be distinguished by A, B, and C.

I mark interviewees' quotations with a reference code that includes the speaker's gender, age and whether they belong among holy lineages (*ocak*) or claimants (*talips*). The reference code begins with O for *ocakzades* who are not active as *dedes*, D for active *dedes*, M for male *talips*, and F for female *talips*. The first number preceding the letter shows the interviewee's age, and the second number indicates the number of the interview. For example, D24-13 belongs to an active *dede* who is 24 years old and was interviewed as the 13th in line. Interview dates appear along with the codes.

1.2.4 Fieldwork in general

My previous fieldwork in Turkey took place in a Baptist community in Buca in 2017. During this time, I became acquainted with local Christian community life and saw the challenges they experience as a religious minority. Christian and Alevi communities face similar challenges in a majority Sunni society. Consequently, it was natural to widen my field of research by shifting my focus from a Christian to an Alevi community. This was a rather inspiring turn as I had met Alevis, who had become Baptist church members in my previous research. Thus, my previous fieldwork at a local Baptist church led me to subsequent fieldwork at an Alevi *cemevi* in Buca.

Considering the winter of 2017 fieldwork as independent research and an introductory episode leading to the following research project, I have reflected on it as a significant prelude for taking the following steps and choosing subsequent directions as a researcher. At the time, I was welcomed by an Alevi family to stay with them, and it gave me the privilege to live and experience their daily worries and joys and share views through informal conversations and different activities. Reflecting on the time and situations ‘there and back,’ I certainly cannot ignore the implications of this experience for my subsequent research about Hacı Bektaş among the *cemevi* community.

When I expressed a wish to get acquainted with a local Alevi community, a deacon with an Alevi background took me to Buca *cemevi* and introduced me to the then head of the community – Hüseyin Akçay. This first meeting took place in January 2017. I understood that I was not the first academic researcher who entered the door of the *cemevi*. Moreover, I saw that the Alevis are eager to welcome researchers to communicate their concerns and interests to a broader public, whether Turkish or international. Later, I found it to be a delicate matter as I needed to focus on my research aims, not following the rhetoric that has been developing over the decades in the case of the Alevis. Throughout the Buca fieldwork, I had to make efforts to adhere firmly to my research aims of focusing on a set of questions regarding Hacı Bektaş Veli as the informants tried to communicate other issues that were relevant to them spontaneously and occasionally even tried to lead me to make changes in my research questions towards more day-to-day policy issues.

Before returning to Buca in 2019, I participated in a commemoration festival in Hacıbektaş in August 2018 in order to have an experience of a country-wide Alevi festival dedicated to Hacı Bektaş Veli. Although this was the second year when the official celebration was held in October instead of August, the commemoration of Hacı Bektaş Veli in August still took place, being organised by some Alevi associations instead of the local municipality as usual. At that time, I could observe how the local municipality’s controversial decision to change the festival dates caused tensions and misunderstandings within the community. Because of the changed situation, the festival was not as crowded and varied as usual; however, a smaller-scale programme was carried out, and the sacred places were still full of visiting devotees.

By the time I returned to Buca in the spring of 2019 for fieldwork, the *cemevi* had gained a new headman – Hüseyin Gökçe – to whom I was introduced by the former headman. They presented me to the board members of the association and the spiritual leaders – *dedes* – and asked them to provide me with everything I might need and to keep me updated with events and activities. In this way, both headmen acted as classical gatekeepers for me as a fieldworker. They helped me to introduce my project during one of the public concerts that took place in the *cemevi* (dedicated to International Women’s Day), where I found my first voluntary interviewees, who in turn recommended others who, in their eyes, were suitable for joining the research project.

After the fieldwork in Buca, in the autumn of 2019, I visited the regions in Eastern Anatolia where many informants were born and had lived. This trip allowed me to understand the natural environment and related lifestyle that is understood as ‘ideal’, but also of the economic conditions that caused the families to migrate to other regions of the country and abroad. Also, I observed the local sacred sites that are visited by the Alevi population for worship – Oğulveren (Erzincan), Düzgün Baba (Tunceli), and Munzur Baba (Tunceli) and participated in a *cem* gathering in the village of Bağpınar (Erzincan).

All these fieldwork trips have been complementary and perspective-creating data-collecting activities. I had further plans of going back and participating in the common visitation to Hacıbektaş with the community members that were to be organised by the *cemevi*, but with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, these plans were interrupted. Since this regrettable development closed down the *cemevi* and affected the activities of the community for many months in 2020 and 2021, I also found myself in a situation where I was not able to follow my full research plans. Despite this obstacle, I am confident that the data I have collected and brought to the reader through this thesis provide new knowledge through a vernacular perspective about the meaning of Hacı Bektaş Veli in today’s Alevi community in Buca.

1.2.5 Some further aspects of the fieldwork

One of the striking aspects of the fieldwork that affected and framed my experience in Turkey was the excitement and increased interest in me as a foreign researcher. It was almost impossible to remain unnoticed, whether during ritual gatherings or while visiting sacred sites. In order not to affect the natural course of events and behaviour as little as possible, I decided not to take photos or film during rituals, even though I had the consent of the community and the religious leaders. Instead, I used a voice recorder and notes I took by memory right after the events. However, the presence and effect of a researcher were still there, as noticed, for example, in Buca during a *sohbet* meeting where a *dede* usually chooses a topic to teach about and answers the questions of the gathered people. As it was widely known that I was there to learn and research about Hacı Bektaş Veli, the *dede* chose to teach about the saint’s life and deeds. Later on, a young *talip* confessed

during the research interview that it was the first time she heard about some aspects of the saint's life.

It was noticeable how my interest in Alevis and Hacı Bektaş Veli caused the community members to reflect on themselves as Alevis and followers of the saint. While asking questions and getting answers that would lead anyone closer to the spiritual truth according to the Alevi understanding, I was seen as a seeker of the truth from a faraway land. I could see how my search as a non-Alevi inspired the community members to examine themselves and their knowledge about the saint. For example, I noticed how some of the interviewees, who had not read the hagiography (*Velâyetnâme*) of Hacı Bektaş or had read it partly, made up their minds to do that soon. Some, who had not read the hagiographic stories or were not well acquainted with them, expressed disappointment towards this situation and were willing to change it since 'everyone should take care of their heritage'⁶. There was an example of how an interviewee bought the *Velâyetnâme* in order to read it before the interview. I should mention that it was not my intention, nor could I prevent it. Thus, a non-Alevi researcher caused a situation where some participants experienced ignorance of topics that were important to them.

Another aspect discussed in more detail regarding the reflexivity section below is my non-Aleviness and gender. On the one hand, I was much welcomed and encouraged to conduct this fieldwork with great freedom in all of my destinations; on the other hand, there were essential hindrances on a personal level. This situation was most striking while interviewing the *ocazades*. As a non-initiate, I was seen as someone who had not yet proceeded to certain spiritual levels for grasping and understanding the deeper meanings of the particular phenomena. This may have been one of the reasons why, for some topics, the responses of the *ocakzades* remained superficial or general. Another obstacle during the interviews was implementing the concept of secrecy (*sır*). It is difficult to determine how many of the interviewees did it consciously, as only two mentioned it as an obstacle to sharing some specific knowledge or experiences. Consequently, the implementation of *sır* is taken into account as a limitation.

I consider the informal and spontaneous conversations with random people in different locations (Erzincan, Tunceli, Izmir, Hacıbektaş) as important in the light of authenticity. During these conversations, whether at homes, sacred sites, cafes, workshops, or at some common activities such as baking for a ladies' gathering, I could be part of the everyday situations that enabled me to reflect on attitudes, beliefs and views. In these everyday situations, I was seen rather as an ordinary person, not a researcher, which gave ground for a free and informal atmosphere for communication. In this way, the informal contributed to the formal data collection methods. Consequently, the knowledge gained from informal conversations and the impact of these experiences on data analysis can certainly not be underestimated.

⁶ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

1.2.6 Insight on reflexivity

As this thesis is based on qualitative fieldwork, reflexivity has been a very important tool throughout the process. Being permanently conscious of myself as a researcher during the research process has been one of my concerns for producing knowledge transparently and clearly. Berger has noted that ‘researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal’ (Berger 2015: 220). Although the role of the self may not be nullified or ignored in qualitative research, it can be realized and articulated. My general characteristics, such as being a woman from a different cultural, social, political and religious background as well as speaking Turkish as a learned language put me in the position of a classical outsider. I do not possess a shared background or experiences of being an Alevi, nor did I become an Alevi during my fieldwork. However, as a religious person, I might have shared understandings with the Alevis about faith and related activities in general. I was probably not able to hear the unsaid or grasp hints that ‘insiders’ might have heard and understood. Still, constantly asking myself about how to gain a reliable representation of the themes collected during the observations and submitted in interviewee responses, rather than reflecting on my own biases, helped me to see myself as a research instrument that determines the course of the process and the result.

Among the many differences between the Alevi interviewees and me, I consider it important to mention religious and cultural differences. What are my chances of understanding, describing, and analysing in a comprehensive, trustful and sensible way meanings, imaginaries and beliefs regarding a medieval saint in a different religious and cultural context? As a Protestant Christian, I do not have personal experiences with saints and pilgrimage even in the Christian context. Still, as a Christian believer, I may consider myself an insider in the religious-nonreligious scale regarding religious Alevis. The experience of having previously lived and worked in Turkey may have helped me to grasp cultural particularities as if from the inside. However, the absence of language sensibility in particular contexts became apparent. For example, talking about the *semah* ritual in a *cemevi* context, I mistakenly called it a ‘dance’ because it looks like one. Fortunately, I was corrected and learned that calling the *semah* ritual ‘dance’ does not make sense to Alevis; it may even be offensive. This incident made me aware of the importance of acknowledging possible misleadings due to terminology and language usage. Another important issue that influenced the fieldwork and data collection process is power relations that derive from the general characteristics and particular personalities of the people involved. As a non-Alevi woman, who wanted to know more about Alevis, I was seen as another claimant (*talip*) by the spiritual leaders (*dede*) on the one hand. One of the *dedes* proposed me to become his *talip* in order to gain personal and deeper guidance on the issues I was interested in. Most probably, I would have gained different perspectives if I had

done that. As it was not the case, I had to take into account that the *dedes* shared knowledge with me according to who I was in their eyes spiritually. That meant, among others, hearing general introductions to Alevism before proceeding to the interviewing process. On the other hand, as an academic student and a university representative, I was accepted as 'knowledgeable' and involved in the discussions held by the *dedes*. Thus I had to consider the reciprocal power relations that determined the dynamics of the research process, especially with the *dedes* but also with *talips*.

Even though my fieldwork was not about researching political worldviews and social conditions, these issues emerged as important and meaningful to the participants. I saw how socialist and communist ideologies were often blended with religious thoughts. Since I was born in Estonia under the occupation of the Soviet Union, I have developed a certain opinion about socialism and communism. In this light, for example, participating in the celebration of International Women's Day as 'working Women's Day' was like driving back in time. As back then, the celebrations did not have any religious connotations whatsoever; furthermore, religion was suppressed and excluded a 'decent' lifestyle. Seeing the combining of communist ideas with Alevi religious objectives explicitly created a sort of contradiction. This feeling of discord about combining religious and political ideas followed me during my fieldwork, which I had to be aware of and reflect on.

In addition to my general characteristics such as being European, Estonian, Christian and female, also being a certain kind of European, a certain kind of Estonian, etc., influenced the relationship with the interviewees I encountered. Building up relationships with the community members, I found it important to be as clear as possible about my background and aims, as well as my personality. As Estonia is a small country, I expected to be the first Estonian the participants met in their lives. Thus I was ready to explain about Estonia and its particularities. When I was asked about life in Estonia or my religion, I shared my personal views. In this way, the relationship between the community members and I became dialogical and cooperative. By sharing knowledge and experiences, a common ground for togetherness was created. Though it was neither possible nor my intention to fully integrate with the community and 'go native' because of the several factors that have been mentioned above, my attitude towards myself as a researcher aligns with the portrait depicted by Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk, who note that 'contemporary scholars do not think of themselves as impartial outside observers, alien 'others' who study cultures from a safe and scientific distance, but rather as partners in communication, participants in a heteroglot dialogue of indefinite numbers of voices and points of view' (Bowman and Valk 2012: 10). Seeing community members as partners and not simply as information sources or a 'field', has enriched my perspectives and allowed me to follow the approach of vernacular religion.

There are also advantages to being an 'outsider'. For example, in certain situations, I could understand that I was seen as a 'neutral party' in ongoing Sunni-Alevi discussions. Not being Turkish nor Sunni was an advantage that allowed the community members to freely express their concerns about the future of

Alevism and Sunni-related developments. Not being an Alevi was occasionally seen as a virtue as I participated in Alevi community life as if I were an Alevi. For example, when I participated in preparing common meals, I was told that I was not ‘like a researcher observing from afar but someone touching the community with my hands’⁷. This made me think of the importance of doing things together in an everyday context, such as cooking. It also made me aware of the excitement of seeing a researcher who is neither Alevi nor from Turkey taking an interest and participating in the community’s life. Thus, being ‘ignorant’ of certain aspects does not necessarily mean being disadvantaged. Berger has noted that being ‘ignorant’ as a researcher lifts the respondents to expert positions, which is an empowering experience, especially for marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged populations (Berger 2015: 227). Feeling respected and empowered because of my interest inspired community members to participate in the project as interviewees to contribute to general knowledge about Alevism.

Experiencing reflexive challenges throughout the research process has made me reflect on the limits of researching religious beliefs and the experiences of people from different religious and cultural contexts. However, as this thesis is not autoethnography but research on Alevis, at a certain point, I had to make up my mind not to focus too much on myself and my limits, but on finding a balance between subjectivity and reflexivity. Linda Finlay has said that ‘taking the threatening path of personal disclosure, the researcher treads a cliff edge where it is all too easy to fall into an infinite regress of excessive self-analysis at the expense of focusing on the research participants’ (Finlay 2002: 532). In order to avoid that ‘fall’, to a large extent I give a platform to the community members and empower their voices by describing their activities and quoting their words about imaginaries, meanings, and experiences. Nevertheless, the final decision of what and how to highlight, as well as the process of analyses, belongs to the researcher.

1.3 Frequently used terms

In this thesis, specific terms characteristic of the Alevi worldview and understandings are translated into English and shown in parentheses in Turkish in italics. If a term is in frequent use in the interviews and thus also in the analyses, it may be used directly without using parentheses. General Islamic terms such as the Hajj or Shari‘a law are written customarily in English instead of *hac* and *şeriat* as in Turkish. Personal names such as Ali or Yunus Emre and place names such as Hacібektaş are written in Turkish orthography. In the following glossary, I will give a general or literal meaning (if there is one) of terms followed by Alevi understandings.

⁷ Fieldwork notes 09.03.2019.

Adak – vow, votive offering; primarily understood as votive blood offering (*adak kurbanı*).

Ayin-i cem (or *cem*) – the most distinguishable Alevi ritual led by a *dede*. Women and men participate together, and musical performance is regular.

Cem evi – house of *cem*; Alevi place of worship and community house.

Dede – grandfather; spiritual leader and descendant of a holy lineage (*ocak*).

Ehl-i Beyt – people of the house; the family of the Prophet Muhammed, particularly his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali, and their sons Hüseyin and Hasan; expressing devotion to and commemorating the *Ehl-i Beyt* is considered a form of worship in Alevism.

Eren – saint; a spiritually mature person who has overcome his *nefis*.

Hacı – the title given to a person who has been on Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca.

Hünkâr – sovereign ruler; a title used to indicate Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Imam – worship leader of a mosque; for the Twelver Shia Muslims and Alevis: infallible leaders of Muslims after the Prophet, the Twelve Imams.

Kızılbaş – Red Head; ‘heterodox’ Muslim groups in Anatolia. The term appeared at the end of the 15th Century and was derived from the red headgear worn by the warriors of the village groups and tribes who followed the Safavid sheiks (Melikoff 2004: 5). The term was gradually replaced by *Alevi* since the 19th Century, but is still occasionally used to mark Alevis.

Lokma – bite, mouthful; dedicated food shared among the participants during *cem* gatherings or other ritual occasions such as *ziyaret*.

Meydan – square, arena; a place for common worship (*ibadet meydanı*).

Nefis – personality, desire; destructive desires and feelings that should be overcome through self-development in order to reach spiritual perfection.

Niyet – intention; religiously motivated intention.

Ocak – hearth, stove; a holy lineage descending from *Ehl-i Beyt* or Anatolian saints.

Ocakzade – son of a hearth; a person belonging to a holy lineage. Even though not all the *ocakzades* become active as *dedes*, they are respected because of their lineage and generally approached as *dedes*. The female descendants of the holy lineages are known as *ana* (mother), and they are expected to support their husbands in their responsibilities.

On iki hizmet – the twelve services performed during the *ayin-i cem*.

Pir, mürşid – founder or leader of a *tarikât*; spiritual leader from a holy lineage; titles used to designate Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Rızalık – consent, agreement; a condition of agreement and peace between individual community members, that is obligatory for common Alevi worship. *Rızalık* is always searched and mediated by the *dedes* before the *cem* gatherings.

Semah – one of the twelve services, a ritual dance performed during the *cem* gathering along with the music.

Şeriat – Islamic law; the first gate or level of the four-level spiritual journey towards perfection and truth.

Seyyid – master, lord; descendant of the Prophet Muhammed

Sır – secret; sacred truth learned by spiritual effort.

Sohbet – conversation, talk; religious instruction gathering led by a *dede*.

Talip – a claimant, follower; lay Alevi, the Alevis who are not *ocakzades*

Tarikat – a Sufi brotherhood such as Bektashi or Safavi order; the second gate or level of the four-level inner journey towards spiritual perfection and truth.

Teberik – present, souvenir, or small remembrance from a deceased; objects taken from the vicinity of a saint's shrine or other sacred places and are believed to possess protective and healing power.

Türbe – shrine, mausoleum; tomb of a saintly person.

Veli, evliya – saint; miracle-working saint descending from a holy lineage; title of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Zat – person, self; a person of importance; a term frequently used to designate Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Ziyaret – visit; a place of spiritual significance; a voluntary pious visitation or pilgrimage to saintly tombs or other sacred landmarks

1.4 Previous academic research

Alevis and Alevism began to attract the wider attention of academic researchers after the mass migration in the 1960s from rural areas to larger Turkish cities and abroad. This process of change in lifestyle, social relations, education, politics, etc., culminated at the end of the 1980s in the so-called Alevi revival, a wave of rising self-awareness among Alevis. Since then, Alevis and Alevism have been the focus of academic and popular research in Turkey and abroad, leading to abundant literature.

Before proceeding to previous research and Alevi studies, I find determining the term Alevi and its usage important. According to Markus Dressler, four main historical meanings are associated with the term Alevi (or *Alawî* in Arabic). First, it refers to the bloodline descendants of the first Shi'ite Imam 'Ali ibn Abî Tâlib; secondly, it signifies people following Ali and thus being Shi'ite in the widest

sense; thirdly, the term has been used pejoratively, indicating heretics with Shi'ite tendencies; and fourthly, since the beginning of the 20th Century, it has found use as an umbrella term denoting those socio-religious, endogamous communities in Anatolia and Thrace which were historically referred to as *Kızılbaş*⁸ (Dressler 2008: 1). The term has also been used to indicate various groups known as worshippers of Ali (*Ali ilahi*), believers in Ali as a divine incarnation (Melikoff 2015: 35). To a greater or lesser extent, all these meanings may be used to describe the contemporary Alevi – Ali's alleged successors are found among them; they are followers of Ali, they are considered heretics with Shi'ite tendencies, and they attribute Ali with divine qualities.

Within this thesis, the term Alevi is used as an umbrella term to indicate the historical *Kızılbaş* and other adherents of Ali, such as *Tahtacı*, *Çepni*, *Avşar* and *Abdal* groups originating in Anatolia. Thereof the term includes a variety of the diverse ethnic, cultural and socio-religious groups of Anatolia. Shankland (2003) reports that the Turkish-speaking Alevi may refer to themselves as village Bektashis, and the Kurdish Alevi are more likely to call themselves *Kızılbaş*. Indeed, the term *Kızılbaş* has not been entirely replaced and occurs, for example, in social media and community web pages as a term of self-designation⁹. Contemporary usage as a conscious self-label has connotations of rebelliousness against the Turkish state and its structures (Shankland 2003: 18–19). Melikoff has noted that the term Alevi has received the same pejorative meaning as *Kızılbaş* previously (Melikoff 2004: 6). In this case, the change of the term has not served its primary purpose as the meaning has maintained its position.

This thesis makes a firm distinction between the Alevi and Twelver Shi'ites of Iran and Alawis¹⁰, mostly present in Syria. Also, we should adhere to the distinction between the Bektashis and Alevi, often referred to as the same group and used synonymously because of their similar beliefs and practices. In general, I agree with the distinction that has been made by Birol Azar, who argues that while Bektashis may be seen as the initiated followers of the Bektashi dervish order, the Alevi are the ones born to an Alevi family (Azar 2005: 83). The same understanding is present in the work of Suavi Aydın, who notes that 'only Alevi-born people were affiliated with the Alevi community, Bektashism is open to all aspirants, including non-Alevi people' (Aydın 2017:22). However, there is

⁸ As proponents of Shah Isma'il I (1501–1524), the founder of the Safavid dynasty in Iran, the *Kızılbaş* were seen as a domestic political threat by the Ottomans. After many conflicts and the closure of the Ottoman-Safavi border, the connections between the *Kızılbaş* and Safavi rulers weakened, and firm relationships with the Bektashi order were established. Since then, Safavi sheiks were gradually replaced by Hacı Bektaş Veli as the patron saint, whose position was firm no later than the 17th Century (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 47).

⁹ See more about the 'come back' of the *Kızılbaş* as a term for self-definition in *Kızılbaş Alevi rönesansı* by Ali Haydar Saygılı.

¹⁰ There are similarities in the belief systems of Alevi and Alawis as; however, there are also major differences in beliefs, rituals, religious hierarchy, texts and attitudes towards women.

evidence towards change in that understanding as an offer of becoming an Alevi by choice was made during my fieldwork¹¹.

In this thesis, I refer to different kinds of literature – traditional literature such as the hagiography of Hacı Bektaş Veli (*Velâyetnâme*) and various sayings attributed to the saint; confessional literature such as the *Erkânnâme* authored by Seyit Derviş Tur; and academic literature on Alevis and Alevism. In the following, I will overview previous academic research and relevant literature.

Since my research focuses on Hacı Bektaş Veli, John Kingsley Birge's *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (1936), which has turned into a classic in Bektashi studies and is also a relevant companion in the research on Alevism up through the present, has been a great contributor to this thesis. Just as Alevism is rooted in Bektashi thought, it is also connected to and influenced by pre-Islamic beliefs, whose relations have been researched and brought to light by Irene Melikoff and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak. Melikoff's monograph *Hacı Bektaş efsaneden gerçeğe* (Hacı Bektaş: From Legend to Reality) (1999) and article collection *Uyur idik uyardılar* (We Were Sleeping and They Gave Warning) (2015) are timeless contributions to the field and, as such, also helped provide direction for the course of this work. Since both Melikoff and Ocak, including the latter's *Bektaşî menâkıbnâmelerinde İslam öncesi motifleri* (*Pre-Islamic Motifs in Bektashi Hagiographies*) (1983) have researched the hagiographies of Bektashi tradition, these authors' works have been highly valued during this study.

A new generation of researchers on Alevism arose in the wake of the Alevi revival at the end of the 1980s. Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi and her monograph *Kızılbaşlar/Aleviler* (1988) introduced the Alevis from historical, religious and cultural perspectives in a comprehensive way. David Shankland's *The Alevis in Turkey: The Emergence of a Secular Islamic Tradition* (1993) was a fresh and innovative comparative approach to Alevi and Sunni villages during modernisation and remained a landmark in Alevi studies. His fieldwork accounts give an insight into the Alevi community's social life and religious practices of the time and give a comparative overview of Alevi and Sunni villages and mutual relations.

In the light of Sunni and Alevi relations, the question of Alevi identity – who is an Alevi and what is Alevism – emerged and still lies at the centre of academic studies. The anthology *Alevi Identity* (1998), edited by Catharina Raudvere, brought together several important authors in the field, such as Karin Vorhoff, Tord Olsson, Fuat Bozkurt and David Shankland. In 2005, another important anthology, *Alevis and Alevism. Transformed Identities*, edited by Hege Irene Markussen, brought together authors from different disciplines studying Alevism, such as Elise Massicard, Mark Soileau, David Shankland and Atilla Çetin.

Mark Soileau's comparative work *Humanist Mystics. Nationalism and Commemoration of Saints in Turkey* (2018) reflects on three saintly figures who have found their place in republican Turkey as wide-ranging humanists – Cemaleddin Rumi, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Yunus Emre. Since this work focuses on

¹¹ Fieldwork notes 19.03.2019.

the imaginaries of Hacı Bektaş, it provides valuable generalizing material for evaluating the results of my case study in Izmir.

One of the most influential authors in defining Alevism today is Markus Dressler. His *Writing Alevism* (2013) makes a great contribution to showing the ideological, political and historical circumstances that have affected approaches to Alevism and Alevis since the end of the 19th Century. This work demonstrates the importance of being aware of the ideological and political situations prevalent at the time of studies on Alevism. The ideologically motivated attempts to classify Alevis by the Christian missionaries or the Ottoman historiographers since the 19th Century have, in a way, affected later researchers and also the self-classification of Alevis. Since the Alevi question is still highly politicized, it is necessary to constantly be aware of both – the historical circumstances and the current political situation.

An important issue for Alevis that has gained much attention from academic researchers is the question of Alevis' struggle for recognition and equal rights in Turkey. Among others, such authors as Suavi Aydın (2018), Ayfer Karakaya-Stamp (2018), Cemil Boyraz (2019), Celia Jenkins and Umit Cetin (2018) have contributed to this area. *The Alevis in Modern Turkey and the Diaspora: Recognition, Mobilization and Transformation* (2022), edited by Derya Özkul and Hege Markussen, is the latest comprehensive overview, including fourteen case studies of the Alevis' struggle for recognition and representation¹² as well as the transformation of traditional authority and rituals.

Also, the relations between genders and the position of women in Alevi communities have found much attention. In his comparative case study, David Shankland brought to light the situation of women in villages. In this area, Also deserving of mention are Ayşegül Akdemir (2020), who has researched the construction of gender identity in Alevi organisations, and Nimet Okan (2018), who has questioned the alleged gender equality in Alevism. The peculiarities of

¹² Living in democratic states such as Germany and Great Britain has enabled Alevis to identify themselves in a new way through organising in political, cultural and religious associations. Together with the growing number Alevi organisations and their political and cultural activism, awareness of the religious and cultural needs of the community in the host countries have grown simultaneously. The Alevi Culture Week, which took place at the University of Hamburg in 1989, disseminated an 'Alevi Declaration', which demanded public recognition of Alevism in Germany and Turkey (Sökefeld 2022: 135). This event, together with the declaration, ushered in an arousal of Alevi consciousness known as the Alevi revival. This wave of self-determination opened up discussions about Alevi identity, the nature of Alevism, legal recognition, organising in associations and the building of *cemevis* abroad and in Turkey. European countries (Germany, first of all) have been fertile ground for the growing recognition for Alevis. Education on Alevism started in German state schools in 2002. The signing of the Equality of Rights Agreement in 2012 between Alevi organisations and the Hamburg government granted the Alevis the same rights as Christians and Jews in the region. In 2015, the chair in Alevi studies was founded at Hamburg University (Özkul 2022: 160–161). Consequently, Alevis living abroad are more likely to identify Alevism as a religion separate from Islam. These ongoing processes continually mould Alevis' self-definition and provide research challenges for scholars of religion.

Kurdish Alevi have been researched by Martin van Bruinessen (1996), Celia Jenkins, Umit Cetin and Suavi Aydın (2020), and Cemal Salman (2020). An important monograph about the Zaza-speaking Kurds has been written by Mehmet Siddik Kaya (2018).

Because of the inner diversity of Alevism and the differences between various Alevi groups, I find focused case studies of great importance. As there are Alevi communities in Turkey representing various ethnic, cultural, linguistic, social and geographic backgrounds, it is difficult to present a comprehensive approach to certain issues that would characterize all Alevi communities at the same time the same way. There are many examples of case studies that confirm the variety of ideas and customs represented among Alevi. For example, the study of Carolina Tee (2010) about Derviş Cemal's holy lineage (*ocak*) from Erzincan gives us an understanding of identity struggles through reformulating the history and tradition related to a forefather. This work is greatly relevant in the light of my research in Izmir, as many community members have a background in the Erzincan province and thus reflect similar identity struggles. Also, the study of Hege Irene Markussen (2012) about an Alevi Foundation, Şahkulu, in contemporary Istanbul gives us a focused insight into a particular Alevi organisation attended by Alevi migrants of different regions of Turkey and its way of teaching and learning about Alevism. I value these and similar case studies focusing on a particular Alevi community through certain phenomena as they give a close insight into beliefs, values, etc., that may be further compared and analysed. In this regard, the works of Fevzi Rençber (2014, 2014a) and of Zeki Uyanık and Arif Kala (2012), who have been writing about Alevi living in Adiyaman and Ardahan, respectively, are also worthy of mention. Furthermore, case studies focusing on particular common phenomena are important sources of academic knowledge. In the light of this thesis, the work of Seher Sen and Bayram Ali Soner (2016) offers invaluable reference material concerning *cemevis* in Izmir. The works of Karaoğlan (2007), Atasagun (2006), Oymak (2010), Günay (2003) and Bekki (2018) have been invaluable sources of reference about the phenomenon of visitation (*ziyaret*) and related rituals in the context of Alevism and Turkey.

2 BUCA CEMEVI AND ITS COMMUNITY

The second part of this dissertation focuses on the Alevi community in Buca (Izmir) that has emerged due to migration from rural areas to urban environments. Dividing this part into four chapters, I will approach the community from different perspectives – its origins, its organisation and activities, its people and relationships, and the self-perception and understanding of Alevism among community members. This part aims to introduce and give background knowledge of the Buca community, whose imaginaries, beliefs and practices concerning Hacı Bektaş Veli will be researched in the following parts.

The first chapter, *The emergence of an Alevi community in Buca*, is dedicated to the origins of the Buca Alevi community, which has its roots in various eastern provinces. I will give a general overview of Izmir and Buca as the destination for Alevi migrants and seek answers to questions regarding reasons for and changes resulting from migration from rural villages to urban settlements. Special attention will be paid to satisfaction resulting from migration and related changes – which areas of life have been improved and whether there are areas of life that are perceived as bearing loss and degeneration.

The second chapter of this part, *The Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Associations and its cemevi*, concentrates on the organisational life and activities of the Alevi community of Buca *cemevi*. I will show how Alevis in Buca have organised into an association and joined an umbrella organisation – Alevi Culture Associations – to formulate, preserve, and develop their Alevi identity and answer the cultural and religious needs of local Alevis. I will seek answers to the questions regarding leadership and activities of the community – how the leaders of the organisation are chosen and what kind of activities have emerged in the *cemevi* to support and promote the Alevi culture and faith. Also, I will show how the *cemevi* was constructed and why it is so essential for the community to have a separate building that expresses the Alevi worldview and values visibly. Why it is important to stress the function of the *cemevi* as a place of worship and how the religious identity is represented and lived through the visual depictions of important Alevi figures and ritual activities in the *cemevi*. The ritual of *ayin-i cem* will be focused on as the main religious gathering defining the religious function of the *cemevi*.

In the third chapter, *The community of the Buca cemevi*, I will focus on the distinctive relationships in the community between the religious leaders and followers. Firstly, I will concentrate on the changing relationships between the *dedes* and *talips* – the relationship that has been one of the cornerstones of the Alevi social and religious community life. I will seek answers to the questions of how the *dedes* have been settled into the new situation in the urban environment as religious leaders and how the *talips* as followers reflect the need for religious

leaders. In addition to the distinctive *dede-talip* relationships¹, participation of women next to men in the organisational and ritual life is taken into consideration. I will seek an answer to the question of whether and how the participation of women is encouraged in the *cemevi*. Besides the participation of women, I will also concentrate on the involvement of the youth in community life. I will research the challenges the families and the association are facing regarding attracting the youth to participate in the *cemevi* activities and following the Alevi path.

The fourth chapter, *Alevi identity boundaries in Buca cemevi*, turns its attention to the identity and perceptions of Alevism. The question ‘What is Alevism?’ will be answered according to the community members’ understanding. I will show the various ways perceptions of Alevi identity as represented in Buca *cemevi*. Since the community includes Turkish and Kurdish Alevis, I will research whether there are similarities and differences in perceiving Alevism among them. While discussing identity issues, I will also pay attention to the question of the primary ‘other’ according to the Alevis – the Sunni Muslims. The main reasons for distinguishing from Sunni Muslims will be discussed.

2.1 The emergence of an Alevi community in Buca

2.1.1 Destination: Izmir

Although Alevis are the largest religious minority group in Turkey, their exact number is not known since censuses never inquire about religious identity (Toprak, Bozan, *et al.* 2008: 53). Alevis are estimated to number 5–25 million out of 84 million,² which makes up about 6–30% of the total population. According to the Alevi Bektashi Federation, the number of Alevis reaches 20 million in Turkey and 1 million in Europe.³ While Sunni Islam, followed by the majority of Turkish nationals, is privileged and sponsored by the state, minority religions are not encouraged to establish and develop their institutions. Alevis are expected to

¹ Traditional *dede-talip* relationships are based on the understanding, that the religious guidance is permitted only by a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. It is not lawful (*caiz*) to practice religious guiding by a non-*ocakzade* or receive guidance from a non-*ocakzade*. See further about the relationship between the spiritual masters (*pir*) and *talips* in ‘Imam Caferi Sadık Buyruğu’ (Command of Imam Ja’far), one of the main sources referred to in the context of spiritual guidance by the Alevis in Buca. In special cases it is possible for a non-*ocakzade* to practice spiritual guidance as a *dede*. In this case suitable persons granted with special permits by the *Çelebi Ocağı*, the *Çelebiyan* branch of the Bektashi order, to practice *dedelik*. Dertli Divani is an example of this exception. (Markussen 2012: 48)

² The total population of Turkey has reached 84 million. Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2021 (Address based population registration system results) (<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-Sonuclari-2021-45500>).

³ ABF tanıtım broşürü (Promotion brochure of Alevi Bektashi Federation) (<http://www.alevifederasyonu.org.tr/abfhakkindatay.php?id=3>).

visit mosques and take part in Sunni Islamic practices. At the same time, compulsory religious instruction in state schools is based on the Sunni interpretation of Islam. Tensions based on mosque-building projects in Alevi villages and compulsory religious instruction are the most critical aspects of state policies. Also, the non-recognition of Alevi houses of worship (*cemevi*) by the state is another factor that has reached the European Court of Human Rights.⁴ However, the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs) in Turkey has never recognized Alevis as a distinct religious group.

One of the key factors in the process of change for Alevis in Turkey has been migration to the cities. Historically settled mostly in the Central and Eastern Anatolian rural areas, the increased migration process since the 1960s has brought Alevis to live all over Turkey, especially in the suburbs of the larger cities – Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul. Migration abroad has resulted in a large Alevi diaspora living mostly in Western European countries but also in the USA and Canada.⁵

Urbanisation⁶ caused by the rapid migration process has changed the once primarily agricultural society into a land of metropolises. Izmir, as the destination of migration, has become the third-largest city after Istanbul and Ankara, with a population of over 3 million people. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the province of Izmir is home to 4,4 million people.⁷ In 2015, only 1,7 million of the total population were born in Izmir province and regarded as locals. The remaining were mainly domestic migrants from different regions all over Turkey, the largest group being from nearby Manisa (200 000), which was followed by people from Mardin, Erzurum and Konya.⁸ Despite the exact statistics on demographics, there are no data about the number of various religious groups living in Izmir. One of my interviewees, who is a sociologist, estimates that out of 500 000 people living in the Buca district of Izmir, there are about 100 000 Alevis.⁹

Until the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, Izmir's ethnic and religious composition was in many ways different from today – Orthodox and Catholic Greeks, Gregorian and Catholic Armenians, Jews and Levantines (members of

⁴ As of Feb 2022, the Council of Europe is still waiting for the Turkish government to follow its decisions regarding the recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship (Avrupa Konseyi, Türkiye'den AIHM'in Cemevleri kararına uymasını bekliyor (The Council of Europe expects Turkey to comply with the ECHR decision on Cemevis) (<https://tr.euronews.com/2022/02/08/avrupa-konseyi-turkiye-den-aihm-in-cemevleri-karar-na-uymas-n-bekliyor>)).

⁵ The total number of Alevis living abroad is uncertain due to the fact that their community is not always seen as a distinct group apart from the main Islamic community. The largest Alevi diaspora is found in Germany, where it is estimated to be 600 000–800 000 (Özkul 2022: 149). The number of Alevis living in France is estimated to be 150 000 (Arkılıç 2022: 167).

⁶ The urbanisation rate in Turkey reached 75% in 2018 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/255487/urbanisation-in-turkey/>).

⁷ <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-Sonuclari-2021-45500>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019.

the Latin Church in the Middle East) – created the distinctive atmosphere of city life. Consequently, Izmir was seen as an unbeliever city from the Muslims' point of view and regarded as an infidel area (Inal 2006: 28). The demographic situation changed after the Greek-Turkish population exchange agreement in 1923, which caused about 1,2 million Greeks to leave Turkey and about 400 000 Turks from Greece to move to Turkey (Aktar and Demirözü 2006: 86). Immigrant Turks from Greece, but also other Balkan countries such as Albania and Bulgaria and followed by later domestic immigration, have changed the city's demographic composition rapidly since the foundation of the Turkish Republic.

Its location on the shores of the Aegean Sea makes Izmir one of the westernmost cities in Turkey. It has a long history of being a centre of commerce, culture, and education. Today, many universities attract young people from different regions of Turkey and abroad to continue their education in Izmir, which has transformed the city into a cradle of ideas and opinions. Its multicultural character and prevailing open attitude towards modernization and its liberal worldview have maintained Izmir's historical differentiation from other regions of Turkey. It is most evident in the public space, where women are uncovered and participate actively in the workforce. Also, in terms of religious diversity, it is probably one of the most advanced Turkish cities having several active Christian churches, synagogues and *cemevis* besides mosques.

Izmir is regarded as a stronghold of political opposition and democracy. Democracy and equality are also the most frequently used keywords among Alevi while talking about political and social life. Due to the disregard for human rights and democratic principles in political decisions by the current ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and respect for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Alevi are most likely to vote for representatives of the opposition parties. In 2017, the people of Izmir voted against the constitutional amendments by 68,8%,¹⁰ showing their opposition to restrictions on other freedoms. During the last local elections in March 2019, the largest opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), won 58,1% of the vote in Izmir.¹¹ Since the elections took place during my fieldwork, I could also observe election preparations and advertising campaigns, together with the excitement they created in the local Alevi community. Inasmuch as the Buca *cemevi* organised special events of solidarity outside their premises to mobilise support for liberal and democratic voting results, their voices also contributed to the victory of the opposition in Izmir.

Buca, the largest district of Izmir with a population of more than half a million people,¹² has been one of the fastest-growing areas of the metropolis. Lying on

¹⁰ 2017 Anayasa Referandumı Sonuçları (Constitutional Referendum Results, 2017) (<https://www.yenisafak.com/secim-referandum-2017/secim-sonuclari>).

¹¹ 31 Mart 2019 Türkiye Geneli Yerel Seçim Sonuçları (Local Election Results in Turkey, 31 March 2019) (<https://www.yenisafak.com/yerel-secim-2019/secim-sonuclari>).

¹² Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2021 (Address based population registration system results) (<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-Sonuclari-2021-45500>).

the outskirts of the city centre, Buca has attracted immigrants from poorer and less educated regions to settle and find jobs in the manufacturing, construction and transportation sectors. At the same time, it is home to Dokuz Eylül University with its many faculties attracting young people, also Alevi, from all over the country to continue their education in Buca. As a result, the district is full of student cafes, fitness clubs and dormitories. However, in contrast to modern life, it is still possible to hear roosters crowing and sheep grazing in its residential areas. There are sheds on the main streets where sheep are sold as sacrificial animals (*kurbanlık*). Various customs, social relations and tastes are kept alive and occasionally changed to answer to new circumstances in an urbanized area.¹³

2.1.2 Origins of Buca *cemevi* community

The Buca *cemevi* community emerged as the result of domestic immigration and represents, according to dede Hüseyin Akçay, the whole spectrum of Alevi diversity from all over Turkey. There are Zazaki, Kurmanji and Turkish speaking Alevi, as well as Tahtacı, Cepni, and Türkmen Alevi involved in the community. Although there are people from all over Turkey among the members and participants of the *cemevi*, most of them, according to the current Buca *cemevi* chairman dede Hüseyin Gökçe and also confirmed by the ‘snowball interview’ sample, originate primarily from Eastern provinces such as Erzincan, Tunceli, Bingöl and Muş. Some of the migrants reached Buca after living in other urban areas such as Ankara and Istanbul.

As noted by Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Tunceli, Elazığ and Muş provinces are home to primarily Kurdish-speaking Alevi, while in Erzincan, Erzurum, Sivas, Maraş and Malatya provinces, both Kurdish and Turkish speaking Alevi are equally represented (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017:88). These provinces, home to the Alevi people, are located in mountainous areas at altitudes of 1000–2000 m above sea level and have a harsh climate with cold and snowy winters alternating with extremely hot summers. Also, these areas are located in seismically active zones, which often cause earthquakes. The abundance of water from the Euphrates and its tributaries compensates for the otherwise difficult natural conditions and makes agriculture and animal husbandry the primary source of livelihood. The villages have preserved their traditional rural lifestyle with simple residential buildings next to animal sheds and cabbage gardens surrounded by fields of wheat and animal pastures. As much food as possible is produced and prepared inside households. Only those goods that cannot be self-produced are purchased from outside.¹⁴

While visiting Erzincan province in September 2019, I was introduced by the chairman of the Erzincan *cemevi* to an Alevi family of Zaza background with two small children living in a village in the Tercan district. The head of the family

¹³ Fieldwork notes from March 2019.

¹⁴ Fieldwork notes September 2019.

had borrowed a car to pick me up in the district centre and drive to the village 25 km away. Before riding, we stopped at a grocery store, where he told the seller not to accept money from me for anything I would like to buy. I was given the best place in the house for sleeping and introduced to many people in the nearby villages. Being part of the family's daily activities allowed me to step into the rhythm of local rural life with its joys and sorrows. Besides the daily routine of milking cows and producing dairy products such as yogurt, cheese and butter, the preparations for the winter were at hand – food canning and storing bovine manure for heating in the wintertime. The families staying in the villages during winter have to be self-sufficient for shorter or longer periods depending on weather conditions. Occasionally, the roads may be blocked by snow for days or even weeks.

Some families have developed a lifestyle of staying at the province's centre during the winter and returning to villages in the summer season to cultivate the land and take care of their households. Those who have migrated to Buca, as a rule, visit their villages in the summertime, staying either in their own houses or with relatives. Still, not everyone can afford the visits to their villages since traveling is costly, and not everyone has a place to stay as the properties have been sold and all relatives have left the area. The retired and older generation is more likely to return for the summers as they have a long experience of village life and are not engaged in work responsibilities. The younger generation, especially those born in Izmir, have lost direct contact with the villages since the urban lifestyle has been the central part of their life experience.

The Eastern background of the Buca *cemevi* community manifests itself, among other ways, through language, music and eating traditions. Although most of the time, Turkish is spoken in daily communication, occasionally, Zazaki and Kurmanji are also used. Although the second and third generations of migrants are less acquainted with the Kurdish languages, they can still sing along during music events and understand when spoken. While hymns are sung in Turkish during religious gatherings, Zazaki is used next to Turkish at concert performances and other meetings. Switching from Turkish to Zazaki is always emotional and captivating. One example comes from a concert dedicated to International Women's Day when the association's women's choir was performing traditional folk songs in Turkish. When they started to sing "Elqajiye," a love song in Zazaki, the audience was overwhelmed with emotions, and the hall was filled with the voices of the audience. The choir and public turned out to have a solid Kurdish representation during a simple song of a mountain village in Tunceli province.

As the migration process is still ongoing, new migrants contribute to the community's cultural diversity by keeping the language, music and culinary styles alive. The activities organised by the Buca *cemevi*, such as cooking, handicraft and music courses, contribute to the maintenance of traditional skills developed in the migrants' homelands.

2.1.3 Migration and change

Migration has always been part of human life, and the Alevi migration is part of Turkey's overall urbanisation and migration process. There are several reasons why people leave their homes and settle in different countries, regions or environments. For the Alevi people of the Buca *cemevi* community, migration has been a life-changing experience that shook them away from traditional lifestyles and relationships.

As narrated during the interviews, the reasons for migration have been primarily economic and educational. The low interest of the state in the development of the regions, lack of land and too few job opportunities could not and still cannot meet the needs of the growing population. Mehmet Siddik Kaya, whose research on Zaza villages in Bingöl province dates to the 2000s, criticized the state of public services in the area as late as a decade ago. He concludes with the circumstances in the villages:

[I]n the villages, there are no kindergartens, health care, or other public services. There are primary schools, but only three out of four children have been attending the schools. Each school has 150 pupils on average. The schools usually have only one teacher, and very few have two. The teaching is in Turkish. However, the educational activities proceed unsystematically because the teachers may be absent for weeks, either due to the alleged illness or as a result of threats from the Kurdish guerrilla movement, the PKK, which demands that education should be conducted in Kurdish. (Kaya 2018: 54)

This account confirms my findings on the villages' public services and educational opportunities. Consequently, the lack of schools and teachers and the low level of education, have counted among the reasons for leaving the villages behind. Education and studying are not only associated with better job and career opportunities but are also related to religious aims of personal development and contribution to society. The Alevis, who give much importance to education and science in their rhetoric, gave me examples of hard work in education and knowledge.¹⁵ One *ocakzade*, who migrated from Erzurum province in 1987, acquired primary, secondary and higher education while working in a factory. Now he is researching the Alevi relationship with the state during the Ottoman era while continuing his factory employment. He testifies that migration did not end economic difficulties but still allowed him to support his family and provide for his education and development.¹⁶

¹⁵ The saying of Hacı Bektaş Veli 'any road that doesn't follow science, ends in darkness' describes the Alevi vision about science and religion, which are often seen as inextricably linked with each other. However, wider opportunities for education and science did not appear before migration and urbanisation. This saying was quoted repeatedly while talking about the Alevi path.

¹⁶ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

The Alevi migrants of the first generation have been contributing as workers to the demanding needs of the textile and leather industries, construction and transportation sectors of the growing city while settling in a new environment and supporting the younger generations' acquisition of education. The second and third generations of migrants have gained better opportunities in the labour market. Most of the interviewees of the Buca *cemevi*, who are younger than 30 years old, are university graduates or planning to continue their education at the university level. One interviewee has opened a private educational institution to help primary school pupils progress in their studies. The leadership and community of the *cemevi* pay attention to providing material assistance to the university students whose families remain in the villages so as to support them in their studies.

Besides economic and educational reasons, personal security, social conflicts and natural disasters were also mentioned as reasons for migration. Violence and insecurity caused by Turkish-Kurdish tensions and the spread of political unrest in the Eastern provinces have led to a search for safer areas. Also, Sunni-Alevi contentions¹⁷ in mixed villages were referred to as a motive for migration. For example, a family migrated from a Sunni village where they were the only Alevis. They aimed to change their social and religious surroundings to find acceptance as Alevis. The appreciably liberal urban environment with a considerable Alevi population has offered the family a more peaceful life with less experience of discrimination.¹⁸ Along with social and political conflicts, natural disasters such as earthquakes were mentioned as reasons for migration. For example, one of the active *dedes* of the *cemevi* migrated after the Erzincan earthquake in 1992, in which his home was destroyed.¹⁹

2.1.4 Village nostalgia

Migrating to Izmir, one of the most liberal and economically advanced regions of Turkey, has led community members to better living conditions and greater freedom of expression. For the Alevis as a religious minority group, less social exclusion from Sunni Muslims and differentiation by the government is experienced in terms of public services compared to their places of origin. Social emancipation offered by urban diversity and educational opportunities is appreciated. On the other hand, the city is perceived as a threat to authentic Aleviness (*Alevilik*) and sustainability, according to the Alevi migrants included in this study. Although the urban environment with its opportunities has provided the Alevi migrants with better living conditions and education, the villages of origin

¹⁷ The tensions are often based on prejudices. My conversations with Turkish tourists in Europe revealed that the *mum söndü* (the candle went out) controversy still receives credence. According to a widespread opinion among Sunni Muslims, Alevi religious rites with men and women both present end in a kind of blind sex orgies after the lights are turned off.

¹⁸ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

¹⁹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

are considered the best milieux of ideal and authentic Alevi lifestyles – the places where the Alevi faith may be lived to the fullest.

The contradiction between the idealized village and the spiritually restrictive city has resulted in criticism of urbanisation and change among migrants and their descendants. The urban environment is perceived as corrupt, egocentric and frivolous compared to the countryside and villages. In addition to the contradictory nature of the urban environment, the absence of sacred places is seen as a significant shortcoming. Being cut off for extended periods from the natural environment in general, and sacred natural sites in particular, as well as tombs of local saints, is perceived as an obstacle on the Alevi path.

As Alevism is interconnected with nature and the Alevis consider animals, plants, springs, and shrines of the saints (*türbe*) to be part of their spiritual journey (as we will see later), the urban environment is perceived as artificial and spiritually harassing. Even younger Alevis born in Izmir associate the urban way of life with losing one's religion and merging into a foreign lifestyle. It shows that the prevailing feeling of spiritual loss has been communicated by parents and adopted by younger generations through the representations of an ideal environment. Even the youngsters who have never been to the original villages of their parents appear to be of one mind on this question. In their imagination, the villages and the time their parents and grandparents were living in villages are considered ideal and essentially different from the city and urban areas. A young Alevi born in Izmir, whose parents are from Erzurum province, expressed her feelings about the change, which is perceived as a loss of purity and solidarity:

Times have changed a lot; nothing is as pure as it used to be. Back then, there was solidarity in the villages. For example, everyone used to work together – first, they went to someone's field to harvest, then to another one's. Without cooperation, nothing was achieved. But now, no one needs anyone anymore. Without necessity, there is no need for others. The feelings are not pure anymore.²⁰

Even though she is a frequent visitor of the *cemevi* and takes part in its activities, she experiences a decrease in mutually supportive relationships – according to her, people neither need each other nor offer their assistance to one another as before. Notably, she reflects on the accounts of the *dedes*, who admit that the young people are not as interested in *cemevi* activities as expected²¹. Another young Alevi, born in a village in Erzurum province, expressed her opinion about the imbalance between rural and urban environments' abilities to ensure spiritual completeness through supernatural manifestations. She describes the difference between the village and the city as follows:

²⁰ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

²¹ Interview D49-22, 01.05.2020.

Miracles happen mostly in the villages. Living in a city... because it's difficult to live according to the faith here, we don't see such things happening. Everyone is bound to their problems to earn an income. The people are... because the faith has been left behind, the miracles cannot appear to these people.²²

Such a sharp contrast between the city and the village comes to the fore through many young people's reflections. A young Alevi explained her strong feelings about her previous life in the village in Erzincan province, where she felt secure and spiritually happy compared to her life in Izmir:

In the village... my faith was solid. This is the Alevi way. I was like a real Alevi, I tell myself. Later I came to Izmir. No *türbe*, no people from my culture. I compromise with situations; the cultures are clashing. Some things I don't accept are normal to them. *Türbe* is like a way to nirvana for me. I let my inner self pour out there, and I feel peaceful there. But here I don't have a place to pour myself out, no *türbe* here.²³

These accounts testify to the inner conflicts caused by ideal rural versus everyday urban reality. The ones who have established close relationships with *dedes* are more likely to find answers following the Alevi path. Later in this thesis, I will pay attention to some solutions for the spiritual needs in the urban environment, such as participating in the organised visits of the *türbes* and the usage of *teberik*.

As mentioned above, those who can afford it and still have places to stay in the villages spend their summers at their birthplaces. Older and retired people who have personal contact with villages are more likely to return and stay for more extended periods. Those who sold their properties rarely return and regret not being able to visit the villages after migration. As a consequence, there arises an experience and expression of nostalgia and yearning for the villages, especially by the middle-aged and younger generations.

2.2 Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Associations and its *cemevi*

2.2.1 A discussion on *cemevis*

Alevi have developed a distinct type of ritual gathering known as *ayin-i cem*. Traditionally performed in villages inside houses large enough to accommodate participants or in the open air, it is a core expression of Alevi religious identity and cohesion.²⁴ Migration to urban areas prepared the ground for the construction boom of a new type of community house, known as *cemevis* – literally houses of *cem* – to answer the needs of the growing Alevi population in city settings. As

²² Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

²³ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

²⁴ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

such, *cemevi* is a new phenomenon caused by migration and emerging from the urbanisation process (Şahin 2005: 472).

There are few studies about the number and location of *cemevis* in Turkey.²⁵ According to a survey initiated by a member of parliament for Tunceli, Hüseyin Aygün, there were 937 *cemevis* in Turkey in 2013.²⁶ Subsequently, this number has been growing during the following years, and the estimate today may be about one thousand. According to *dede* Hüseyin Akçay, a former head of the Buca *cemevi*, there are 33 *cemevis* by now in Izmir province.²⁷

Due to their lack of legal status as places of worship, the construction of *cemevis* has been organised by the Alevi associations since the beginning of the 1990s as ‘culture centres’ (Orhan 2019: 196). Even though the *cemevis* are used for various activities such as concerts, seminars, and language and music courses, their main aim is to provide the Alevi community an opportunity to gather for religious purposes. *Cemevis* are central to various Alevi religious activities such as *cems*, funerals and spiritual fellowship gatherings (*sohbet*). Despite *cemevis*’ religious significance, they have not been recognized as places of worship by the government (Sen and Soner 2016: 705), which is perceived as persecution (*zulüm*) and injustice (*haksızlık*)²⁸.

There have been long discussions in Turkey’s political circles about whether the *cemevis* are places of worship or cultural centres. In other words, the debate is about whether Alevis are to be recognized as a distinct religious group with a collective identity separate from Sunni Muslims. The legal position of *cemevis* defines the legal status of Alevis, for whom the need for government-recognized places of worship is crucial in the light of a distinct religious identity and consistency. It has been a long confrontation with the government to prove that Alevis are not only a cultural but also a religious group with its spiritual needs, of which the most important is the need for recognized distinct places of worship. Having officially the status of cultural or social centres, they cannot receive discounts on public services such as water, electricity and use of the land as do mosques (Sen and Soner 2016: 706).

Alevis themselves do not use terms such as ‘culture centre’ or ‘association centre’ instead of *cemevi*, *i.e.* a place of worship. I did not hear anyone indicating the *cemevi* as a culture house during my fieldwork. Also, Sen and Soner, who have researched *cemevis* in Izmir, have found that *cemevis* have gained legi-

²⁵ The number of mosques reached 89 817 in 2021 (İstatistiki bölge birimleri sınıflamasına göre cami sayısı (Number of mosques by classification of statistical region units) <https://stratejigelistirme.diyaret.gov.tr/sayfa/57/istatistikler>).

²⁶ Hangi ilde kaç cemevi var? (How many cemevis there are in the districts?) <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1002426-hangi-ilde-kac-cemevi-var-liste>).

²⁷ Interview D62-23, 12.05.2020. According to the survey of the Ministry of the Interior initiated by Hüseyin Aygün, there were 26 *cemevis* in the province of Izmir as of 2013 (Hangi ilde kaç cemevi var? (How many cemevis there are in the districts?) <http://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1002426-hangi-ilde-kac-cemevi-var-liste>).

²⁸ Fieldwork notes 16.03.2019.

timacy as Alevi places of worship not only in the eyes of the Alevis themselves but also in the eyes of the general society in Izmir. Built as cultural centres due to construction regulations, they are still known and accepted as *cemevis* for visitors and in their neighbourhoods (Sen and Soner 2016: 705).

At the beginning of 2020, İzmir Municipality granted the status of the house of worship to seven *cemevis* constructed by the municipality. This historical event happened at the municipality's city council meeting chaired by Izmir mayor Tunç Soyer from the Republican People's Party (CHP). Seven *cemevis* in the Bornava, Aliğa, Bayraklı, Çiğli, Konak and Selçuk districts of Izmir were designated as houses of worship in zoning plans by a majority vote of the municipality. The head of the Buca *cemevi*, Hüseyin Gökçe, commented in a local newspaper after the positive vote: 'Naturally, the definition of a belief should be made only by those who live that belief'.²⁹ During the research interview, he added that the general problem of recognition of the *cemevis* as places of worship and Alevis as a distinct religious group could not be solved at the local municipality level but needs the decision of the Turkish Parliament.³⁰

2.2.2 Buca *cemevi*

2.2.2.1 Organisation and construction

Several Alevi organisations have been founded, with their activities taking place in Izmir and Buca since the beginning of the migration. Closures due to government restrictions and subsequent reorganisations have been part of the Alevi organisational life through the decades. Activities related to the Buca *cemevi* began in 1991. First known as Hacı Bektaş Veli Culture and Solidarity Association (*Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği*), the status was changed after joining the union of Alevi Culture Associations³¹ (*Alevi Kültür Dernekleri*) in 1998.³² Now organised as the Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Association, the *cemevi* is part of the Alevi Culture Associations umbrella organisation, which unites up to 100 member organisations.³³ Alevi Culture Association is, in turn, a

²⁹ İzmir'de cemevleri imar planlarına ibadethane olarak yazılacak. (The *cemevis* will be designated as houses of worship in the Izmir zoning plan) <https://www.izmir.bel.tr/tr/Haberler/izmirde-cemevleri-imar-planlarına-ibadethane-olarak-yazılacak/41213/156>.

³⁰ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

³¹ Alevi Culture Associations, one of the oldest umbrella organisations, was founded in 1991 and is still operating. Today there are many Alevi organisations operating in Turkey, among which the Hacı Bektaş Veli Anatolia Culture Fund (Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Kültür Vakfı), the Republican Education and Culture Center Foundation (CEM Vakfı or Cumhuriyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi Vakfı) and Pir Sultan Abdal Culture Associations (Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Dernekleri) are some of the biggest.

³² Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

³³ Alevi Culture Associations does not have an active web page at the moment. They use social media for communication and their account is found on the Alevi Kültür Dernekleri (Alevi Culture Associations) Facebook homepage (https://www.facebook.com/pg/GenelMerkezAKD/about/?ref=page_internal)).

member of the Alevi Bektashi Federation. Membership in the union and federation provides the association with confidence in legal matters and relations with the state.³⁴ Currently, the Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Association is one of the biggest branches of the umbrella organisation, and thus, the chairmen of the *cemevi*³⁵ take responsibility as spokespersons for the Alevi cause and its board acts as a coordinator for solving general difficulties.³⁶

During the first decades of migration, Alevi in Buca organised their religious gatherings in the larger rooms of houses or apartments as they used to do in the villages. As the number of Alevi grew in urban areas due to the continuous migration, the need for larger premises for gatherings also increased. The practical necessity to accommodate the growing number of participants led to the construction of the Buca *cemevi*, which has become one of the central institutions organising Alevi activities in the district. Although the main aim of the building was to answer the religious needs of the community, it has also served in various educational and cultural matters such as language courses, seminars, concerts and anniversaries. Providing the opportunity for social interaction, especially for women and youth, and material aid for the needy, the *cemevi* has also served as an essential means for Alevi solidarity and unity.

The cornerstone of the Buca *cemevi* was laid in 1990, and the first parts of the five-floor building were opened for activities in 1991. Although the primary building process was finished in five years, there is still work in progress on the interior.³⁷ The entrance floor of the *cemevi* welcomes members and visitors with vast portraits of important persons for Alevi – Imam Ali, Imam Hüseyin, the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli, and Atatürk. There are several offices reachable upon the entrance – the office of the chairman, the secretariat, offices for the youth and women, and funeral branches. The spacious lobby serves as a place for waiting, conversations and meetings with family and friends after various gatherings. Right next to the entrance hall, there is a small kitchen where fresh tea is always on fire to greet those who come. As the Buca *cemevi* is one of the few venues for Alevi funeral services in the area, both the lobby and the large lower dining hall are constantly crowded daily around noon. In some cases, hundreds of people are offered meals, which means constant organising work for both the procurement and preparation of food. There is another large dining hall upstairs that still needs to be completed, a library and a concert hall, which is often used for various cultural events and seminars. In the ritual sense, the most crucial hall – *meydan* for the *cem* gatherings – is on the highest floor.

In its exterior, the *cemevi* does not differ in architecture from surrounding buildings, being reminiscent of a school or a culture house. There are two

³⁴ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

³⁵ For simplification, the Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Associations is referred to as Buca *cemevi* in this thesis. The same simplification is used by the community members.

³⁶ Hüseyin Gökçe in the travel programme 'Seda ile geziyorum: Buca' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjIPN-1ZSyE>).

³⁷ Interview D63-23, 12.05.2020.

complementary reasons for this. Firstly, it was built as a culture house according to the zoning plan of the municipality due to the lack of formal regulation of Alevi religious organisations and places of worship. Secondly, since the *cemevis* are new phenomena, arising as a result of rapid urbanisation, there were no unique historically developed architectural solutions or examples, such as churches for Christians to follow during the design process. The only architectural component indicating the distinctiveness of the building in Buca is on the roof – a twelve-faceted pointed dome reminiscent of the headgear of the Bektashi order.³⁸ However, it is only noticeable from above and from the ritual gathering hall (*meydan*) inside the building.

According to the study of Sen and Soner, the *cemevis* of Izmir have been constructed in five different ways: (1) by a community association with their own resources, (2) by the municipality but left to the use of the community for a term of 49 years, (3) by a community association with the partial support of the municipality, (4) constructed and operated by the municipality, and (5) rented and operated by a community association without ownership (Sen and Soner 2016: 697). The Buca *cemevi* was constructed by the community association with its own resources. The money for the work was raised through different campaigns from the Alevi community. Hüseyin Gökçe noted that ‘the money was donated by families at the expense of their children’s mouths’.³⁹ Dede Hüseyin Akçay, who led the building process at the time, added that the Buca *cemevi* was built and its spot of land was purchased by donations and is still the only one in Izmir owned by an Alevi community organisation.⁴⁰ It can be concluded that the building of the *cemevi* at the time was a collective undertaking that mobilised the local Alevi community under one objective – to be together and remain in unity. All expenses related to the *cemevi* are still covered by membership fees and donations from the members of the *cemevi* association and the community. While it is not enough, the board of the *cemevi* is searching for extra income opportunities. At the beginning of 2020, a part of the ground floor was rented out to a small grocery store, which also helps to meet the expenses of the organisation.

2.2.2.2 Membership and leadership

To join the membership of the Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Association, one needs to be an Alevi, fill in an application form, and have a recommendation from a member. The application is reviewed and accepted by the central office of the

³⁸ The headgear used by the Bektashi dervishes, *Hüseyini Taç*, was formed of twelve pleats symbolising the Twelve Imams radiating from the centre at the top, where a button stands for the Divine Reality. Usually it is divided around its lower part into four sections symbolising the four gates. The turban (*sarik*) bound around the headgear is usually green (Birge 1994 (1936): 232).

³⁹ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

⁴⁰ Interview D63-23, 12.05.2020.

Alevi Culture Association.⁴¹ Membership presupposes the payment of membership fees, which are essential for covering monthly expenses of the *cemevi*, such as water and electricity. Participation in the activities of the *cemevi* membership is not required. Most activities are free for members and non-members alike. In this way, the members of the association contribute not only to the *cemevi* community but also to wider local life. The *cem* and *sohbet* gatherings, with some exceptions, are open for visitors from different *ocaks* and even for non-Alevi. Researchers like me are seen as voluntary members (*gönüllü üye*) whose interest and participation in the activities are welcomed and appreciated⁴².

The leadership consists of seven members with seven alternates elected by the association members for three years. The central office affirms the administration members as ordinary members of the organisation. The leadership consists of the chairman, secretary, treasurer, and four managers of the branches – women-, youth-, kitchen- and funeral branches. Two of the seven board members are women – the leader of the women’s work and the treasurer. There has never been a female chairman. All members of the board work as volunteers. There are only two paid positions in the *cemevi*, which are related to cleaning and cooking. The kitchen and funeral branches are active almost every day as this *cemevi* is the only Alevi institution in the Buca district with a morgue and a preparation room (*gasilhane*) offering funeral services according to Alevi belief.

As noted by Sen and Soner, the Alevi organisations in Izmir are usually governed by the community’s non-religious leaders (Sen and Soner 2016: 696). In Buca’s case, most of the chairmen have come from holy lineages, and some of them are also active as *dedes*. The last three chairmen are all practicing *dedes* from different sacred lineages. The election of *ocakzades* as chairmen reflects the community’s confidence in their ability to reconcile those in conflict and guide in different matters. Despite the changes in traditional social and religious relations, in particular local *dede-talip* relations, the members of the organisation still see an *ocakzade* as the best candidate for chairman.⁴³

2.2.3 Buca *cemevi* as an Alevi place of worship

2.2.3.1 The visuality and visibility of the *cemevi*

As seen above, the Buca *cemevi*, which is one of the largest in the region, was built in accordance with the practical needs of the community to accommodate primarily religious activities but also cultural and social events. Even though the building was constructed officially as a cultural centre, the religious purposes were frequently stressed during the interviews by the *dedes* involved in the building process⁴⁴. As a result, the building looks like any public building, except for

⁴¹ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020; D62-10, 16.03.2019.

the large portative images of important Alevi saints and quotes of religious content on the façade. From afar, these colourful images give an impression of conventional advertisements that are so common in surrounding buildings. However, it becomes clear from a sufficient distance that the building is adorned with meaningful Alevi images and religious messages. As the depiction of human and animal forms is not common in Islamic art, which is generally nonrepresentational⁴⁵, the large pictures of saints on the façade and interior of the building explicitly indicate a different interpretation of Islam.

The enormous colourful iconographic images belonging to Imam Ali, the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Pir Sultan Abdal and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that are generally characteristic of Alevi *cemevis* are also represented in the outer and inner walls of the Buca *cemevi*. In addition to the images, in order to make sure that the aim, belonging and function of the building were unambiguous for the community members, passers-by and the neighbourhood, the signboard ‘Buca cem evi’ was permanently placed on the main *cemevi*’s entrance in 1997. The reason for this was the understanding of the building as a *cemevi* or a religious gathering house by the members of the community. On the one hand, there was a demand to define the building according to the needs of the community and, on the other hand, to be visible as a *cemevi* to the outside world. According to Hüseyin Gökçe, the placing on the signboard ‘cem evi’ on the building was not welcomed by the authorities, and it was only after the efforts of the general director and the principal office of the *Alevi Kültür Dernekleri* in Ankara that the signboards were allowed to be used by the branches of the association.⁴⁶ Today, there are several smaller boards of ‘cem evi’ on the building in addition to the main one on the front door.

The use of the public areas next to the *cemevi* also shows the building’s belonging to a different religious and cultural affiliation. Next to the *cemevi*, there is a small public green area known as Hacı Bektaş Veli Park (Figure 1). A few years ago, three statues of important Alevi figures – Yunus Emre, Pir Sultan Abdal, and Hacı Bektaş Veli – were erected in the park. Each person is depicted with their sayings that have gained particular importance among Alevi. For example, we can read on the statue of Hacı Bektaş Veli, his most famous sayings such as ‘control your tongue, hand and waist’. In addition to the sayings, a note ‘Memorial to tolerance’ has been added to the statue of Pir Sultan Abdal, a reference to the events at the Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Sivas, where crowds attacked participants in the Madımak hotel. Pir Sultan Abdal is depicted, as usual, having the most used and known Alevi traditional instrument – *bağlama* – in his hand. Yunus Emre is represented as a villager holding a shepherd staff in his hand, a reference to a story in the hagiography of Hacı Bektaş Veli (Korkmaz 2015: 93–94).

⁴⁵ Islamic arts summary (<https://www.britannica.com/summary/Islamic-arts>).

⁴⁶ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.



Figure 1. Statue in the Hacı Bektaş Veli Park (Photo by Helen Haas)

The presence of these prominent Alevi figures outside the *cemevi* indicates the desire to define the building and its surrounding area on the basis of Alevi values and meaningful symbols. The posters on the building and statues outside create an integrated space including the *cemevi* and the green area behind it. The park functions as an extension of the *cemevi* during crowded events such as funerals, when people have conversations and meetings outside the *cemevi*. Often it is participating people whose presence in the vicinity of the *cemevi* adds to the visibility of the Alevi presence in the area.

During thirty years of existence, the building of the Buca *cemevi*, the public expression of Alevi's presence in the area, has gained a rather conventional position in the visibility of the neighbourhood. It is known and accepted as a *cemevi*, and it is possible to find it on Internet applications such as Google Maps under the name of *Buca cemevi*, in addition to *Alevi Kültür Dernekleri Buca şubesi*. The adjacent park of Hacı Bektaş Veli expands the area of the building and announces it as a *cemevi* – the house of Alevi religious ritual.

2.2.3.2 House of saintly presence: Imams and Saints

As seen above, one of the most signal characteristics in the visuality of the *cemevi* is the use of depictions of imams, saints and poets. The public and direct representation of these persons leaves no doubt of their essential role in shaping the distinct character of the building and conveying its message. It is made clear that this is an *Alevi* place of worship and community house, guided by the legacy of the Twelve Imams and their Anatolian descendants.

The most represented figure in the *cemevi* belongs to ‘Ali ibn Abî Tâlib (600–661), referred to as Imam Ali by the Alevi. Revered by the Sunni Muslims as the fourth rightly guided caliph and one of the closest companions of the Prophet, his position in Alevism is much more complex. As with Shi‘a Islam in general, also in Alevism, Ali is seen as the only possible legal successor of the Prophet. In addition to his historical life and role as the first Imam, Alevi believe that he has existed since the beginning of the universe possessing and uniting divine and human qualities (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 118). He appears in Alevi hymns and poems as an incarnation of God (Melikoff 2015: 40–41), reincarnated in later Imams and saints such as Hacı Bektaş Veli and Ismâ‘îl Shah (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 131–134). The belief in the reincarnation of Ali in later Imams, saints and prominent leaders also finds evidence in the Buca *cemevi*. For example, it is believed that Imam Ali reappeared in Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.⁴⁷ Consequently, it can be understood that the most represented figures in the Buca *cemevi*, such as Imam Ali, the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Atatürk, are seen as essentially connected and representing the same spiritual values.



Figure 2. The main entrance hall of the Buca *cemevi* (Photo by Helen Haas)

⁴⁷ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

Anyone who enters the *cemevi* through the main entrance is welcomed by the vast poster-like portraits of Alevism's above-mentioned essential figures (Figure 2). The whole area of the entrance is decorated with quotations and pictures of important Alevi actors, which leave no doubt about the belonging of the building. Above the main entrance stands a signboard 'Buca gathering house' (Buca *cem evi*) and a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, 'I am the house of knowledge, and Ali is its door. Whosoever seeks knowledge must enter through this door' (*Ben ilmin şehriyim, Alide kapısıdır. Ilmi isteyen kimse kapıdan grimelidir*).⁴⁸ This saying, widely known and cited throughout Alevi communities, indicates the crucial role of Imam Ali for seekers of knowledge and also for those stepping into the *cemevi*. It is understood to mean that Muhammad taught external knowledge about belief and ritual, but it is through Ali that one can enter into a deeper understanding of their inner meaning (Birge 1997: 106).⁴⁹ Also, it shows the need for and importance of both roles and the inseparable relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali.⁵⁰ Consequently, Ali is seen as the gateway through which all seekers must enter to ensure spiritual growth and knowledge.⁵¹ Using this particular saying of Prophet Muhammad on the main entrance refers, on the one hand, to the importance of the whole house as a place for seeking and achieving knowledge. On the other, it also indicates the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad and, in this way, refers to the building as part of Islamic tradition. Thus, this inscription has twofold importance, inviting people to participate in the Alevi path by following Imam Ali and his descendants and legalizing the Alevi path as Islamic. The two small round images on both sides of the inscription representing Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli, respectively perceived as the founder and upholder of the Alevi path, confirm the legacy of spiritual consistency.

⁴⁸ This saying is found in the collection of *hadiths* of al-Tirmidhî as 'I am the house of wisdom, and Ali is its door' (Jami' al-Tirmidhî 3723).

⁴⁹ In the *Velâyetnâme*, there is a story about the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali teaching Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî when he was young and while his teacher Lokmân-i Perende was not present. When Lokmân-i Perende asked about it, Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî answered that both were teaching him the meaning of the Quran. The Prophet taught its exoteric and Ali its esoteric meaning (Korkmaz 2015: 17).

⁵⁰ The second chapter of the *Buyruk* illustrates the inseparability of the Prophet and Imam Ali. There is a story about the Prophet and Ali wearing one shirt, so appearing as one body with two heads (Bozkurt 2013: 25). According to another story, out of His infinite goodness, God created a green river from which appeared a pearl – on one side of it a green light, on the other side of it a white light. The green light represents the Prophet Muhammad, the white light Imam Ali (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 25).

⁵¹ Through this symbolism, the door as such is considered sacred in Alevi tradition. Still, this saying does not decorate any doors but entrances leading to rooms of ritualistic importance. Usually, the doors leading to a ritual hall (*meydan*) and a sacred mausoleum (*türbe*) are of utmost importance and paid special respect while entering. People bow their heads on the threshold pack, touching and kissing it. Also, the sides of the door are kissed and touched. The threshold pack is not stepped on out of respect. (Fieldwork notes in Hacıbektaş 2018 and Buca 2019)

In addition to pictural forms, Imam Ali is represented through the statues of lions and his legendary sword, *Zülfikar* (Dhû al-faqâr).⁵² One of the main titles of Imam Ali used by the Alevi is the Lion of God (*Allahın aslanı*). Comparing Ali with a brave, strong, and fearless creature such as a lion is also common in the Sunni community, as Ali was one of the closest companions of the Prophet and never left his side.⁵³ Comparing Ali with a lion is rooted in a well-known story of the *Buyruk* of Imam Cafer-i Sadık, known as ‘The Gathering of the Forty’ (*Kırkların cemi*). This story relates to the Prophet’s nocturnal ascent to heaven (mirac), where he was given 30 000 words in the form of Islamic law (şeriat), and Imam Ali, as a guardian of esoteric knowledge, was given 60 000 words. This symbolism of Ali as the lion of God and custodian of esoteric knowledge is communicated in the Buca *cemevi* through the two statues of male lions on both sides of the main entrance.

The two-pointed swords are usually shown with Ali in one image as they belong together but are also found separately. One of the striking examples of representing *Zülfikar* is in the office of the head of the *cemevi*. *Zülfikar* is exhibited in the size of a conventional sword behind the seat of the headman. Placed on a spacious shelf under the images of Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the two-pointed metal *Zülfikar* dominates the whole room with its symbolism. In addition to symbolizing Ali as the legal and rightful successor of the Prophet, one of the most common meanings of the sword is justice – a value most lacking throughout history in relations with the state and public institutions. As it is believed among Alevi that the sword fell from heaven sometime before it reached the hand of the Prophet, it represents the divine justice to be implemented on earth (Güneş 2018: 10). All frequent guests, as well as politicians and journalists visiting the *cemevi*, are received by the head in his office under *Zülfikar*, which has become one of the most well-known symbolic objects of Alevism in Turkey.⁵⁴ Furthermore, *Zülfikar* has its rightful place in the most important hall of the *cemevi*, the ritual hall known as *meydan*. The painting of the sword and the saying *la feta illa Ali la seyfe illa Zulfikar* (there is no hero like Ali and no sword like *Zülfikar*) are part of the composition depicting the Twelve Imams behind the seat (*taht*) of the *dedes* leading *cem* gatherings.

Besides Imam Ali, the pictures of Imam Hüseyin, the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli and other prominent Alevi figures decorate the interior of the building. While Imam Ali is mainly represented alone or together with the Twelve

⁵² According to Islamic tradition, the sword *Zülfikar* was given to Ali by the Prophet Muhammad as war booty after the battle of Badr (624) and is believed to possess miraculous qualities. As a symbol of sovereignty and power, it is another proof according to the Shi’ites that Muhammad appointed Ali as his successor. After the death of Ali, the sword was in the hands of Hasan and Hüseyin and their descendants. Later on, it was lost by the time of the Abbassids (Güneş 2018: 10).

⁵³ Ali saved the wounded Prophet Muhammad miraculously in the battle of Uhud (625) with the help of the legendary sword *Zülfikar* (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 123).

⁵⁴ *Zülfikar* is, for example, also worn as a pendant or tattoo by Alevi.

Imams through iconographic images, *Zülfikar* and statues of lions, Hacı Bektaş Veli is represented through iconographic images and his sayings. As a bloodline descendant of Imam Ali and a legitimate spiritual leader, his images stand beside Imam Ali and the Twelve Imams in the *cemevi*. While the informants often refer to themselves as Alevi-Bektashi, the abundant usage of the images of Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli in the *cemevi* only confirms this self-designation.

2.2.3.3 Cem and sohbet: some aspects of the Alevi religious gatherings

Several religious events, social gatherings and educational activities organised by the board of the association take place in the *cemevi* according to the community's needs and expectations. Whilst activities of a social and educational character, such as concerts and various courses, are the result of the building's cultural function, religious gatherings such as *cem* and *sohbet* rituals and funerals are the reason why the building was constructed in the first place. Whilst both types of gatherings – cultural and religious – have their importance and relevance for the community, religious events determine the goals of the building. There may be a *cemevi* without courses and concerts, but not without a *cem* gathering. Without ritual gatherings, the *cemevi* would not serve its initial purpose, *i.e.* answering the religious needs of the Alevi community. Because of the importance of the *cem*, it has been crucial for the community to identify the building as a *cemevi*, as a house of worship, and apply for official recognition for it as a *cemevi* that is essentially different from a cultural centre.

The *cem* gatherings are organised at least three times a year on special occasions – *Hızır cemi* in February, *Nevruz cemi* in March, and *Matem cemi* in the Islamic month of Muḥarram (*Muharrem*).⁵⁵ These gatherings, which aim to provide unity and solidarity, reconciliation and common worship for the Alevi community, are open to anyone who would like to participate, including non-Alevi such as me, and are not limited to followers of a particular *ocak* or holy lineage. There are certain *dedes* who have established spiritual guiding relationships with the organisation and members of the *cemevi* community, in addition to the traditional *dede-talip* relationships. As traditional *dede-talip* connections have been declining due to migration and urbanisation processes, the *dedes* residing in Buca have taken the position of the spiritual authority of teaching and guiding the *talips* of different backgrounds. Additionally, *görgü cemi* and *ikrar cemi*,⁵⁶ which are organised for the *talips* following a particular *ocak* and are limited to traditional *dede-talip* relationships, are occasionally organised.

⁵⁵ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

⁵⁶ There are various *cem* gatherings that have certain aims and focuses. For example, the *görgü cemi* focuses on the unity and peace among the community and the *ikrar cemi* is about taking oaths. See more about the different types of *cem* gatherings in the works of Rençber (2013) and Işık (2013).

There are 4–5 *dedes* in the *cem* gatherings, who share the responsibilities of leading the *cem* through reconciliation, repentance, teachings, prayers, blessings and calling for the twelve services (*on iki hizmet*)⁵⁷ in Buca. Having several *dedes* present during the *cem* is a privilege not available in smaller places and villages. Also, having *cem*s three times a year is an advantage that is rare or even non-existent in smaller places. A young female interviewee noted that she participated in a *cem* gathering for the first time in her life in Buca after migrating from her original village, where the *cem* gatherings were not held because of lack of *dedes*.⁵⁸ Also, it is not difficult to find the performers of the twelve services and *semah*⁵⁹ among such a large congregation as in Buca, gathering several times a year. In small villages, where there are not so many people gathering and the assemblies are rare, it can be quite a hindrance to the completion of a whole ritual. For this reason, visiting *dedes* take with them *semah* groups, who are trained to perform the *semah* and the twelve services in order to educate the villagers through performance and have proper rituals. I witnessed this in a small village in Tercan county in Erzincan during a *Matem cemi* dedicated to the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hüseyin in September 2019.⁶⁰ The visiting *dede* from Erzincan organised the *cem* for the villagers by including guest performers of *semah* and the twelve services. In Buca, there are also trained *semah* performers participating; however, also spontaneous performance is encouraged by the *dedes* and participated by men and women of different age groups.

Cem gatherings take place in the ritually most important hall – *meydan* – a large assembly room accommodating about 500 people on the highest floor. This hall is the most important place for Alevi common worship in Buca, where there are no other sacred landmarks and mausoleums (*türbe*) that are existent in the villages. The hall is used only for ritual purposes during *cem* gatherings, turning it into a consecrated area of the building. The hall is furnished with images of the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî and Pir Sultan Abdal, with a podium for the leading *dedes* (and *anas*) and pillows for the participants, men and women, who kneel or sit on the floor during the ritual. The area right in front of the *dedes*' podium, the initial *meydan*, is marked with a red carpet and used for the announcement and blessing of the twelve services and *semah* ritual that is the

⁵⁷ The twelve services are various ritual and practical activities that form an integral part of the *cem* gathering. These activities may vary according to the area and leading *dedes*. In Buca, the services are as follows: *pir* (the leading *dede*), *rehber* (assistant *dede*), *gözcü* (watchman), *kapıcı* (doorkeeper), *çırağcı* (service of the candle), *kurbanacı* (service of the food), *süpürgeci* (service of the sweeper), *tarikçi* (service of the square), *tezekâr* (service of symbolic ablution), *peyik* (service of invitation), *sakacı* (service of sacred water), *zakir* (musician) and *iznikçi* (service of order and shoes).

⁵⁸ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁵⁹ The *semah* ritual is traced back to the gathering of the forty saints described in *Buyruk*. After reaching the highest heavens during the nocturnal journey (*mirac*), the Prophet visits the Forty, with whom he joins in ecstatic dance after drinking from the heavenly sherbet (Bozkurt 2013: 15–21).

⁶⁰ Fieldwork notes September 2019.

culmination of the *cem* gathering. The ceiling of the ritual hall is topped with the form of the Bektashi headgear *Hüseyin-i taç* or the crown of Hüseyin, which has twelve sides resembling the Twelve Imams.

The participants enter the hall leaving their shoes behind the door, and prostrate in front of the podium of the *dedes* paying respect to the holy lineages and receiving blessings before sitting among the congregants. During the whole gathering, the participants are actively involved by responding to the *dedes'* prayers, blessings and calls for repentance by loud chanting. Whilst not all the participants can take part in the twelve services and *semah* every time, everyone may be directly involved in the ritual by praying, chanting and bringing food (*lokma*) that is blessed by the *dedes* and distributed among the participants for eating.⁶¹

Before the initial ritual starts, a *dede* asks if there are individuals among the people who have unresolved issues that need to be reconciled.⁶² This traditional questioning, which aim has been to ensure good relations between community members in villages by solving disputes, seems to be nonrelevant in a gathering of several hundreds of people who might not know each other. Occasionally, this question is followed by a symbolic reconciliation through the hugging of the nearby participants. However, there are examples of people standing up and sharing their unresolved issues in front of the *dedes* and the congregants. In these cases, the traditional questioning of the parties is conducted, solutions are offered by the leading *dede*, and the congregation is involved by showing their consent to the results.

Besides *cem* gatherings that take place a few times a year, there are *sohbet* (literally, “conversation” in Turkish) gatherings once a week on Thursday evenings. Whilst *cem* gatherings are crowded and need special organisation from advertising for determining the twelve services, *sohbet* events are rather small, weekly fellowship gatherings led by the *dedes*. And although *cem* gatherings take place in the *meydan*, *sohbet* gatherings may take place in various rooms such as the *dede* or youth offices. Although *sohbet* gatherings are more informal and smaller in size,⁶³ they may only be led by *dedes* (and *anas*) since the teaching is conducted. Three candles representing Allah, the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali are lit and put out by the *dedes* at the beginning and the end of the gathering. People bring food (*lokma*) for blessing and distribution among the participants. As at the *cem* gatherings, men and women participate together also during *sohbet* meetings.

The main aim of the *sohbet* is to share and gain spiritual knowledge concerning various aspects of Alevism. The leading *dede* chooses a topic for teaching

⁶¹ Preparing *lokma*, usually baked bread, for the *cem* and *sohbet* gatherings, is an important part of the preparation for the gathering (fieldwork notes March 2019).

⁶² Solving issues and reconciliation of involved parties has been one of the important roles of *dedes* during the *cem* gatherings. The ritual may not start before all the participants are content (*razi*) with each other.

⁶³ Usually about 10–20 people come together for the weekly *sohbet* meetings.

and instructs *talips* about the Alevi path. The *talips* may also ask questions and share their concerns. *Talips* ask the *dedes*' advice on a wide variety of topics, including how to raise children. For example, during a certain *sohbet* meeting, a female participant asked the *dedes* about what she had done wrong that her son married a Sunni woman and became Sunnified. The *dede* did not see any causes in the family or mother but rather in the state's policy that favours Sunni Islam through compulsory religious instruction in state schools. The concerns of assimilation into Sunni Islam and how to maintain and live one's Alevi identity were the main issues raised during the *sohbet* meetings.

Since *sohbet* gatherings are small in number, all people are visible, with their wishes taken into account and questions answered. As a researcher, my aim was to observe the course of rituals with as little interference as possible. Whilst this principle was likely to be implemented during the crowded *cem* gatherings, it was not feasible at the *sohbet* meetings, where everyone is visible. For example, the *dedes* chose the topics of the gatherings according to my research questions. The leading *dedes* decided to talk about the life and miracles of Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî, sainthood (*velilik*) and the importance of the sacred bloodlines since they knew I was there to learn about these subjects. Also, there was a discussion among the *dedes* whether I should be 'punished' along with the Alevis, who broke a certain rule concerning ritual food by eating *lokma* before permission was granted. As the result of the argument being won by the older *dede*, who advocated my being included in the 'punishment', I had to bring food for the next *sohbet* gathering in a certain amount, together with the others who had transgressed the rule.

Both gatherings, the *cem* and the *sohbet*, testify to the religious significance of the *cemevi*. Along with these two, there are also Alevi funerals organised almost every day that marks the importance of the *cemevi*. For the local Alevis, the Buca *cemevi* is the only place where funerals may be conducted according to Alevi beliefs and customs. Before the *cemevi* was constructed, funerals were conducted in local mosques according to Sunni traditions, which was not the first choice for most Alevis.⁶⁴ As is evident, the *cemevi* is, first of all, a religious centre that carries out religious purposes, but at the same time, it is not restricted to non-religious activities. There are social and cultural activities that support the local Alevi community to live out their Aleviness as long as these activities are appropriate, dignified, tolerant and not contrary to Alevi values.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Informal conversation with Hüseyin Gökçe 06.03.2019.

⁶⁵ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

2.3 Community of the Buca *cemevi*

2.3.1 Dedes and talips

The Alevi people are traditionally divided into two groups along certain bloodline boundaries: *ocakzades* and *talips* or spiritual leaders and lay Alevis, respectively. The *ocakzades* are the reputed descendants of the Ehl-i Beyt or Anatolian saints, and, thus, representatives of the holy lineages. As descendants of such lineages, the *ocakzades* are responsible for the religious instruction of the *talips* (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 156). The *Buyruk* designates that spiritual leadership and guidance belong to the bloodline of the prophet Muhammed and guidance by others is not permitted (Bozkurt 2013: 31–44). This distinction between *ocakzades* and the non-*ocakzades* is well known by the community members in Buca. I didn't meet anyone during my fieldwork who was ignorant of his or her origins in this matter. In Turkey, there are about 300 *ocak* lineages whose genealogy can be traced back to the miracle-working saints of Anatolia (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 156). In the Buca *cemevi* community, the most represented lineages are Baba Mansur, Kureyshyan, Dervish Cemal, Delil Berhican and Yan Yatır. The current chairman Hüseyin Gökçe belongs to the Kureyshyan lineage, and the former chairman *dede* Hüseyin Akçay represents the Delil Berhican lineage.

Since *dede-talip* relationships are constructed by patrilineage, it is determined by birth from which lineage someone's *dede* or spiritual leader will come. However, it is not known from the beginning which of the individual *ocakzades* takes the active role as a *dede*, since it depends on one's personal qualities and willingness (Shankland 2004a: 40). Not all *ocakzades* take responsibility as practicing *dedes*.

The migration and urbanisation process has affected the functioning of Alevis' traditional concepts, especially the *ocak*-based *dede-talip* relationships. According to *dede* Hüseyin, in the villages, the *talips* were closely related to their *dede* lineages in spiritual and social matters as well as participating in exclusive *cem* gatherings led by their *dedes*. The gatherings took place in larger rooms of the houses of the village, usually in the houses of the *dedes*.⁶⁶ Despite efforts to maintain *dede-talip* relationships and ritual practices in the early decades of migration, it appeared in time that urban conditions necessitated new ways of collectivity and a new type of Alevism regarding community structures, organisation and ritual practices, as also noted in the work of Sen and Soner (2016: 696).

According to *dede* Hüseyin Akçay, religious gatherings were organised during the first decades in apartments with larger rooms. Due to the physical distance between *dedes* and *talips*, meetings took place irregularly and only when a *dede* was available. Over time, the number of Alevi migrants increased in the area, and the apartments could no longer accommodate participants; that, in turn, led Alevis to step out into larger premises and to the building of the *cemevi*.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Before the *cemevi* was built, larger gatherings took place on rental premises. After the construction of the *cemevi*, *cem* gatherings started to be organised by the chairman of the board of the *cemevi*. He is the one who seeks contacts with *dedes* in the area from different lineages and invites them to lead the *cem* gatherings, which are open to all *talips* regardless of the *ocak* they are following. However, according to the current chairman of the *cemevi*, Hüseyin Gökçe, the traditional *dede-talip* relationships are not completely diminished. From time to time, *talips* of certain *ocaks* come together to have private *cem* gatherings in the *cemevi*.⁶⁸ These gatherings are not advertised to the Alevi public like the general open *cem* gatherings.

The *talips* respect the *dedes* of all the lineages because of their genealogy. In general, *dedes* are attributed with distinct divine knowledge and the ability to guide people on the Alevi path. However, younger and educated Alevis more and more often challenge *dedes* with questions they cannot always answer. This becomes evident also in discussions with Alevis influenced by Sunni Islam. For example, in a discussion between an *ozakzade* not active as a *dede* and a young Alevi man married to a Sunni woman, I noticed how the *ocazade's* basis for convincing the young man in a certain question was, first of all, his descent from a holy lineage. Since this was not enough for the young man, the discussion ended in vain.⁶⁹

Before the Alevi revival at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, Alevi belief had been, in general, transmitted orally as esoteric knowledge through secret rituals by the *dedes* to their *talips* (Şahin 2005: 265). The situation changed rapidly due to migration and access to education. As general knowledge about Alevism has become widespread since the Alevi revival through different channels such as printed publications, television, radio and the Internet, the role of *dedes* as the only transmitters of knowledge has changed. As we will see below, it is common to invite academics and other specialists, such as lawyers and historians, to talk about Alevism from various perspectives during different events at the *cemevi*. This situation challenges the *ocakzades*, who are willing to act as *dedes*, to educate themselves in addition to oral heritage in order to answer the religious needs of an increasingly demanding community.

It might be questioned if, and to what extent, Alevis still value traditional oral spiritual guidance or reconciliation by a *dede* in changed educational and social circumstances. According to my findings in the Buca *cemevi* community, the belief in a *dede's* personal spiritual guidance as the best way to advance on the

⁶⁸ Traditionally, the season of *cems* was initiated before the winter ploughing with the *görgü cemi* or annual 'seeing' of the *talips* by their *dede* (Shankland 2007: 123). The aim of the *görgü* is to ritually question the *talips* in order to solve possible disputes incurred during the year and maintain consent in the community. In the urban context, it has lost its practical meaning as *talips* are scattered and not connected to each other on a daily basis as in the villages. However, when such *cems* are organised, only the *talips* of the 'seeing' *dede* are allowed to participate in order to protect participants' privacy (Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020).

⁶⁹ Fieldwork notes 11.03.2019.

Alevi path is still common. Thus, *dedes* are seen and valued as spiritual guides and mentors. Since the *cem* gatherings can only be conducted by *dedes*, their role as spiritual leaders is continuously relevant and uniform. Since the *cem* gathering cannot start before all the people present are at peace with one another, the role of *dedes* as peacemakers in quarrels is still in demand. Hence, *dedes* are the ones who, on the one hand, fulfill the expectations of the community as custodians of traditions and, on the other, need to compromise with necessary changes to ensure the continuity of the community in changed circumstances.

As a researcher of Alevism, I was seen in some cases as a seeker of spiritual truths, and as such, a certain *dede* invited me to become his *talip*. In another case, I was offered to become an Alevi in order to follow the path and, in this way, gain a deeper understanding. It confirms that *dedes* have reached flexibility in offering their guidance beyond their traditional *dede-talip* relationship boundaries and also beyond the borders of Alevism. The trend towards universality was noticed and will be discussed henceforward.

2.3.2 Women's activities

Except for the elderly, Alevi women in Buca do not cover their heads, and they speak freely to their male neighbours, colleagues, and *cemevi* visitors. They wear idiosyncratic and fashionable clothes and use makeup occasionally. Very often, they work outside their homes and engage in political activities. Women are side by side with men during the *cem* gatherings, where both are addressed as *can* (soul) without differentiation based on gender. They participate in the twelve duties (*on iki hizmet*) and *semah* ritual during the *cem* along with men. Holy lineage women known as *anas* sit beside their performing *dede* husbands at *cem* gatherings and, if needed, can exceptionally lead *cem* gatherings themselves.⁷⁰

In general, it can be argued that Alevi women enjoy greater social freedoms and religious equality with men compared to Sunni women. Still, the common Alevi claim about equality between women and men has been criticized, for example, by Nimet Okan (2018). Her case study on the rhetoric of equality between men and women in Alevism shows that the statement serves identity purposes of being distinguished from Sunnis rather than finding application in real life. According to my findings in Buca, however, the will and desire for equality between men and women is noticeable and also practiced. The chairman Hüseyin Gökçe commented on the question about the equality of men and women:

There is no inequality between men and women, never, ever! We have been struggling for it and will continuously struggle for it! So, when a saint (*velî*) or a prophet (*nebî*) is born of a woman, this woman is as important and holy as this saint or prophet.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

⁷¹ Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

It is noticeable how the male leaders of the *cemevi* contribute to women's rights and support them in their goals. In the following, we will see how women's needs are communicated and responded to through activities in the Buca *cemevi*, where women are actively involved in the whole spectrum of tasks, from participating in the work of the board to leading courses and housekeeping.

As mentioned before, in the Buca *cemevi* there is a distinct branch for women led by its elected leader. The women's work branch, together with the youth branch, organises most of the social and educational gatherings taking place in the *cemevi*. Women and youth branches have their rooms next to the chairman's office and secretariat on the entrance floor, which makes these branches visible and easily accessible to visitors. Special events, such as concerts and seminars focusing on women and youth and their needs, organised by the aforementioned branches are attended by the entire community, regardless of age and gender.

One of the highlights of the year, organised by the women's branch, is the International Women's Day celebration on the 8th of March. This event is prepared well for the larger public and is often referred to as 'International Working Women's Day', emphasizing women's right to work and economic independence. The women of the community invite specialty speakers to lecture on a chosen topic and prepare musical performances, sketches and speeches. Occasionally, they screen films concerning women's struggles and achievements. One of the important topics that receive attention during these events concerns domestic violence against women, which is a major problem throughout Turkey and is also present among Alevis (Okan 2018: 82). Although talking about women as mothers is not the main focus of the day, motherhood still finds attention and is expressed as domestic employment, especially by the men. Still, it is understood that for the women gathered, working at home is not perceived as 'real employment,' and working outside of the home is perceived as part of women's rights.

In Women's Day advertisements and speeches, quotes by Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk frequently appear. Quotes such as 'Educate women' and 'Nations who don't educate their women can't develop', attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli, and 'Societies that leave their women behind, will stay behind', said by Atatürk, are some of the most frequently used. Deploying the quotes of Hacı Bektaş Veli shows, on the one hand, an attitude towards the saint as a medieval humanist and philosopher who lived ahead of his era. On the other hand, it adds a religious dimension to the event. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, in whose personality religious and political meanings merge, as we will see below, a political dimension is added to the celebration. These chosen quotations, addressed to men, challenge them not to remain ignorant about women's needs and apply them on the national level for their own benefit. Even though Alevis, as a minority group, have little power to change women's situation at the societal level, it is communicated and accepted that it is possible to do so at community, family and personal levels. Consequently, Women's Day celebrations in the *cemevi*, like Alevi celebrations in general, bear a multidimensional character bearing a strong social, cultural, religious and political scope.

In addition to International Women's Day in March, other special days such as Mother's Day in May and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on the 25th of November, are celebrated. The activities of the women's branch have become an integral part of the community's life. Women's needs are emphasized, and activities are organised throughout the year. From time to time, courses on cooking, childcare, and knitting that offer socialization opportunities, in addition to learning, are organised. Lectures on health issues such as breast cancer are advertised. Activities and information concerning women are constantly spread through different channels such as telephone and social media. Communication continued during the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 when the most important information about avoiding the virus and how to inform and find help in the case of domestic violence was shared through the association's official Facebook page.⁷²

2.3.3 Reflections on youth

As noted above, young people are another group in the *cemevi* community who have a distinct branch for their activities. It is considered a special task by the board of the *cemevi* and parents to draw young people's attention and interest to the Alevi path through different activities. Since it is generally believed that parents must guide their children not to depart from Alevism, parents look within themselves for the reasons for young people's self-distancing from Alevism. Parents question themselves and *dedes* about possible mistakes they might have made. A mother whose son married a Sunni woman and started to attend prayers in mosques presents her situation as a warning example of what might happen.⁷³ However, parents admit that no matter how hard they try, they are often unable to compete with the Sunni-affiliated compulsory religious instruction in state schools and widespread assimilation politics.

At the same time, young people, while receiving a systematic education at the school system, are eager to understand the reasons and precise meanings of the peculiarities of the Alevi path. The traditional way of oral transmission is perceived as too superficial because parents and *dedes* do not sufficiently explain the rationale and background of Alevi values and historical personalities⁷⁴. As a result, young people feel ignorant about certain issues and admit that they have not been conveyed the full meaning of certain questions. A young male *talip*, who is a music teacher at the *cemevi*, expressed his ignorance about not knowing the sources of the importance of Alevi saints with regret:

⁷² Alevi Kültür Dernekleri Buca Şubesi (Buca cemevi) Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/akdbucacemevi>).

⁷³ Participant observation at a *sohbet* gathering, 14.03.2019.

⁷⁴ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

As a person raised in an Alevi family, I heard the name Hacı Bektaş probably for the first time on the day I was born. Also, the name of Ali and Pir Sultan Abdal. I know them as our important values! I was raised with them. My parents thought that they were very important for Alevi. But something is missing here! I was told that these people are important, but why they are important, I was not told! Maybe I don't know the reason for their importance until this very day. I only know that they are important.⁷⁵

In this case, we see how the importance and meaning of central figures have remained occasionally unexplained, which is met with discontent by young Alevi. In turn, this lack of knowledge has raised questions concerning identity. A young female *talip*, who was born in Erzincan province, questions her identity and the reasons behind it:

I asked my mother why I am Alevi, why we are Alevi, and what is an Alevi? Where does it come from? We are Muslims, but the sects of Alevi and Sunni emerged in time, as I know. Why are we not Sunni? Yesterday the *dede* said to me: "You are like a book, and you have to find out yourself, you have to read and know yourself." I was crying today for one hour while thinking about it. Why have I stayed aside?⁷⁶

It seems like the indirect and allusive way of guidance practiced by Alevi *dedes* is not always easily understood by young people, who are used to more formal education and instructions practiced in the schools. It can also be a question of consistency since Alevi, especially the younger ones, are cut off from traditional *dede-talip* relationships, thus departing from the way guidance is given and should be understood.

As traditional *dede-talip* relationships have diminished or even vanished, young people who do not actively research Alevism by themselves depend on the knowledge they occasionally receive from their parents and the *dedes* connected to the *cemevi* during the *cem* gathering, *sohbet* or occasional social gatherings. As developing oneself on the Alevi path is connected to a personal relationship with a *dede*, young people who have not been able to establish firm relationships with a *dede* admit their insufficiency in spiritual matters. The ones who have a *dede* as a personal spiritual mentor are more confident about their religion-based Alevi identity and purposefulness⁷⁷.

It is noteworthy how the board of the *cemevi* pays attention to youth. The youth branch office is one of the biggest, next to that of the chairman. Along with youth branch organisational activities, it is also used for weekly *sohbet* gatherings, which provide opportunities for asking questions and following discussions. Young people who have many unanswered questions are still not active in expressing them in public since they have learned to respect older people and

⁷⁵ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁷⁶ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁷⁷ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

give them priority in speaking⁷⁸. As a consequence, the religious knowledge they gain is rather accidental and dependent on older people's interests.

The youth branch's office is abundant with visual objects to communicate the values of Alevism. In addition to religious images and symbols such as the *Zülfikar*, there are memorial stands with pictures of those killed by setting the *Madımak* hotel on fire during the 4th Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Sivas on the 2nd of July 1993⁷⁹. Also, there are posters about the Alevi massacres in Gazi (1995), Malatya (1978), and Çorum (1980)⁸⁰ with slogans of 'Don't forget' and 'Don't let it be forgotten' represented. These contemporary martyrs of Alevism, of whom many were young people, stand beside the first martyrs of Alevism – Imam Ali and his two sons, Hasan and Hüseyin. In this way, being an Alevi in contemporary Turkey is compared with the first generations of the *ocak* lineages and their fate fighting injustice. In order not 'to let it be forgotten,' the martyrs and massacres are regularly commemorated and visualized with Alevi youth being present, thus reestablishing a common socio-political and cultural belonging.

As mentioned before, Alevis in general, and young Alevis in particular, have been targeted by the state's assimilation politics since the foundation of the Republic to achieve national unity based on homogeneous cultural and religious grounds (Salman 2015: 310). For this reason, the Alevis would quite likely use their political votes in favour of liberal oppositional parties to avoid the spread of political Islam and restrictions on freedoms. Before the local elections in 2019, I witnessed how two young people from the Sunni-affiliated AKP party visited an Alevi home to congratulate their daughter on her 18th birthday. Even though it was very clear that the home belonged to Alevis, who are voters of the oppositional CHP party because of the posters on their front door, the political activists did not hesitate to hand over small gifts and ask permission for photography. The birthday child herself perceived this unexpected visit as an attempt at religious proselytizing. Even though the aim of the visitors was primarily to find political followers, the young woman herself associated the visit with religious purposes since AKP has a clear Sunni character.⁸¹

However, the social borders between Sunnis and Alevis are becoming vaguer in the city, especially among young people, since there are more opportunities for finding common ground in different areas of life. It is not unusual to see Sunni youth participating in different courses organised by the *cemevi*. According to the chairman Hüseyin Gökçe, from time to time, there are more Sunni young people taking part in different courses than Alevi youth. There are various cultural events

⁷⁸ Fieldwork observation notes 14.03.2019.

⁷⁹ The Sunni-fundamentalist mob attack on the festival guests was not interfered with, either by the police or the fire department. Among the thirty-five victims killed in the fire were Alevi intellectuals, writers and poets (Soileau 2017: 566–577).

⁸⁰ For more about contemporary Alevi martyrs see Mark Soileau (2017) *Hızır Pasha Hanged Us: Commemorating Martyrdom in Alevi Tradition* and Nil Mutluer (2016) *The Looming Shadow of Violence and Loss: Alevi Responses to Persecution and Discrimination*.

⁸¹ Fieldwork notes 20.03.2019.

and courses held in the *cemevi*, especially the English language and music courses, that are popular among Sunnis.⁸² As a consequence, the youth branch of the *cemevi* acts as a creator of a socio-cultural environment for Alevi youth to (re)discover and establish their Alevi belonging and as a connecting bridge between Alevi and Sunni youth, thus making Alevis more visible in the neighbourhood.

2.4 Alevi identity boundaries in Buca *cemevi*

New social environments and academic interests have created a situation where Alevis experience pressure and expectations to define their religious identity.⁸³ As Özkul and Markussen have noted, one of the most contentious issues about Alevism is its definition, which is subject to both internal and external controversies (Özkul and Markussen 2022:3).

Changing community structures and ritual environments that have led to (re)defining Alevism and Alevi identity have caused an abundance of various understandings of Alevism. The absence of a central authority or structure of leadership within Alevis has allowed many different views of Alevism to emerge. Variations in how Alevism is perceived manifest themselves in the public messaging of various Alevi associations and foundations (*vakıf*). One of the main questions is whether Alevism is understood as a part of Islam or a distinct religion outside it. When it is seen within Islam, what is the nature of its relationship with ‘orthodox’ Islam? For example, one of the influential Alevi organisations, the CEM Foundation, applies the Turkish-Islamic approach to construing Alevi identity. Contrary to this view, the Pir Sultan Abdal Association claims that, although Alevism is influenced by Islam, it is instead a separate religious belief system (Beşe 2013: 21). Dressler has noted that the latter conception of Alevism has found more favour in the diaspora (Dressler 2022:20). There are also Alevi organisations that are influenced by, and are close to, the Iranian Ja‘fari approach, such as the Ehlibeyt Foundation. The Alevi Culture Association, which is part of the Alevi Bektashi Federation, represents a position that is critical of the interests of the state and mainstream Islam, seeking instead to formulate its own view about Alevism.⁸⁴ At the same time, it avoids deviations from a general Islamic framework.

As seen above, there is no single answer to what Alevism is. Even though defining Alevism is not easy, interviewees answered these questions with confidence and certainty. Generally speaking, there are four main perceptions of Alevism presented in Buca *cemevi* – Alevism as an integral part of Islam, as original incorrupt Islam, as a mystical interpretation of Islam and as a culture or world view. Often these views are interconnected. Even though many of the

⁸² Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

⁸³ According to the Sunni side, one of the obstacles in progressive dialogue has been the lack of systematic approach to Alevism (Çakir and Bozan 2005: 38).

⁸⁴ Interview D50-22, 01.05.2020.

respondents are Zaza speakers, I did not encounter the understanding of Alevism as a belief system consciously connected to Kurdish-Iranian religious traditions in Buca. Nor did I encounter at the Buca *cemevi* the opinion of Alevism as a religion separate from Islam.⁸⁵ Defining Alevism as a part of Islam, however, does not make the specification of Alevism uncomplicated since it leads to a discussion of Alevism's ambivalent borders with Sunni and Shi'a Islam and with other belief systems, such as Shamanism.

Defining Alevism may, in addition to ambivalence, lead to politically sensitive argumentation. In Buca, talking about Alevism is often framed by the experience and memory derived from social and political confrontations with Sunni Muslims. Dressler has shown how defining Alevism may even turn into a 'controversial and highly politicized question, especially in terms of its relationship to Islam' through the definitions of the EU Commission and European Court of Human Rights in the light of Alevi court appeals about the legal status of *cemevis* and compulsory religious instruction in public schools in Turkey (2022:17–19). Both of these questions are also on the agenda and receive mention in Buca *cemevi* as examples of the issues reflecting general Alevi concerns which have not yet found satisfactory solutions.

The diversity of perceptions and the ongoing process of communal self-definition, as well as political sensitivity, was well reflected in the findings of my fieldwork in Buca. On the one hand, the benefits of a would-be uniform Alevi identity are valued; on the other hand, different views of Alevism are accepted. This situation seems to be solved with the Alevi saying, 'The path is one, while practices are a thousand and one' (*yol bir, sürek bin bir*), an expression of Alevi pluralism characterizing the great variety of different ways of reaching God and often used to show tolerance and good will about other religions. Consequently, I recorded various definitions that emphasized various aspects of Alevism. The definition that was given by a *dede* characterizes the all-embracing nature of Alevism, which in the framework of Islam includes the importance of nature and the teachings of saints, and elevates humans, both male and female, to the centre of divine interaction:

Alevism is the path of the followers of Ali's house, which cares about human beings and nature. Alevism is the path of people who value knowledge and the teaching of Hacı Bektaş Veli, who said, 'The road that doesn't follow science ends in darkness'. In Alevism, man and all created beings have a high position – it is a belief that sees a human being in God and God in a human being. Whatever you're searching for, seek in a human being! The Kaaba of Alevism is a human being, and the soul has no gender.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See more about different perceptions and understandings of Alevism in 'What is Alevism?' by Markus Dressler (2022).

⁸⁶ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

These kinds of rather verbose definitions of Alevism that aim to include different spheres and aspects of life were quite common among the *dedes*. It is also usual to define Alevism through commonly accepted proverbs of Hacı Bektaş and the importance of and love towards the *ehl-i beyt*. Non-religious Alevis, who perceive Alevism first of all as a culture (*kültür*) or a worldview (*dünya görüşü*), leave religious components out of their identity description. However, shared cultural, social and ideological aspects of Alevism lead them to take an active part in the life of the *cemevi*, volunteering in its activities and participating in its organised trips to various destinations of pilgrimage (*ziyaret*).

No matter the different views of Alevism, they strongly confront what it is not, that is, the ‘orthodox’ Sunni Islam with its ritual practices and leadership. Even if a person doesn’t represent an unambiguous understanding of Alevism, being born as an Alevi is seen as a privilege that must be valued and transmitted to the next generation. The feelings of discrimination or being a ‘second class citizen’ has gained another side during the self-discovery and recognition process – ‘proud to be an Alevi’.⁸⁷

2.4.1 Various perceptions of Alevism

2.4.1.1 An integral part of Islam: Muslim and Alevi

In Buca, Alevism is first seen as an integral part of Islam, a religious richness (*zenginlik*) in the wider Islamic framework. Corresponding to this opinion, most of the interviewees of the Buca *cemevi* community identified themselves as Muslims and their religion (*din*)⁸⁸ as Islam. At the same time, it was always added that one is also, in particular, an Alevi, a proponent of Ali as the successor of Prophet Muhammad after his death and a follower of the Alevi path. Hence, as Alevism is considered part of Islam, none of the interviewees referred to Alevism as a separate religion (*din*). Instead, terms such as belief (*inanç*), interpretation (*yorum*), school (*mezhep*) and path (*yol*) were used to describe Alevism. Consequently, one of the most prevailing viewpoints at the Buca *cemevi* defines Alevism, in one way or another, within the framework of Islam with belief in Allah and love for Prophet Muhammad and his house.

I did not notice any contradiction between being a Muslim and an Alevi. A young *talip* explained his position on the relationship between his Muslim and Alevi identities:

To be an Alevi, one has to testify that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. The Alevis add a phrase about Ali as the *veli* of Allah. To believe in Islam means to believe in the afterlife; these things are all interconnected. You can’t say that you are a Muslim and do not believe in paradise.

⁸⁷ Jenkins and Cetin (2018) have also discussed this phenomenon.

⁸⁸ *Din* is used by the respondents to denote Islam as a religion in general.

Also, you can't say that you are an Alevi and not a Muslim. If someone says that... An ignorant can say that, perhaps.⁸⁹

This account shows that defining Alevism as a separate religion is considered wrong and identified with ignorant⁹⁰ (*cahil*) people who have not acquired proper knowledge. This kind of reasoning by younger people, who have received Sunni-affiliated compulsory religious instruction⁹¹ at school, is not surprising. The same tendency among older people might be explained by personal reasoning or by the influence of the opinion of the Alevi Culture Associations, and in the long term, it might be the result of the 'making process' of Anatolian Alevism since the end of the 19th century.⁹²

Identifying with Islam in the broader sense still contains a quite clear confrontation with its 'orthodox' Sunni and Shi'a branches (*mezhep*). Explicit opposition to the teachings and principles of Sunni Muslims (*ehl-i sünnet*), which will be discussed below, exhibits a clear belonging to the adherents of the prophet's household (*ehl-i beyt*). From the legal point of view, Alevism was defined by the interviewees as belonging to the Ja'farî (*Ca'ferî*) school of jurisprudence (*mezhep*), which refers to a common background with Twelver Shi'a Islam. However, the close proximity of Alevism and the Twelver Shi'a is not considered an option, as the latter does not follow the moral standards of the Alevi path.

One of the main arguments against the 'orthodox' branches of Islam was based on moral principles derived from the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli. The name of the medieval saint was used to further signify that Alevism is identified rather as Alevism-Bektashism and not as *Kızılbaş*⁹³ Alevism. Also, referring to oneself as Alevi-Bektaşî suggests that the two concepts are seen as one entity with common values based on the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Later on, it will be shown how the saint is considered to be the one who established Alevism in Anatolia and directed its path a firm direction towards love, respect and tolerance, thus becoming essentially different from Sunni and Shi'a Islam, which are both

⁸⁹ Interview M25-18, 27.04.2019.

⁹⁰ *Cahil* also means illiterate in Turkish. As Alevi culture has been mostly oral and transmitted orally, literacy or illiteracy has played little role in the process. There have been illiterate *dedes* throughout history but not considered *cahil*. On the contrary, they are attributed with great knowledge despite their illiteracy.

⁹¹ Religious instruction has been compulsory since the military coup in 1980. Most teachers of religion are graduates of the *imam-hatip* (religious vocational) schools, who are seen as tools for religious indoctrination (Bozkurt 2004: 94). For more about the consequences of and Alevi responses to the 1980 coup, see Mutluer (2016).

⁹² See Dressler (2013).

⁹³ *Kızılbaş*, still derogatory and pejorative in meaning, is rarely used as a term of self-reference in the Buca community since it has been gradually replaced by the term Alevi. The term *Kızılbaş* is still frequently used in Alevi blogs and social media, often in tandem with the term Alevi, as *Kızılbaş Alevi*. See more about the reformulation attempts of *Kızılbaş* identity in Ali Haydar Saygılı (2015).

considered as systems of submission and *only* outward piety, which is regarded as insufficient for inner spiritual advancement. None of the informants mentioned Alawism⁹⁴ in defining Alevism. The Alawites were named to illustrate and compare the current tense political situations in Syria and Turkey. There is a sense of solidarity towards Alawites as co-adherents of Ali and a minority group that has faced similar challenges in history under a Sunni government.⁹⁵

The Alevis of the Buca *cemevi* community consider themselves neither Sunnis nor Shi'ites but still part of the Islamic world; an understanding of a distinct Alevi Islam has found acceptance. This identity, based on love and reverence towards the Twelve Imams, the prophet's household (*ehl-i beyt*) and the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, also includes elements of other religions of which Shamanism⁹⁶ was frequently mentioned by interviewees. Beliefs and practices outside the borders of Islam are certainly problematic for defining Alevism, first and foremost, as Islamic without hesitation. However, 'unorthodox' beliefs such as the deification of Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli as the reincarnation of Ali, as well as veneration of saints and sacred natural objects, are not perceived as contradictory to Islam but part of it.

2.4.1.2 Claims of authenticity

As seen above, all the interviewees agree that, from the religious point of view, Alevism is part of Islam and belongs to the Islamic world. Some respondents described Alevism as the true and incorrupt Islam from the time of the Prophet. It is believed that unadulterated Islam, as preached by Prophet Muhammad and transmitted by his household, has survived until today through the representatives of the Prophet's bloodline. In general, the knowledge transmitted by the holy lineages is believed to carry the essence of true Islam in its incorrupt form. Those influenced by Sunni Islam were rather skeptical about *dedes'* knowledge and their role as the only legitimate transmitters of true knowledge⁹⁷. Non-religious Alevis showed respect towards the *dedes* as representatives of Alevi cultural heritage, leaving the religious aspect aside⁹⁸.

The concept of true Islam corresponds to the opposite understanding of corrupt Islam. The basis for this notion derives from the Shi'ite understanding of Imam Ali as the only legal successor to the Prophet as the caliph (*halife*). In Buca, it is believed that many of the companions of the Prophet were blinded and driven

⁹⁴ Historically known as *Nusayrî*: a religious minority, usually classified as a Shi'i sect mostly found in Syria, but also in Turkey.

⁹⁵ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁹⁶ According to *dede* Hüseyin, about half of Alevi beliefs and rituals are connected with Shamanism (Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019). This brave estimate refers to a rather vague perception of the borders of Alevism. Irene Melikoff linked Alevism in her works to Shamanism. See more about Shamanic influences and elements in Turkic peoples in Razia Sultanova (2014).

⁹⁷ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

⁹⁸ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019; M33-15, 23.03.2019.

away from the right path. Consequently, it is understood to be the main reason for the persecution of Ali and his house, whereby many were martyred.⁹⁹ However, the bloodline continued and was mixed through marriages with the Turks of Central Asia, whence it reached Anatolia.¹⁰⁰

The concept of true Islam is closely related to the acceptance of Islam by the Turks. I was frequently told the story of how Turks converted to Islam. In Buca, there is an understanding of the Turks converting to Islam in two ways – part of the Turks was converted forcefully by the Sunni Muslims (*ehl-i sünnet*), and part of them converted willingly following the representatives of the prophet's house (*ehl-i beyt*). The Alid branch of Islam was voluntarily chosen because of its love and respect for humanity and nature.¹⁰¹ It seems like the continuing reluctance towards Sunni practices supports this narrative of coercion by Sunnis and favour for the Prophet's household during the earliest encounters with Islam. According to this narrative, the Sunnis are attributed, among others, with a violation of the idea of free will about religion as it was expressed by the Prophet¹⁰².

Authentic Islam is also perceived to include special love and respect towards women, as narrated by a female *talip*. 'There is no violence of rights and femicide in true Islam, is there? It's not Islam, is it? It's something else! We have to look at the community and its ways!'¹⁰³ 'Orthodox' Islam is perceived, being contrary to Alevism, as a violent and abusive system in this matter. As discussed in chapter 1.3.4, the needs and rights of women are paid special attention to.

While the caliphs of various successive Islamic states until the end of the Ottoman Empire are ascribed with continuous eagerness to persecute and even diminish the Prophet's bloodline, the nomadic Turks of Central Asia, having intermarried with the descendants of Ali, are seen as saviours of the holy bloodline. Even the Zaza-speaking Alevis prefer to highlight the holy bloodline's Turkish aspect, leaving its Arab origin out of focus.¹⁰⁴ As a result, preserving the holy lineages and, with it, true and incorrupt Islam is a privilege and mission, in which the *ocak* system and *dede-talip* relationships have had one of the most important roles to play.

⁹⁹ One of the main periods of mourning of the martyrs is in the Islamic month of Muharrem. At 'Ashûrâ' (*Aşure*), the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Hüseyin (680) and his companions by Yezid I, is commemorated by Alevis. To the present day Alevis call their humiliators and persecutors *yezits* and the persecution of Alevis as the behaviour of Yezid I (*yezitlik etmek*).

¹⁰⁰ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹⁰¹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰² 'There shall be no compulsion in religion' (Quran 2:256).

¹⁰³ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹⁰⁴ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; O73-05, 14.03.2019; D45-12, 19.03.2019.

2.4.1.3 The mystical interpretation of Islam

At the Buca *cemevi*, Alevism is also understood as Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*). The terminology of Sufism is used in explaining spiritual efforts and goals in Alevism. Among others, *dede* Hüseyin pointed out that Alevism is Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*), whose main contradictions with ‘orthodoxy’ are based on interpretation (*yorum*) and meaning. While the *Buyruk* of the 6th Imam Ja’far as-Şâdiq (*Ca’fer es-Sâdik*) is seen as an interpretation (*yorum*) of the Quran, Alevism is seen as an interpretation (*yorum*) of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Whereas Alevism emphasizes the Quran’s hidden (bâtin) meaning, its interpretation (*yorum*) seeks mystical understanding. Ali as the master of secrets¹⁰⁶ has the central position in this approach as the way to understanding. The focus of the interpretation of the inner meaning is a human being and his spiritual development; religion (*din*) is seen as a tool, not as an aim.¹⁰⁷

In this light, it is understandable why spiritual development and becoming a better person are daily issues at the Buca *cemevi*. Advancing on the Alevi path is frequently discussed during random conversations¹⁰⁸. This task is often seen as difficult because of the ego (*nefis*) and various daily concerns. People questioned their ability to follow the Alevi path¹⁰⁹ in full because of their faults and failures. Self-criticism is based on the knowledge of the ideal, of the ultimate goal – becoming a Perfect Man (*insân-i kâmil*). In order to reach the level of the Perfect Man and, in this way, become one with God (*Hakla Hak olmak*), the guidance of a *dede* is necessary, and the Alevi path is to be followed from the heart with love.¹¹⁰ In this process, the principles of four gates and forty stations¹¹¹ (*dört kapı, kırk makam*) are to be followed according to one’s *dede*’s guidance. The four

¹⁰⁵ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰⁶ In the *Buyruk*, there is a story about the night journey (*mirac*) of the prophet Muhammad, where he spoke 90 000 words, of which 30 000 was transmitted as Sharî’a (*şeriat*) to the people and 60 000 was given to Ali as a secret (Bozkurt 2013: 16).

¹⁰⁷ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰⁸ Fieldwork notes March 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Alevi ethics are based on the saying of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî ‘Control your hand, tongue and waist’ (*eline, diline, beline sahip ol*). Controlling hands stands for keeping from stealing and physical hurting; controlling the tongue means refraining from lying and gossiping; controlling the waist symbolizes abstinence from sexual relations outside marriage. This well-known phrase within mystical Islam is adopted by the Alevis as the very core of their spiritual fulfilment (Shankland 2004b: 19). Immorality (*düşkünlük*) consists of gossiping, stealing, injustice, adultery and killing (Tur 2012: 695–698).

¹¹⁰ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019. This position is also communicated in the book of *dede* Seyit Derviş Tur *Erkânâme* (Tur 2012: 479), which is used as a handbook in the *cemevi* community.

¹¹¹ The Sufi path leading to God and to mysteries of human self is based on the doctrine of consecutive stations and states. The number and order of the stations may vary from order to order (Sultanova 2014: 30–31). The teaching of 4 gates and 40 stations attributed to Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî, followed by the Bektashi order and the Alevis, is available in *Makâlat-i Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî* (writings of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî), edited by Mahmud Esad Coşar (2019).

gates – *şeriat*, *tarikât*, *marifet* and *hakikat*¹¹², each consisting of ten stations, are the levels of the inner journey on the way to spiritual development. Alevîs seem to skip the *şeriat* level by being born involuntarily at the *tarikât* level. None of the informants identified with the *şeriat* level as it is seen the path of the Sunnis, of Shari‘a law¹¹³. According to Tur, *şeriat* is the level of learning by oneself, while *tarikât* is the level of being purified from all sorts of evil by giving a promise (*ikrar vermek*)¹¹⁴ and becoming a *talip* (Tur 2012: 482). Since all Alevîs are either *ocakzade* or *talip* by descent, they are connected with the *ocak* system by default. However, in the urban situation, as shown above, it has been quite difficult, especially for young people, to find a *dede* to follow, which makes access to ‘real’ Alevî life theoretically impossible as the guidance of a *dede* is pre-conditional for spiritual advancement.

The mystic character of Alevism manifests itself, among others, in its attitude towards words. According to the tradition of oral transmission, it is preferable not to use printed or written sources in spiritual guidance or during a ritual. Furthermore, I noticed some reluctance in expressing Alevî religious principles in writing, as narrated by *dede C*:

The word is alive! A book can’t express the same meaning as living speech. A word comes to you and affects you, opens something to you. After that, it goes on to someone else and affects him similarly. A word has its mimicry, behaviour, and movements because it’s alive. That’s why we don’t follow any books during our gatherings. Everything is as it comes from inside, from the spirit.¹¹⁵

This account shows how attempts are made to keep away external constraints and possible obstacles in spiritual guidance by letting the word act as it chooses. The written book is seen as the word’s prison. Although receiving and transferring knowledge through immediate oral performance is ideal and preferable for spiritual growth and obtaining information, written texts are acquired and used

¹¹² According to Birge, for the Bektashîs *şeriat* corresponds to the Sunni religious law, *tarikât* contains the teachings and practice of the secret religious order, *marifet* is mystical knowledge of God and *hakikat* is immediate experience of the essence of reality (Birge 1997: 102). According to Shankland, the four gates represent the four ascending ways to God – *şeriat* is the lowest level of spirituality; most of the Alevîs associate themselves with the level of *tarikât*; *marifet* finds less attention; *hakikat* is becoming one with God and achieving the ability to perform miracles (Shankland 2004a: 36). The teaching of four gates and forty stations, frequently mentioned in the narratives, greatly shapes the image of oneself and others. Whilst the *talips* imagine themselves as situated on the level of *tarikât*, the *ocakzades*, especially the *dedes*, are expected to have been reached the level of *hakikat* and the ability to perform miracles (*keramet*). There are also various classifications of social relations concerning the four gates. For example, the concept of woman differs as follows – *şeriat* stands for woman, *tarikât* for mother, *marifet* sees woman as a world and *hakikat* as heaven and earth (Tur 2012: 499).

¹¹³ Islamic law based on the Quran and Sunna, the example of the prophet Muhammad (Coulson).

¹¹⁴ *İkrar vermek* – to promise, to give word in Turkish. In the Alevî context it means to surrender oneself under the guiding of a *dede* or *pir* in order to proceed on the Alevî path (Tur 2012: 480–482).

¹¹⁵ Interview M45-12, 19.03.2019.

for self-development by *dedes* and *talips* alike. One of the ways to release the written word for action is to expect to experience dreams when sleeping after reading. When I was given *Erenlerin süreği*, a methodological approach to dervish-hood by Caner Işık and advised expecting to have meaningful dreams, which would guide me to the inner meaning and deeper understanding of the themes I was dealing with during my fieldwork. Expecting and receiving guidance through meaningful dreams is quite a common aspect of vernacular Alevi spirituality, which will also be discussed later in the context of the visitation to Hacıbektaş.

I also encountered the subject of secrecy. In a few cases, spiritual experiences and inner knowledge were explained as entrusted information to be kept secret (*sır*). Two active *dedes* explained why they are unwilling to talk about everything they have experienced. The reason is that once knowledge is gained, it should be kept secret to avoid losing it. One of the *dedes* narrated,

Some things are secret and should not be talked about. If talked about, they can disappear. That is why we don't talk. If I talked, it would be like marketing. The inner things are not to be talked about; they are kept inside because they leave at the moment you talk about them. The secret will be ruined at the moment of speaking about it. God gives a secret to the one who can keep it! Not to the one who cannot keep it. If you talk about the secret, you are exploiting it, you are trying to get some kind of profit out of it, and the secret will be taken away.¹¹⁶

This concept of secrecy sets ethical boundaries for a researcher. I am thankful to the *dedes* for dedicating me to this understanding of personal mystery. A secret is not to be shared or talked about recklessly; it is an inner knowledge gained through a spiritual experience or oral transmission and perceived as a personally entrusted treasure.

2.4.1.4 Ambivalent borders

The tension between Sunni and Alevi Muslims in Turkey has a long history, reaching back to the Ottoman era. Gradual religious, political, social and cultural divergence has culminated in countless clashes and massacres. Consequently, Alevis sought refuge in remote mountainous areas and practiced religious concealment (*takiye*) (Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 117). However, today there are Alevis who get married to Sunnis and seek the advice of Sunni imams in religious matters. As shown by Shankland, there are Alevi young people who educate themselves in the state-run *imam hatip* schools¹¹⁷ and even become employees of

¹¹⁶ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹¹⁷ Vocational state-run schools to train government employed imams for mosques. Since the schools give free accommodation and food, and also provide jobs after graduation, they are an option for fighting poverty and seeking prospects for the future. However, as shown by Shankland (2007), the imams of Alevi background are hardly recognized and often they have to keep their identity in secret in order to be accepted by the Sunni community.

the *Diyanet* as imams in mosques (Shankland 2007: 25–27). In Buca, I found this question marked with delicacy and spoken about compassionately. In the ideal, those born as Alevi should follow the path properly by paying attention to beliefs and customs until death. However, as discussed above, families and communities cannot always compete with Sunni ideas spread by compulsory educational programmes in state schools and the influences of wider society and media. In the following, I will present two examples of Alevis who are willingly connected with Sunni circles.

A *talip* family with two married sons is an example of the urban impact of changes. The mother of the family is a deeply religious and active *cemevi* visitor. The father is indifferent about religious matters but loves to discuss religion and politics in general. The older son considers himself an atheist; the younger one is married to a Sunni woman, and they have a small son. The younger son visits mosques; the older one visits leftist organisations. All of them live in one house not far from the *cemevi*. I visited the family several times, and we had many discussions together. Once, an *ocakzade* visited the family, and an intensive discussion developed about religious issues. Ultimately, the *ocakzade* and the Sunni-affiliated son reached the point where they could not agree on a certain matter. The *ocakzade* argued that he was right because of his descent from the Prophet; the son argued that all Sunni scholars could not be unanimously mistaken and did not take the argument of holy descent seriously. Afterward, the Sunni-affiliated son took me to his family quarters and introduced me to his wife and abundant Sunni literature. He wanted to ensure I understood Islam and the discussed issues correctly. Despite different religious and political affiliations, all the family members identified as Alevi, except for the Sunni woman. Even the son married to her sees himself as an Alevi, which is his cultural and social belonging.¹¹⁸

There is another example of an *ocakzade*, not active as a *dede*, who acquired higher education while working in a factory. Currently, he is involved in a research project on the Alevi question during the Ottoman era. About ten years ago, he had a series of mystical experiences with visions of heaven and the voices of angels speaking secrets. He started to feel like one of the saints (*evliya*). He shared his strong feelings with his family and some close friends, but it did not bring him peace of mind. So, he decided to talk to an Islamic teacher (*hoca*) about the matter. Even though the *ocakzades* are supposed to take their spiritual masters from holy lineages,¹¹⁹ he sought advice from a Sunni *hoca*, who took him to his spiritual master (*mürşit*). After a satisfactory explanation and prayer, the burden of a saint (*evliyalık yükü*) was lifted from his shoulders. Later on, inspired by the experience, he published a poetry book, where the terminology and patterns of Alevi mystics are widely used.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Fieldwork notes 11.03.2019.

¹¹⁹ All the Alevis are meant to submit themselves to a spiritual guide of a holy lineage, also the *ocakzades*.

¹²⁰ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

Both examples imply that the border between Alevi and Sunni worlds may be ambivalent and depend on personal needs, preferences and choices. This border becomes rather vague, especially in cases where personal matters and mysticism are involved. The mother would agree more with the choice of her son, who is involved in leftist ideas and became an atheist, than in seeing her other son getting involved in Sunni circles.¹²¹ She questions herself and the *dedes* of possible mistakes she could have made in raising the Sunni affiliated son but not the other one, who decided to follow a non-religious path.¹²²

2.4.2 Religious confrontation and othering

2.4.2.1 Reflections on the Sunni “other”

As shown above, the Alevi path is classified in various ways. Since the Alevi have a long experience living under Sunni Islamic society – the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey – opposition and othering are mostly expressed towards Sunni doctrines and institutions rather than Ja‘faris.¹²³ However, Alevi generally do not admit any association or similarity with Twelver Shi’a Islam either (Yeler 2010: 337–338). A similar attitude was also detected in Buca – I observed no association or closeness to Ja‘faris.¹²⁴

Identifying Alevism as an integral part of Islam and genuine Islam from the time of the Prophet Muhammad includes a confrontation with ‘corrupt’ and ‘non-genuine’ Islam. According to my findings, corrupt Islam is the one that fell apart from the teachings and guidance of the Prophet’s bloodline, which still exists in the Alevi belief system. Supporting and following the holy lineages is considered one of the main characteristics of maintaining true Islam. The ‘orthodox’ Islam, in contrast, is identified with ignorance and treachery, which became obvious right after the death of the Prophet when his bloodline was rejected by the leadership of the Muslim community. Hence, there were no sects or sub-groups (*mezhep*) in the time of Muhammad; such divisions as Sunni and Shi’a are regarded as developments caused by a lack of knowledge. Despite such a strict line of confrontation, as seen above, it is possible to observe some ambivalence on the grounds of mysticism and personal choices. Also, the principles of love, respect and tolerance are extended, at least in rhetoric, to all people despite their race, language or religion.¹²⁵ Whilst the previous section discussed the perception of Alevism, in this subsection, I will point out the main contradictions between Alevi and ‘orthodox’ Sunni Islam detected during my fieldwork.

¹²¹ Fieldwork notes 11.03.2019.

¹²² Fieldwork notes 14.03.2019.

¹²³ The Twelvers of Turkey (*Caferi*) originate mostly from Azerbaijan and make up an estimated 1,5-3 million people (Yeler 2010:335).

¹²⁴ Fieldwork notes March 2019.

¹²⁵ Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

As noted, in light of the doctrine of four gates and forty stations Alevi self-identify as dwelling on the *tarikât* level and above. The *şeriat* level, which is seen as corresponding to 'orthodox' Islam and its law, respectively, is in general perceived as irrelevant and distant. Nevertheless, the Shari'a or Islamic law has its place in the system. While Shari'a law, followed by the Sunnis, derives from the exoteric understanding of the Quran and Sunna, the Alevi vision follows the inner interpretation. From the Alevi point of view, Shari'a is connected with outer purity and moral standards¹²⁶, which are essential; however, the most common reaction to Shari'a is criticism, as it is generally associated with Sunnis. An interviewee expressed it this way: 'Is there a certain place or time for prayer? Is this logical? Should I pray in the mosque? Really? The inner purification of a person is important; you can purify your body as long as you want. Is this worship? The way of thinking must be changed. Purification starts from within, from the heart.'¹²⁷

Consequently, the biggest gap lies between the first two gates of the four – the *şeriat* and *tarikât*, which correspond to exoteric and esoteric understanding (Birge 1997: 109). Once the gap is surpassed, the path continues in the esoteric realm until the level of *hakikat*. Understanding esoteric truths and meanings requires an experience of inner revival or "removing the curtain" (*perde kaldırılması*)¹²⁸. To progress towards inner understanding, one needs a spiritual guide. As the secrets are entrusted to Ali (Bozkurt 2013: 16), esoteric knowledge (*bâtın bilgi*) is only reachable through Ali and his descendants. Consequently, one of the main conflicts lies between the *şeriat* and *tarikât* levels and how Ali and his bloodlines are seen.

Hence, one of the fundamentals to follow in social and religious life lies in association with the ones who love *ehl-i beyt* (*tevella*) and disassociation with the enemies of *ehl-i beyt* (*teberra*). This Shi'ite confrontation was often spoken about, but in real life, the borders are not so strict and are becoming increasingly ambivalent in the urban situation. Following the *tevella-teberra* principle was and is more common in rural areas, where Alevi, as a rule, live in separate villages or different quarters of a village (Shankland 2007: 35), and thus seclusion exists naturally. In an urban area such as Buca, disassociating with the enemies of the *ehl-i beyt* is complicated since social relationships have become more diverse.

Because there are Alevi, who, to a greater or lesser extent, are affiliated with Sunni principles and practices, it is not always clear where the borderline lies, as it may vary from person to person. Internal inconsistencies concerning following Sunni practices or usage of the Arabic language in rituals occurred most visibly

¹²⁶ Seyit Derviş Tur explains in his book *Erkânname* that the *şeriat* corresponds to the outer purification of body and clothing; the *tarikât* to the purification of the heart. Control your hand, tongue and waist (*eline, diline, beline sahip ol*) principle is the fundamental of the Alevi morals associated with the *şeriat* level. Moving on to the *tarikât* gate is a voluntary decision and begins with submission to a spiritual guide (*dede/pir*) (Tur 2012: 483-484).

¹²⁷ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹²⁸ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

concerning funeral services. I witnessed how the relatives of the deceased argued about whether to have the funeral prayer in Arabic or Turkish. In these situations, the chairman acts as a middleman leading to some sort of compromise between different opinions and parties.

2.4.2.2 A discussion on mosques

In general, Alevis do not recognize mosques as prayer houses and *hocas* as their spiritual leaders. Consequently, one of the most critical issues, besides compulsory religious instruction, is the question of the nonrecognition of Alevi places of worship (Bozkurt 2004: 94–95). Because Alevis are not acknowledged as a distinct religious group by the state, they are not offered legal or material support for building and organising their places of worship, the *cemevis*. Instead, they are encouraged to visit mosques, which are increasing all over Turkey and are gradually being built in Alevi villages.¹²⁹ Erecting mosques has been part of the state's strategy for eliminating 'false' beliefs and assimilating Alevis into a homogeneous nation-state by achieving religious and national unity. In some Central Anatolian villages, Alevi communities have been offered a choice between allowing a mosque to be built or being deprived of basic facilities such as roads, clean water and schools (Açikel and Ateş 2011: 726). While visiting Erzincan villages in 2019, my attention was drawn to the fact that it was still possible to distinguish between Alevi and Sunni villages from afar by the absence or presence of mosques¹³⁰.

During my fieldwork in Buca, I met different attitudes towards mosques. Only a few consider mosques proper places for an Alevi to visit and pray. An *ocakzade*, who searched for the advice of a *hoca* about his mystical experiences, also occasionally practices 'orthodox' prayer (*namaz*). A young *talip* admitted that there is nothing wrong with visiting mosques and even stated that Alevis should practice *namaz* as it is an Islamic tradition.¹³¹ Another young *talip* admitted that she once kneeled (*secde*) in the mosque for prayer in the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex, but not for *namaz* as she does not know how this should be done.¹³² These are the only relatively supportive accounts I recorded during my fieldwork about mosques. Most respondents stated that mosques have no place in Alevism and revealed rather negative attitudes and feelings about this institution of 'orthodoxy'.

¹²⁹ According to the statistics of the *Diyânet*, the number of mosques in Turkey was a little less than 90 000 in 2019. For example, in Tunceli province, which is mostly Alevi populated, there are 93 mosques. There, the number of *cemevis* is less than 1000 in Turkey and with 8 *cemevis* in Tunceli province (Hangi ilde kaç cemevi var? (How many cemevis are there in the districts?) <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/1002426-hangi-ilde-kac-cemevi-var-liste>).

¹³⁰ Fieldwork notes September 2019.

¹³¹ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

¹³² Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

Very often, negative assumptions regarding mosques were based on inherited legends and stories about how Imam Ali was killed in a mosque and how, later on, his and his descendants' names were cursed in mosques.¹³³ Even though these stories were mentioned, they were mostly not believed in, or they were regarded as legends with doubtful nuances. Rather, they were presented as general explanations about possible reasons for grievances. Therefore, explanations that see proper places for Alevi prayer and rituals in the open air next to natural holy sites, such as trees, boulders or springs and about the tombs (*türbe*) of saints seem more reasonable. In this case, mosques are perceived as restrictive tools of 'orthodox' Islam restraining the practice of Alevi beliefs. Consequently, most negative feelings appeared concerning the state's assimilation policies through mosques.

In this context, the stories about Ali being killed in a mosque are attributed to the opponents of the Alevis as fabrications. *Dede C* argued that 'the biggest deception of assimilation politics is the story about Ali being killed in a mosque. The second deception is building a mosque in the lodge (*dergah*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli.'¹³⁴ This straightforward account echoes a deep and continuous disagreement with the current situation. Even entering a mosque is considered dangerous out of fear of assimilation. Taking one's family and children to a mosque is out of the question. "It is like giving a finger and losing a hand", according to *dede C*.¹³⁵

When I was on my first fieldwork in Buca in 2017, collecting religious life stories, I detected a certain fear about mosques in the childhood memories of Alevis. A woman with an Alevi background narrated how she feared passing by mosques while walking on the streets of Ankara in her childhood.¹³⁶ It seems that the fear of assimilation and the resulting confrontation with 'orthodoxy' is transmitted as a natural part of being an Alevi to the next generation.

In addition to fear of assimilation, building mosques in Alevi villages and especially in the surroundings of Alevi holy sites, is perceived as an insult (*hakaret*), the humiliation of Alevis. These feelings multiply about the historical dervish lodge,¹³⁷ including the tombs of Hacı Bektaş Veli and his followers, one of Alevi most important pilgrimage (*ziyaret*) sites. Today, the holy compound is operated as a museum by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and is open to all interested visitors. Occasionally, a discriminatory aspect of another nature

¹³³ Imam Ali was assassinated as the result of a Kharijite plot with a poisoned sword while praying in the mosque of Kufa (Afsaruddin 2022).

¹³⁴ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Fieldwork notes from January 2017, Buca.

¹³⁷ A mosque was built to the Hacı Bektâş-ı Veli lodge complex after the abolition of the Janissary corps connected to the Bektashi sheikhs by Mahmut II in 1826. The order was closed down and its property taken over by the treasury or given to the use of other Sufi orders. The central lodge of the Bektashi order was given to the Sunni affiliated Naqshbandi order (Kızılkaya 2019: 14). All the religious brotherhoods and their places of worship were closed down in 1925 during the republican reforms. The Bektashi lodge in Hacıbektaş was reopened in 1964 as a museum.

appeared – Sunnis could enter the territory of the museum of the Bektashi lodge for free while visiting the mosque for Friday prayer; the Alevis, obviously not visiting the mosque for prayer, had to pay the entrance fee.¹³⁸ Confused feelings about the situation result in denial and inability. *Dede A*, who at first reacted with spontaneous denial about the existence of a mosque in the territory of the lodge, later gave the exact date of the building. ‘There is no mosque there!... The mosque was built in 1834. But it is a *dergah* over there! I never enter the mosque there; it insults us.’¹³⁹ Consequently, it is very difficult to come to terms with the situation. At my visit during the annual *Hacı Bektaş Veli* memorial festival in August 2018, I witnessed how the mosque stood empty whilst all the other parts of the compound were overcrowded.

In addition to the previously mentioned reasons for avoiding mosques, it is also widely believed that, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, smaller prayer houses (*mescid*) were in use¹⁴⁰. As a result, the mosque is considered a later addition in Islam introduced sometime after the death of the Prophet. Also, rituals performed in a mosque are considered to represent only outward purity and are thus meaningless from an Alevi perspective. As seen above, there are principal obstacles to ritual prayer in the mosques for the Alevis, starting from the absence of *dedes* as leaders of the ritual and women as co-participants and performers of rituals. Also, it is impossible to have common worship without reconciliation (*rızalık*) and the consent of the participants. As it is never looked for in mosques, the prayer there is considered unsuitable.

When I asked *dede B* about the Alevi places of worship, he told me the following anecdote:

The governor of Marash asked once *dede Haligöz Toprak* about the prayer house of the Alevis, saying, ‘The Christians have churches, the Jews have synagogues and the Sunnis have mosques, but what do you have?’ The *dede* replied that everything you didn’t mention is ours... Everything is ours, spacelessness (*mekansızlık*)! We pray everywhere, every time and in every way!¹⁴¹

On the one hand, this story illustrates the Alevi attitude towards spiritual freedom; on the other hand, it shows clear boundaries with other places of worship.

¹³⁸ The entrance fee (5 TL) to the museum was cancelled in 2014 (Yanardağ 2014).

¹³⁹ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹⁴⁰ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹⁴¹ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

Conclusion of the second part

In this part of the dissertation, I focused on the Alevi community of the Buca *cemevi* – its origins, organisation and understanding of Alevism. As seen, the Alevi community in Buca emerged due to the overall migration and urbanisation process taking place in Turkey since the 1960s. The origins of the community in Buca lay all over Turkey, but mostly in eastern provinces such as Erzincan, Tunceli, Bingöl and Muş. The reasons for migration have been universal – search for better living conditions through better working and educational opportunities. Although the traditional way of life is much valued as authentic and nature-preserving, it does not answer economic and educational needs. Also, security issues specific to eastern Turkey, such as Sunni-Alevi and Turkish-Kurdish discords, have led to relocation. The quest for personal security and social inclusion has motivated Alevis to relocate to safer and socially liberal areas. To a large extent, as migration has improved living standards and provided better prospects in most areas of life, community members are content with their relocation. However, there are some areas of life that are perceived as degenerate and backward in the city compared to village life.

The villages are remembered and seen as the perfect environment for the ideal Alevi lifestyle and spiritual growth, contrary to the city, which is characterized as egocentric, corrupt and frivolous. One of the striking shortcomings of the city is connected to personal religious practices. Sacred places that are so ordinary and common in the villages and, as such, form an integral part of individual and community-lived religion are not obtainable in the city. The absence of the tombs of saints and natural sacred places has generated a feeling of spiritual loss. This feeling of loss caused by being far from dear and religiously meaningful places, and thus detached from known sources of blessing, is seen as an obstacle on the Alevi path.

One of the important ways to maintain and live the Alevi identity for migrants in a new and different environment in Buca is to be part of the Alevi organisation and its *cemevi*. The Buca *cemevi* has acted as a centre of Alevi ritual, learning, culture, solidarity and activism since 1991 in the given area and beyond. The Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Association provides various activities that aim to support individual and corporate Alevi identity. Organised through the elected leadership and various branches, the association arranges educational courses and cultural and political events that aim to unite and empower the community to live their Aleviness (*Alevilik*). In addition to various activities in Buca, the association organises joint trips to different Alevi events in various places around Turkey, of which one of the most popular is the annual Hacı Bektaş Veli commemoration festival in Hacıbektas in August. Nevertheless, one of the most important aims of the association is organising the *cemevi* as a place of Alevi worship. Making the *cemevi* known, visible and accessible in the area as a place of Alevi worship through distinguishable visibility and religious activities has been motivated by the religious needs of the Alevi community.

The initial building project of the *cemevi* that started in the early 1990s was carried out by the donations and voluntary work of the community. Even though the building was officially constructed as a cultural centre, it has been seen and accepted as a *cemevi* since the beginning. The building is distinguishable from an ordinary cultural house by large posters of Imam Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Pir Sultan Abdal and the sign of “*cem evi*”. The *cem* gatherings are crowded and take place at least three times a year. In general, *cem* gatherings are open to the public and led by *dedes* of various *ocak* lineages. *Cems* organised by a specific *ocak* lineage for its *talips* are rarely held. In addition, there are weekly *sohbet* gatherings meant for religious guidance on regular bases.

Even though traditional *dede-talip* relationships passed down through the generations have become fragmented or lost, the sense of belonging to the *ocakzade* or *talip* caste is well preserved. Also, the information on which *ocak* lineage is traditionally followed by which families is preserved. However, new circumstances and long distances from the original *ocaks* have led *talips* to use the religious services of any *active dedes* in the *cemevi*. The *dedes* are recognised and respected for their sacred bloodlines, and the *talips* require their knowledge and spiritual guidance in different life circumstances. The *ocakzades* have adapted to the new circumstances of a wider range of *talips* – geographical background, education, *etc.* – and accordingly strive for wider knowledge by educating themselves to answer the needs of the various *talips*. Those *talips* who have established personal relationships with *dedes* are more confident about their Alevi identity and related questions.

While *dedes* exclusively do the spiritual guidance, academics and other specialists are involved in educating the community through various events organised by the branches of the *cemevi*. Most of the organisations of social and educational gatherings taking place in the *cemevi* are delegated by the board to the women’s and youth branches. The women are organised through various events and courses for socialisation and learning and are encouraged to take the initiative outside their homes and usual settings. Through these events and initiatives, the equal status of women to men is highlighted in rhetoric and promoted in actions as an Alevi brand.

Youth activities’ aim is to involve young people in *cemevi* events that focus on developing and, if needed, reviving their Alevi identity. The instability caused by compulsory religious instruction in public schools and the desire to be socially acceptable poses major challenges to the involvement of young Alevis in the *cemevi* and Alevi communities. On the one hand, there is a willingness and openness on the side of the youth for the Alevi cause; on the other hand, there is also discontent caused by identity issues and unanswered questions. However, trust in the Alevi legacy – its values, worldview, and sacred places – even if not fully elaborated by the youth, confirms their belonging and inspires further discoveries.

There are various understandings of Alevi identity represented in the *cemevi* community. Although the questions ‘Who is an Alevi?’ and ‘What is Alevism?’ found various answers in Buca, they all remain within the limits of Islam. The

evidence about Alevism as a separate religion outside Islam was not documented among the interviewees. Alevism is seen as an integral part of Islam, not separated from it. Rather it is believed that Alevism represents true, original and genuine Islam that was passed on since the times of the Prophet through the generations of sacred bloodlines until today. From this point of view, Alevis see themselves as the custodians and transmitters of the true faith. On the other hand, Alevism is understood as a mystical interpretation of Islam, a view whose roots may be found in the close connection to the Bektashi order of dervishes. In addition, the Alevi path was described by various features such as universality and knowledgeability.

The findings highlighted explanations of the nature of Alevism as opposition to Sunni Islam, *i.e.*, the ‘orthodox’ Islam supported by the state. Alevism is what Sunni Islam is not and *vice versa*. According to the informants, Alevi morals, rituals, places of worship and spiritual leadership are incompatible with Sunni Islamic equivalents. ‘Orthodox’ Islam, most often associated with Sunnis and less frequently with Shi’ites, is generally considered an alien worldview and an assimilating power backed by the support of the state against the true followers of the *ehl-i beyt*. However, there are Alevis who recognize Sunni practices and seek the advice of *hocas* in spiritual matters. Thus, the borderline with ‘orthodox’ Islam is not always unambiguous. All these opinions often exist in parallel to each other, forming a coherent full understanding of Alevism. Turkish and Kurdish Alevis’ perceptions of Alevism did not differ. Both groups emphasized the role of Turkish tribes in the reception, protection, and transmission of Alevism as a true Islam, *i.e.*, Alevism is embraced as a Turkish tradition by both groups.

3 HACI BEKTAŞ VELİ: IMAGINING A SAINT IN CONTEMPORARY IZMIR

This part of the thesis focuses on the imaginaries and beliefs of Hacı Bektaş Veli among the Alevi community members in Buca. Emphasizing the importance of taking seriously what people say, feel and experience (Primiamo 1995: 41), I research the Alevi view of a medieval Anatolian saint in contemporary settings. I will see how the argument of Mark Soileau is reflected among Alevis in Buca in the framework of Turkish nationalism and humanist values such as tolerance, love and human rights (Soileau 2018:85–87). Is Hacı Bektaş Veli a miracle-working saint, humanist or both? Based on the inductive approach, which allows researching and discovering how Alevis encounter, perceive and imagine the personage of Hacı Bektaş at the individual level, I will show how the saint is seen among the Alevis through his hagiography (*Velâyetnâme*)¹, admonitory sayings and a visual depiction. This part of the dissertation also seeks to position the role and importance of Hacı Bektaş Veli among the Alevis in their religious life – how he is thought of and what are the sources of his sainthood and related power in the imagination of Alevis. In the resulting interview analyses, I will draw a picture of Hacı Bektaş Veli through the eyes of the interviewees themselves. I will also seek an answer to how this imagined depiction of a saint is reflected in their daily lives – the importance and relevance of his example and teaching among Alevis in Buca.

In the first section of this part, ‘*Evidence of saintly life: Velâyetnâme*’, I will give an overview of the life and deeds of the saint as described in his hagiography. The stories that I use in surveying his life are the ones that interviewees referenced and narrated most frequently. Since this dissertation aims to highlight the saint’s legacy and not the historical facts relating to his person, little attention is paid to the latter. Rather, I will dignify his traditional biography, which is also one of the main sources of information about the life and acts of the saint among the community members. For this reason, special attention is paid to his *Velâyetnâme*, or hagiography, which has been orally transmitted through the centuries among Alevis and is now available in various versions in written form.

In the second section, ‘*Velâyetnâme and the Alevi community in Buca*’, I will focus on the various ways the *Velâyetnâme* and its stories have reached the interviewees. The written and oral transmission of hagiographic life and deeds are taken into consideration. The objective of the third section, ‘*Imagining Hacı Bektaş Veli in the Buca cemevi*’, is to present various imaginaries and beliefs regarding

¹ The genre of *velâyetnâme* appeared together with the spread of various Sufi brotherhoods during the 11th–13th centuries. The oldest manuscripts of the *Velâyetnâme-i Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî* date from the beginning of the 17th century (Duran 2014: 16–22). It is estimated that the written composition of *Velâyetnâme-i Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî* took place around the end of the 15th century (Ocak 1983: 6). There is good collection of Islamic hagiographies in English translation in “Tales of Gods Friends. Islamic hagiography in translation” edited by John Renard.

the saint. The many various roles and characteristics attributed to him are brought forward and analysed. His figure as the main and most important saint (*pirler piri, velî*), spiritual leader and establisher of Alevism, and his miracle-working and helping character will be discussed in connection with respondents' understandings. I also seek answers to his tasks as a *velî* and whether any other person among prominent figures can be compared to the saint in the interviewees' imagination. In addition to the stories of the *Velâyetnâme* that have shaped the imaginings of the saint, there are other sources of knowledge, such as his sayings and visual depictions. One of his most well-known portraits, where he is depicted together with two animals – a lion and a gazelle – is taken under discussion as a source of knowledge and imagination among the interviewees. I also analyse the function and usage of his sayings and research the continuous importance of his teaching and example in religious life.

The fourth chapter, '*Miracles now and then*', is dedicated to the miracles in the past, *i.e.*, the time of the life of Hacı Bektaş Veli and how they are reflected on by the interviewees today. Are they perceived as real happenings and true stories or invented tales? I also research the possibility of miracles today. What are the possibilities and conditions for miracles to happen in contemporary Izmir? What are the sources of miracles? I will show the importance of Hacı Bektaş Veli not only for miracles such as healing, protection and changes in personal life but also for his central position in the Alevi imagination as one of the main characters defining the Alevi identity and worldview besides the Imams.

3.1 Evidence of a saintly life: *Velâyetnâme*

While there is little evidence of the historical life and deeds of Hacı Bektaş Veli due to the lack of sources, his traditional life story conveyed in the *Velâyetnâme* provides us with a wide range of legendary accounts. *Walâya* in Arabic and *Velîlik*² in Turkish indicate the conditions, attributes and roles connected with a *velî* or friend of God (Duran 2014:13) and are usually translated into European

² The introduction of the term *walâya/velîlik* into the vocabulary of Islamic mysticism is associated with al-Hakîm al-Tirmidhî (d. 910) (Sarrío 2011: 279). Still, there is a significant difference in the concept of *velîlik* in Sunni and Shi'a Islam. In Sunni Islam, *velîlik* occupies an important but not a central place, being especially substantial in Sufism, while in Shi'a Islam it constitutes one of the most important articles of faith. In Sunni Islam, *velîlik* can be earned by any person regardless of their kinship or social standing, in Shi'a Islam it is connected with the concept of the Imamate thus being an 'aristocratic privilege' reserved only to the descendants of Ali (Knysh 2019: 42–43). In the Qur'an, the term *velî* refers to believers as friends of God, whilst in Islamic mysticism it was adopted as a term indicating Sufi saints as intimates of God (Meri 2002: 67). In the Alevi context, in addition to the concept of intimacy, it is given a specific meaning connected with the holy pedigree and its spiritual authority as in Shi'a Islam in general. In the case of Hacı Bektaş, the concept has combined both meanings. On the one hand, Bektaş is a classical Sufi saint, a founder of a brotherhood. From the Alevi perspective, he is a saint because of his descent from the holy lineage and predestined.

languages as ‘sainthood’. The term *veli*, which is also present in the name of Hacı Bektaş Veli, belongs to the terminology of Sufism or Islamic mysticism and refers to a saintly person who has reached a very close relationship and intimacy with God. Differing from other people in terms of their spiritual maturity and knowledge (*marifet*) and ability to perform miracles (*keramet*), they are seen as intermediaries between ordinary believers and the celestial hierarchy of saints, prophets and God (Green 2012: 9). Hacı Bektaş Veli is one of the examples of the medieval miracle-working saints whose relevance in the religious landscape is worthy of research.

Since the objective of this section is to research the imaginaries and interpretations of the legacy of Hacı Bektaş Veli by contemporary Alevis living in Buca, not much attention is paid to discussions of the historical facts concerning his biography. However, it would be reasonable to outline the period of his life and the area he lived in. According to an official website run by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism which introduces the Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli in Hacıbektaş among places of interest in Turkey, the saint lived between 1248 and 1337.³ The Hacı Bektaş Veli University of Nevşehir marks the years of the saint’s life between 1209–1271⁴. The museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli in Hacıbektaş marks the years of the saint’s life as 1208/1209?–1271.⁵

John Kingsley Birge, who was one of the first European researchers interested in the Bektashi order of dervishes, concludes after his study of the possible life period of Hacı Bektaş Veli that he came to Anatolia in the 13th century, settled about Kırşehir and won recognition among the Türkmen tribes as the leading saint of the time (Birge 1994: 50). Irene Melikoff refers to him as a mystic bringing Central Asian practices and customs who lived after the involvement in the Babaî revolt (1239) in a village of Suluca Karahöyük and died in 1270 (Melikoff 2004: 2). Based on these different views, I refer to him as a 13th-century Anatolian mystic who was both influenced by and an influencer of the various local events that took place during times of constant migrations and political turbulences.

The hagiography of Hacı Bektaş Veli describes in detail his origins and bloodline, years of training, arrival in Anatolia, numerous miraculous deeds, relationships with many disciples and death. According to *Velâyetnâme*, Bektaş descended from Prophet Muhammad through the 7th Imam Musa Kazim, and his teacher was, in addition to Lokmân-ı Perende, the Central Asian mystic Ahmed Yesevi, who sent him to Anatolia as his representative (*halife*). Arriving as a pigeon (*güvercin*), he settled in the village of Sulucakarahöyük, where he helped the

³ Hacı Bektaş Veli Müzesi – Nevşehir (Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli – Nevşehir) (<https://www.kulturportali.gov.tr/turkiye/nevsehir/gezilecekyer/Hacibektas-vel-muzes>). These dates are based on the Bektashi tradition summarised in four sentences describing the life of Hacı Bektaş. According to their numerical values, Bektaş was born in 1248, came to Anatolia in 1281, lived 92 years and died in 1337 (Birge 1994: 34-35).

⁴ Hayatı. Hünkar Hacı Bektaş Veli (<https://hbvenstitu.nevsehir.edu.tr/tr/hayati-ve-eserleri>).

⁵ Fieldwork notes, 16.08.2018.

poor, brought justice, spread Islam, performed various miracles, gathered hundreds of disciples and sent them to distant places on special missions.

In the following, I highlight the themes and stories most mentioned and reflected on by the interviewees during the fieldwork in Buca. The summaries of the stories are based on the version of the *Velâyetnâme* edited by Esat Korkmaz, which I bought at the Hacı Bektaş Veli festival in August 2018 in Hacıbektaş. There are 66 chapters in the *Velâyetnâme*, some focusing on one topic, whereas others convey several different stories. The interviewees usually did not tell these stories from the beginning to the end with all details, rather focusing on their meaning and importance. Occasionally some stories were mixed up, and the actors were given different names. For example, while most interviewees narrated that the saint reached Anatolia as a pigeon, one mentioned the form of a stork.⁶

The hagiography, which starts with an account of the noble lineage and miraculous birth of Hacı Bektaş Veli, confirms his descent from the Prophet through the 7th Imam Musa Kazım. His father, Ibrahim Sani, son of Musa Sani, was a sultan in Horasan and ruled fairly throughout the region (Korkmaz 2015: 12–16). When Bektaş reached the age of learning, his father found him a worthy teacher – a certain sheik Lokmân-ı Perende. One day, when the sheik entered the school, he noticed two shining persons teaching young Bektaş. When Lokmân-ı Perende asked about their identity, Bektaş answered, ‘To my right sat the sun of the two worlds, my father, Muhammad Mustafa, to my left sat the lion of God, the commander of the believers, Ali Murtaza. One taught me the external knowledge of the Qur’an, the other internal knowledge’ (Korkmaz 2015: 17).

The *Velâyetnâme* narrates that after some time, another sheik, Ahmed Yesevi, bequeathed to Bektaş, among other holy relics, the turban and prayer rug of the Prophet and assigned him to the village of Sulucakarahöyük in Anatolia. On his way he visited the holy cities of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, passed through Kurdistan and made many disciples (Korkmaz 2015: 46). Finally, he reached Anatolia in the form of a pigeon (Korkmaz 2015: 37–38), and at first, it was very difficult for him to convince the local saints of his legitimacy as a spiritual leader. As he was questioned about his lineage, teachers, spiritual heritage, and homeland, he replied, ‘I come from Turkistan, from among the saints of Horasan. I am a descendant of Muhammad, my teacher is Ahmed Yesevi, my spirituality is from Muhammad-Ali, my share (*nasip*) is from God’ (Korkmaz 2015: 39).

In Sulucakarahöyük, he stayed in the house of a certain Idris and his wife Kadıncık Ana (Korkmaz 2015: 41). The first encounter with Kadıncık happened while she was washing laundry in a stream. Passing the stream, Bektaş asked for some food, and Kadıncık offered him her last bread. After the saint’s blessing, the empty jars of Kadıncık were miraculously filled with oil (Korkmaz 2015: 52–53). In addition to that, Kadıncık, who didn’t have children, got pregnant and had a son after drinking the ablution water used by Bektaş (Korkmaz 2015: 120). While living in the house of Kadıncık, Bektaş was involved in village life as a shepherd. When Idris’s turn arrived to go out with the village flock, he asked

⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

Bektaş to take his place. The saint agreed to go but refused to take the bulls of a certain Saru with him, saying that the wolves would tear them apart and he would not be responsible for it. However, Saru left his bulls with Bektaş, and wolves attacked them. When Saru came to ask for the recovery, Bektaş reminded him about his warning and said he had witnesses of the truth if necessary. The Five Stones (*Beştaşlar*), still intact not far from the town of Hacıbektaş, started to speak and witness in favour of Bektaş in front of the villagers (Korkmaz 2015: 61–62). In addition to the *Beştaşlar*, there is another well-known story involving stones that is about a certain Mahmut Hayran, who came to visit Bektaş riding a lion. Seeing this, Bektaş showed his supremacy to the visitor by riding a stone instead of a living being (Korkmaz 2015: 96).

Over time, Bektaş gathered numerous followers around him from near and far. Among others were Saru Saltuk, Saru Ismail, Ahi Evren and Karaca Ahmet. Encounters and relationships with the disciples take up much of the text. Striking are the relationships with mystics such as Yunus Emre⁷ and Mevlânâ.⁸ Mevlânâ is mentioned in the *Velâyetnâme* as a Molla from Balh who calls Hacı Bektaş Veli his brother (Kormaz 2015: 130). Yunus Emre is depicted as a pure peasant who came to seek Bektaş's advice in times of famine. Bektaş offered him to choose between wheat and *nefes*.⁹ Yunus decided to take the wheat and left with thankfulness. Later he regretted his choice and returned to take the *nefes*. Meanwhile, the saint had forwarded the key for the blessed *nefes* to a certain Taptuk Emre, and Yunus had to serve him for forty years as a wood carrier until he gained his blessed ability to create the most meaningful *nefes*' (Korkmaz 2015: 93–94). In addition to guiding disciples in their spiritual advancement, Bektaş sent them to various places and assigned individuals with certain tasks, such as spreading Islam. For example, he sent Karadonlu Can Baba to Erzincan¹⁰ to invite the Mongol commander Kavus Khan to accept Islam. As Kavus Khan agreed to believe if he saw a miracle, Can Baba performed three miracles – he was boiled in water, burned in a fire and drank poison, but none harmed him. Because of his survival, khan and his people believed and became Muslims (Korkmaz 2015: 81–86).

Although Bektaş was a Muslim, he did not follow the daily routines of Islam. He was a mystic, not a theologian. Instead of praying in the mosques, he preferred to pray in nature. He used to meditate on the hill of Hırkadağı and hold retreats in caves. *Velâyetnâme* tells us how Bektaş took his disciples with him to the Hırkadağı, lit a fire and whirled forty times around it while reaching a state of

⁷ Yunus Emre (1238–1328) was a Turkish Sufi mystic and poet.

⁸ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî or Mevlânâ (1207–1273) was an Islamic scholar, theologian, Sufi master and poet.

⁹ *Nefes* means literally breath in Turkish, but also a poem sung by dervishes and minstrels. It is also understood as inspiration (Birge 1994: 53) or blessing (Udam 2011: 89–90) of the saint blown upon the followers. The *nefes* poems are sung during the religious gatherings of Alevi and cultural events.

¹⁰ A town in the Eastern part of Turkey.

ecstasy (Korkmaz 2015: 72–73). Another chapter tells us how Bektaş, while undergoing a retreat in a cave¹¹ on the hill of Arafat,¹² was visited by his disciples, who complained about the darkness inside the cave. He then punched through the cave wall so that it had an opening through which a person could crawl (Korkmaz 2015: 77).

In addition to dervishes and ordinary rural people, Hacı Bektaş Velî interacted with the political leaders and warlords of the time. The saint is described as an influencer and spiritual leader of the Seljuq rulers and Oguz clan leaders. It is said that Osman Bey¹³ was sent by a Seljuq ruler to the saint in order to get an opinion about him. In turn, Osman Bey was initiated by Hacı Bektaş Velî as one of his dervishes and granted him every blessing for political success (Korkmaz 2015:135–139). Also, Murat Gazi¹⁴ and Bayezid¹⁵ are said to have had great respect and favour towards Hacı Bektaş Velî as ‘their father wore his clothing’. According to the *Velâyetnâme*, Murat initiated the building’s construction, whereas Bayezid continued to improve the saint’s tomb (Korkmaz 2015: 163–164).

At the end of his life, Bektaş appointed Hızır Lale Cüvan, son of Kadıncık Ana, as his successor. For the others, he left instructions to continue with a hospitable and spiritually inspiring lifestyle. He comforted his closest disciple Saru Ismail by saying he would not die but only change his appearance. He said that after he died, a veiled person on a grey horse would come, wash his body and bury it; and that Saru Ismail should not exchange any words with him or inquire about his identity whilst assisting him. After the burial, Saru Saltuk could not hold himself back from identifying the mysterious person and asked the stranger to unveil his face. The person revealed himself as Hacı Bektaş Velî and said, ‘Blessed is the one who dies before dying, who washes his own dead body!’ (Korkmaz 2015: 161–162). The last words of Bektaş about death before and after he died have shaped the Alevi understanding of spiritual advancement towards perfection and the continued existence of a soul in different appearances, which indicates a belief in reincarnation.¹⁶

¹¹ This cave is known as Delikli Taş (a stone with a hole), one of the main destinations of the visitation to Hacıbektaş. The two most mentioned miracle stories – the Beştaşlar or the Five Stones and the Delikli Taş or the Stone with a hole – are discussed in more detail in the fourth part of this thesis in the context of the visitation to the saint's tomb.

¹² A hill in the surroundings of the village Sulucakarahöyük, named after the one in Mecca.

¹³ Osman I (1299–1326), founder and ruler of the Ottoman dynasty.

¹⁴ Murat I (1362–1389), Ottoman ruler.

¹⁵ Bayezid I (1389–1402), Ottoman ruler.

¹⁶ Melikoff and Ocak show that the idea of reincarnation has been widespread among Bektashi and Kızılbaş circles (Melikoff 2015: 23, 40; Ocak 1983: 133–146).

3.2 *Velâyetnâme*: sources of knowledge in Buca example

The *Velâyetnâme* has been available in contemporary Turkish since Sefer Aytekin and Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı presented their edited versions of the historical manuscripts in the 1950s. The increased variety of printed editions since the 1990s has helped the *Velâyetnâme* reach all interested readers. However, only a few informants possess a copy of the *Velâyetnâme*, and it is not available in the library of the *cemevi*. It might be explained by a lack of interest, low reading habits and the dominant tradition of oral communication in religious matters. The latter is one of the reasons for preferring telling and hearing as a method for delivering and gaining knowledge. Oral transmission ‘from the heart to heart’ is considered alive and thus spiritually fruitful. This is also why nothing is read on paper during the *cem* or *sohbet* gatherings but performed by memory and inspiration, which allows the spoken word to act without unnecessary limitations.¹⁷

In this subsection, community members’ knowledge about the *Velâyetnâme* and how it was acquired, is presented and analysed. The informants were asked to tell stories that describe the saint in the best way. In this light, as already seen in the previous subsection, the most narrated stories of the *Velâyetnâme* are connected to the origins and legitimacy of the saint, his miraculous arrival to Anatolia with a particular task to show it the right path, various miracles, relations with disciples and his departure from this world. All the given themes prove and highlight Bektaş’s destined position as a *velî*, an intimate of God with supernatural wisdom and abilities. Originating from the holy bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali, supernatural abilities are a natural part of his personality. Even those respondents, who could not memorize any particular stories about his life, are pretty sure about his miracle-working nature, which derives from this sacred lineage.

The knowledge and interpretation of the stories vary significantly by gender, age, religious caste – *ocakzade* and *talip* – religiosity, and whether or not the respondent has been visiting Hacıbektaş and seen the places connected to his life. Those most knowledgeable about the content of the *Velâyetnâme* are the *ocakzades* and older men, who could provide me with various stories characterizing the saint. The younger male *talip* and women are not as familiar with the stories and suggest that I should learn them from the *dedes* who are considered to possess the *right* information. While most of the *dedes* have read the written form of the *Velâyetnâme*, only one *talip*, a graduate of Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, has read it¹⁸.

Since the reading, as a rule, happened a long time ago and, in some cases, was also fragmentary, the stories are mostly remembered through oral transmission, which takes place during interactions at different religious and secular gatherings and family situations. Whilst the *dedes* and older men narrated many different

¹⁷ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹⁸ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

episodes of Hacı Bektaş Veli's life, some of the young male *talips* and women could not tell me any stories during the interviews. In some cases, the women who were familiar with the stories and could easily narrate them outside the interview situation did not associate them with the written form of the *Velâyetnâme*, i.e. a printed book. For example, the ones who have been to Hacıbektaş and have seen the places related to the life of the saint (Beştaşlar, Delikli Taş) could retell the stories they heard during the visit¹⁹. However, the women are particularly struck by the fact that they do not consider themselves authentic sources of information on such an important subject as Hacı Bektaş Veli and repeatedly advised me to learn about his life from the *dedes*. Non-religious Alevi who define Hacı Bektaş Veli as a philosopher, humanist and scholar, not a saint, could recall some of the most widespread stories, such as the story of the Beştaşlar²⁰.

Based on the interviews, it can be said that the *dedes* are expected to possess the correct information and provide answers about the life of Hacı Bektaş and the other Alevi matters by the *talips*. This attitude is particularly evident in the case of women, who seem to expect the *dedes* to know for them as if they were sources from which knowledge can be extracted when necessary. As it has been in the hands of the *dedes* to possess and transmit knowledge through the centuries, it is still considered the pattern to be followed. The active *dedes*, in return, take this inherited position seriously and make efforts to answer the expectation of the *talips*. At the same time, parallel to this traditional pattern, there is a noticeable change in the method of gaining knowledge – often, the *dedes* themselves reference non-*dede* academic writings about Hacı Bektaş Veli and other Alevi-related issues, and the *talips* at the same time gain information from outside Alevi circles through the educational system and the Internet. Consequently, both *dedes* and *talips* are positioned to recast essential issues in a contemporary world with its demands.

Encountering an Alevi-Bektaş community, one may presume that Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli bear central meaning in their religious life and rituals that fathers transmit to sons. As we have seen above, being an Alevi is closely connected to the persons mentioned above, their life stories and examples. Awareness of saints' lives and teachings supports the Alevi worldview and solidarity. Naturally, the *dedes* are more knowledgeable in different Alevi matters, including Hacı Bektaş Veli's life, than *talips*. This does by no means make the *talip* to be less Alevi. Both groups need each other to preserve spiritual knowledge. To provide guidance and answers to the *talip*, the *dedes* must educate themselves, i.e. to gain knowledge. For example, my research in Buca stirred the *dedes* to acquire and share more detailed knowledge about the saint to answer the questions of a seeker (*talip*), as the *dedes* saw me. In some cases, the *dedes* reported that they did not have a chance to go through the *Velâyetnâme* before the interviews (which was not my intention), indicating that they would prepare themselves to transmit reliable information. Also, during my fieldwork at the weekly

¹⁹ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019; F23-08, 16.03.2019; F37-16, 27.03.2019.

²⁰ Interview M33-15, 23.03.2019; M50-14, 19.03.2019.

sohbet meetings, where the *dedes* usually choose the topic for teaching and answering the *talips*' questions, the life and deeds of Hacı Bektaş were discussed since the *talips* were inspired by the fieldwork interviews to have more knowledge about the matter. One young *talip* told me during the interview that it was her first time to hear about the saint and his life at length at one of the *sohbet* meetings.²¹

The transmission of knowledge and stories about Hacı Bektaş within the family boundaries is most noticeable in *dede* families but less so in *talip* ones. At the same time, it is hard to evaluate in retrospect how much and which information about the saint has been transmitted within families, gained during religious gatherings or learned from books and the educational system. However, all the *dedes* and some of the *talips* recalled their first encounters with Hacı Bektaş regarding their family context. While *dedes* have had lots of experience in their childhood with storytelling relatives, usually fathers or uncles, *talips* indicated instead the visual images of the saint decorating their homes or local sacred places. Thus, most of the first encounters with Hacı Bektaş Veli happened in the childhood of the interviewees as a friend of God (*veli*) and miracle worker through visual images or oral references. A *talip* noted how 'The name of the saint has been part of my life since I can remember'²².

Four young *talips* confessed that they had not heard about the saint from their family members but rather from school and *cemevi*. According to my findings, more and more spiritual knowledge, especially in the case of *talips*, originates from outside the family and the Alevi circle. Ideally, all the *talips* should have their *dedes* guiding them, and this ideal picture is often presented as the primary model in the academic and popular literature about Alevism. However, in real life, due to migration and urbanisation processes, personal *dede-talip* relationships are fading, and the transmission of knowledge and spiritual guidance is not available by default. Consequently, there is an inevitable criticism among younger male *talips* who argue that they had been taught the name of the saint and some episodes of his life, but not the meaning and importance for Alevis. They have always known that Hacı Bektaş Veli is important, but the reason for his matter has not been transmitted to them. The younger female *talips* expressed their lack of knowledge through shame as they realized their incompetence in such an important matter²³. The young *talips*, both male and female, expressed their willingness to gain more understanding about Hacı Bektaş and consider books as a source of information besides the *dedes*.

The miracle stories found in the hagiography of Hacı Bektaş Veli are inheritances gained from the previous generations mainly through oral transmission, not through reading. The relationship between the stories and Hacı Bektaş Veli is simultaneously familiar and deeply personal, as if they happened to the speakers

²¹ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

²² Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

²³ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

themselves. In general, it can be argued that the stories of the life and deeds of Hacı Bektaş Veli are known among the Alevi as a reflection of the ideal way of life to be followed and taken as an example. This argument is based on the fact that the words of the saint are quoted as confirmation or illustration of viewpoints on different occasions – whether during everyday secular or religious gatherings, habitual tea drinking or in family situations. In addition to the miracle stories of Hacı Bektaş Veli and related tangible sacred sites in the town of Hacıbektaş, various proverbs and sayings associated with the saint and his dervishes provide a basis for a spiritual common ground for the self-identification as an Alevi-Bektaşî and a child (*evlat*) of the saint. Even if the stories are not always known or remembered precisely, it does not influence the confidence of being part of *the story* of the saint, which is perceived as continuous and lived by those who keep to his side and follow his path.

3.3 Imagining Hacı Bektaş Veli in Buca *cemevi*

3.3.1 Person of Hacı Bektaş Veli

Since Hacı Bektaş Veli is one of the most well-known and influential Alevi saintly figures, it is not surprising that all of the respondents, *ocakzades* and *talips* alike, have developed ideas regarding his person, mission, teachings, etc. He is always spoken about with great respect, love and abundant emotion. His name is tenderly pronounced and, in a way, as if he were standing next to the speaker. Very often, the titles attributed to him are used in ‘our’ form, such as ‘our lord’ (*Hünkârimiz*) or ‘our beloved one’ (*canımız*), which indicates a close and personal relationship towards the saint. At the same time, the universal character of his teachings and opinions are brought forward – although he is considered to be ‘our great leader’ (*ulu önderimiz*), the comprehensive and inclusive nature of his personality and teaching is meant to inspire all people. A frequent example of the inspiring quality of his teaching is connected with European standards for human rights. It is believed that the human rights developed and pronounced in the European Union are, among others, inspired by the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, who called for tolerance and respect for all people many centuries ago. The lack of these qualities in contemporary Turkish society has led the interviewees to idealize European countries, which are believed to fulfill universal human values and justice similar to Hacı Bektaş Veli’s. Love and adherence towards ‘our’ and, simultaneously, a universal teacher and his example are expressed with eager verbiage. However, at times, some of the respondents are torn by a flow of emotions in the way that they confess the lack of words for conveying their thoughts and feelings.

This subsection discusses various titles and qualities attributed to the saint. Since he is attributed by *ocakzades* and *talips* with similar titles of religious, social and political connotations indicating the wide scale of his activities, joint analyses are called for. Because the religious titles and roles associated with Hacı

Bektaş Veli are in the majority compared to others, the study begins with the religious terms used to describe him.

The most important titles associated with Bektaş are connected with his descent from the Prophet, spiritual maturity and perfection, which in turn legitimizes his activity as a spiritual leader and teacher. It was especially stressed by the *dedes* that he is a *seyyid* – a descendant of the Prophet through his grandson Hüseyin. The *dedes* refer to themselves also as *seyyids* and never as *şerif*²⁴ – the title associated with the descendants of the Prophet through Hasan, Hüseyin's brother. This inherited proximity to the saint empowers a feeling of belonging to a shared spiritual circle determined by birth. As a *seyyid*, Hacı Bektaş Veli is a leader of the path (*önder, yol önderi, yol gösteren*) and opinion (*kanaat önderi*). In addition to being a *seyyid*, he is also a *velî* or *evliya*, which is reflected in his name. He is the most important *velî* in the long line of *velîs*. As an intimate friend of God, he is naturally a miracle worker (*keramet sahibi*), with the abilities to save, protect, heal, support, supply needs, read thoughts, change form, bless and curse. Interestingly, the other title used as a part of his name – Hacı – was never emphasized during the interviews, as if it did not have any vital meaning for interviewees.²⁵

A frequent title associated with Bektaş Veli is *pir*, which denotes a spiritual master, patron saint or founder of a dervish order. In the vernacular Alevi context, it is understood mostly as a spiritual master or leader in general. Hence *dedes* are also often referred to as *pirs*. In the case of Hacı Bektaş Veli, the other previously given meanings, especially the meaning of the sheik of the brotherhood, is also in use. Also, he is referred to as *pir* of *pirs* (*pirler piri*) and attributed with the highest rank (*makam*) among the *pirs* following the prophets and the Twelve Imams. Like *pirs* in general, Hacı Bektaş Veli, in particular, is believed to have attained the highest levels of spirituality, reaching the ranks of the mature man (*eren*) and the perfect man (*insân-ı kâmil*). Both titles are used to describe his spiritual perfection. In general, *eren* signifies dervishes, mystics and saints, which meanings are also considered applicable to Hacı Bektaş Veli. The title of the perfect man is generally used in Alevism to indicate Imam Ali and subsequent Imams, wherein Ali is, in this regard, an incomparable example. However, because spiritual development to the rank of the perfect man is the highest possible goal on the Alevi path, it has been reached by several other figures²⁶ in addition to Hacı Bektaş Veli.

At this point, it is important to remember that, for Islamic mysticism in general, and in Alevism in particular, concepts, experiences, persons, texts, etc. carry both an external (*zahiri*) and an esoteric or inner (*batıni*) meaning. During my fieldwork, I could only realize the existence of the hidden inner meaning as it is transmitted from a *dede* to his *talips* in due time. It was obvious that they did

²⁴ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019; D49-01, 07.03.2019.

²⁵ The title *hacı* signifies a person who has been on Hajj (*hac*) or pilgrimage to Mecca.

²⁶ Also, Shankland has noted through his fieldwork that the *dedes* are/should be spiritually mature (*eren*) and to have reached the rank of perfection in the level of truth (*hakikat*) (Shankland 2004a: 36).

not reveal all the hidden meanings to me as a researcher, which I understand and respect. However, there are some well-known esoteric meanings, which were revealed to me to a certain degree. One of the common esoteric meanings of Hacı Bektaş is Ali.²⁷ He is described as a reflection of Ali in his time and as a re-incarnation of Ali.²⁸ As Ali is also believed to reappear as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk,²⁹ these three historical figures form a united whole carrying the same essential values. This approach extends the meaning of ‘our lord’ (*Hünkârımız*) and ‘our Ruler’ (*Padişahımız*) to a broader period or even to eternity, indicating God himself (*Hakkın kedisî*)³⁰. Thus the ‘Lord of our hearts’ (*gönlümüzün Hünkârı*) indicates an inner connection, hardly explainable by words, with the embodiment of immanent values, known as Hacı Bektaş Veli, who lit a ‘light of friendly conversation’ (*muhabbet çerağı*) which illuminates the Alevi path until this very day³¹. Very often, he is called Hünkâr³² Hacı Bektaş Veli or just Hünkâr, which refers to his spiritual supervision and leadership. As the ‘pole of the time’ (*zamanın kutbu*), he is perceived as a representative of God’s will, connector and intermediary of the whole creation, including humans, animals and vegetation. The title Fountainhead (*Serçeşme*) is exclusively used to indicate Hacı Bektaş, showing his superiority as the source of all perfect knowledge and guidance.

In addition to a multiplicity of religious (and secret) meanings, Hacı Bektaş Veli is ascribed to performing various social and political activities. As the *Serçeşme* and a *velî*, he knows the answers to all sorts of questions and needs that people may ever encounter. He is a master at understanding people, enabled to solve and reconcile conflicts. His role as a reconciler is well expressed in his most famous image: holding a lion under his one arm and embracing a gazelle with another – a symbol discussed later in one of the following subsections. This ability of supervision and reconciliation is believed to have reached beyond the limits of the small village of Sulucakarahöyük. Mediating in village social relations and their surroundings and encounters with the political leaders of the time as their supervisor makes him a political agent. It is believed that Hacı Bektaş Veli’s spiritual support to the first Ottomans enabled the dynasty to rise as a ruling dynasty in Anatolia³³.

Despite his spiritual and supernatural powers, he is also seen as an ordinary man living alongside villagers, occasionally working as a shepherd.³⁴ This is

²⁷ According to a story of the *Velâyetnâme*, Hacı Bektaş Veli proves to those that had doubt in him that he is in fact Ali by showing them birthmarks on his palm and forehead (Korkmaz 2015: 20–21).

²⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interview 49-01, 07.03.2019.

³² According to the *Velâyetnâme*, Bektaş was given the title of *Hünkâr* (ruler) by his teacher Lokmân-i Perende (Korkmaz 2015: 17–18).

³³ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

³⁴ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019; F18-07, 15.03.2019.

another reason Alevis, mostly of rural descent, feel close to him and regard him as one of themselves. One of the *talips* noted that ‘Hacı Bektaş Veli was an ordinary man like you and me but very wise and a master in knowing people, which enabled him to become the community leader’.³⁵ This quality of uniting people with his supernatural and naturally attractive characteristics occurred in numerous references and is believed to be an essential part of laying a foundation for the Bektashi brotherhood and Alevism.

Together with founding the brotherhood, he is also believed to be the establisher of Alevism, or the Alevi path, in Anatolia. He is considered the foundation (*temel*) and cornerstone (*temel taşı*) of Alevism, which in turn is seen as the basis for Turkishness³⁶. He is also seen as one of the main reasons why Alevism has been preserved as a belief system, and Alevis were not assimilated into the majority Sunni community.³⁷ From the Alevi point of view, religious and non-religious alike, Hacı Bektaş Veli is seen as the founder of Alevi culture, someone who brought the community under one goal and initiated a unique social system of *ocaks* and their followers (*talip*). However, the goal is seen somewhat differently among religious and non-religious Alevis. Both groups would agree with the Alevi statement of the ultimate goal in life – to be a (better) human. For religious Alevis, it means, first of all, a spiritual achievement according to the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli, transmitted and explained by the *dedes*. The non-religious Alevis emphasize a humanist philosophy and pro-scientific attitude attributed to Hacı Bektaş. In some cases, the border between the two views is rather vague, as the religious Alevis also accept the aspects ascribed to Bektaş by non-religious Alevis. Both groups attribute Bektaş with universal (*evrensel*) qualities, considering him an enlightened philosopher and a universal (as well as a practical) teacher. Both groups admit that Hacı Bektaş Veli is ‘our great man’ (*ulumuz, zatımız*), an ambassador of love, justice and tolerance. In this sense, he is much revered as a role model for non-religious Alevis.

Religious Alevis see Hacı Bektaş Veli as an ideal man; no error is visible in his personality, actions and words. If someone tried to criticize him, it would not be resultful as he is considered ‘above human criticism’.³⁸ He is a role model in various human aspects of life. His sayings are provided as guidelines for the proper behaviour by the *dedes*. His name is called upon in moments of need and trouble. The most emphasized qualities attributed to him are connected with common human feelings such as love, respect, tolerance and a sense of justice. The last quality, justice, or rather lack of it, is especially highlighted in daily politics. In this light, the person of Hacı Bektaş Veli symbolises common human goals in life, unifying different Alevi factions, religious and non-religious alike.

³⁵ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

³⁶ Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

3.3.2 Social and ethnic background imagined

The importance of the descent from the Prophet through Hüseyin, son of Ali and Fatima, for the religious Alevi has been discussed earlier. The non-religious Alevi, however, do not give any importance to his holy bloodline or predestination as a *velî*. He is considered as human as everyone else, equipped with higher intellectual capabilities. For religious Alevi, the holy bloodline (*ehl-i beyt soyu*) legitimates the practice of spiritual leaders, whether *velîs* or *dedes*. Also, it has been mentioned that his origins reach further to the spiritual world as a reincarnation of Ali. Thus, he is seen as being part of a continuous chain of divine appearances. However, other aspects of his origin are worthy of mention. In the following, I discuss his social and ethnic background according to the interview findings.

Although the *Velâyetnâme* speaks of Bektaş Veli's descent from a local ruling family of Horasan in quite a detail, no one brought it up during the interviews as a matter of significance. His social rank and possible earthly riches seem to have no role in his destiny and completion of his mission. According to the interviewees, he was more influenced by his spiritual teachers, who discovered his predestination as a *velî* and initiated him to the path (*tarikât*). His submission to Sheik Ahmed Yesevi, who sent him to a small village in Anatolia with a special mission, is seen as a guarantee of success. As an immigrant from Horasan, he was welcomed by a local family in the house of Kadıncık Ana. Living among rural village people, shepherds and farmers, occasionally joining them as a shepherd, makes him socially similar, someone who can identify with the needs and understand daily concerns. Being from 'amongst the people' (*halk kökenli*) seems to be an essential aspect of his character, creating invisible social ties with the saint who lived in the distant past and the contemporary Alevi community³⁹. Also, his special relationship with and closeness to nature – taking his dervishes to nearby hills and caves, taming wild animals such as lions, and governing weather conditions draws him even closer to the Alevi, who have been living for generations in remote rural areas for as far as one can remember.

Concerning Hacı Bektaş Veli's ethnic origin, interviewees presented two prevailing opinions. Because the saint is believed to come, at the same time, from the house of the Prophet (*ehl-i beyt*) and of Turkish tribes, the question of his ethnic origin is vague. His ethnicity was often characterized as 'mixed' with an accentuation of Turkish background⁴⁰. The Central Asia of his time is perceived as a melting pot of different ethnicities and cultures, but most of all, as a domain of Turkic nomadic tribes. The Islamisation process of the Turkic tribes is highlighted as a reason for the Alevi path to emerge with its saints (*eren*), whereby the two different ways of conversion – forced and voluntary – are emphasized. It is believed that some of the Turkic tribes were forced to become Muslims according to the Sunni tradition, while the others were converted by love and

³⁹ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁴⁰ Interview 27-02, 08.03.2019; D42-09, 16.03.2019.

tolerance represented by the followers of the house of the Prophet (*ehl-i beyt*).⁴¹ This understanding makes a clear difference between the Sunni and Alevi interpretations of Islam – one perceived as forced, the other as of love. Consequently, Hacı Bektaş Veli is seen as both a representative of the *ehl-i beyt* and a descendant of the Turkic tribes, who voluntarily received Islam in its original loving form from the representatives of the house of the Prophet.

I noticed that the interviewees had not thought about the ethnic origin of the saint in a particular way. However, during the interviews, most interviewees identified him as descending from Turkic tribes and the house of the Prophet. Interestingly, he is not perceived as an Arab, even though he is from the Prophet's bloodline. It is explainable by his significant role in Turkish cultural history and literature and his living in Turkish territory. Also, Alevis associate the Arabs of today mostly with Sunni Islam, which according to the interviewees, has deviated from the right path; Hacı Bektaş Veli is not seen as one of them. Being an Arab is not a virtue, as one of the male *talips* concluded: 'The Prophet was an Arab, but what are the benefits of it for the Arabs today? This means the ethnic background does not give any advantages in morals.'⁴² Hacı Bektaş Veli's Turkishness is explained by the intermarriages between the Turkic tribes and the house of the Prophet, which brought his holy blood into Turkish families. During the process, the persecuted representatives of the *ehl-i beyt* were taken under the protection of Turkish converts, and in this way, the holy bloodlines could be preserved and continued.⁴³ Hacı Bektaş Veli is seen as one of the offsprings of this process, a result or even one of the predestined purposes of the encounter of the two bloodlines – the Prophet's and the Turkic. Converting voluntarily to the incorrupt and original Islam led by the Prophet's lineage is essential to Alevi self-description. According to this view, such Islam has been preserved by the *ocaks* and their followers until this very day. Also, being protectors of the holy bloodlines is perceived as a noble task entrusted to the people worthy of it.

It is believed that Hacı Bektaş Veli spoke Turkish but also knew Arabic and Persian. As an educated man, according to the higher standards of his time,⁴⁴ he is believed to know the most important languages of his era. Turkish is presumed to be his native tongue, whilst Arabic and Persian were learned.⁴⁵ Insofar as many of the informants are of Kurdish background from Zazaki or Kurmanji-speaking families, it is noticeable that Kurdish languages and environments were never associated with the saint. It was not even presumed that he would have spoken Kurdish tongues as learned languages. Hacı Bektaş Veli is quoted in Turkish as, according to the understanding of the informants, it has always been this way since the saint lived in Sulucakarahöyük.

⁴¹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁴² Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁴³ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

⁴⁴ According to the *Velâyetnâme*, his father afforded him the best possible education then available (Korkmaz 2015: 17).

⁴⁵ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; F17-06, 15.03.2019; D62-10, 16.03.2019.

3.3.3 The tasks of earthly life

The different roles associated with Hacı Bektaş Veli are closely related to his tasks and purposes that are believed to be given by God. He did not arrive in this world by accident but by the will of God at a specific time to fulfil predestined actions. This view of assignment and sending is common among the *dedes* and *talips*. Both groups associate him with certain tasks prescribed to him as a *veli*. Like all the other *velis*, he was a servant (*kul*) of God obeying orders. Fulfilment of predestined tasks is connected with passing the test (*sınav*) of earthly life no one can evade, even *velis*.⁴⁶ Also, he is seen as a blessing or grace (*lütuף*) of God through which the people of the time were able to face their everyday challenges. On the other hand, non-religious Alevi do not associate Hacı Bektaş with any predestined tasks or grace given by God but see him as a person capable of meeting the challenges of life and taking on tasks himself. One of the *talips*, actively involved in the *cemevi* as a music teacher, also agrees with the previous notion of assuming the tasks for himself rather than following the idea of predestination as a saint. According to him, ‘the task of Hacı Bektaş was to live his life as all the other people with no difference.’⁴⁷ However, most of the interviewees shared the opinion of the predestined tasks meant to be fulfilled by him as a *veli*. The purposes of his coming to this world are seen not limited to his era and places of residence but exceed geographical and time limits, reaching today’s Izmir and beyond. This subsection discusses the different tasks attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli’s life and actions.

The variety of tasks associated with the saint covers the most critical areas of human life, such as the religious, social and cultural spheres. Since the spiritual tasks stand out among others, I will discuss these first. Social and cultural tasks that are considered separate categories in this discussion are not necessarily perceived as such by the interviewees. Very often, the social and cultural aspects are not distinguished from the religious aspects of life. Non-religious Alevi would, on the other hand, not concentrate on the religious aspects of the life and deeds of Hacı Bektaş but exclusively on the other mentioned spheres of life. However, both parties, the religious and non-religious, tend to agree on the universal character of Hacı Bektaş Veli’s example and teachings according to their different perspectives, which will be discussed in the following sections.

One of the most important tasks attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli was to teach and spread Islam. This is the main reason why he was sent from Horazan to Anatolia by his sheik. However, it needs to be highlighted that according to the interviewees, the Islam spread by Hacı Bektaş was incorrupt and genuine Islam, represented by the *ehl-i beyt*, not Sunni Islam. How and why the Alevi path is considered the original and incorrupt version of Islam has been shown before. Spreading the *ehl-i beyt* Islam among different peoples of Anatolia by showing

⁴⁶ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019; D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁴⁷ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

love, justice, fraternity, respect and tolerance is perceived as his main task. Indeed, it is a task of the *velîs* to spread those values as ‘it is in their nature’.⁴⁸

Spreading Islam needed a base for teaching and communion, so the brotherhood with its formalities was established. Founding the Bektshi brotherhood and its central lodge (*dergâh*) in Sulucakarahöyük is seen as a cornerstone of the Alevi religious establishment through which Alevi Islam was spread. Initiating, educating, and sending dervishes to the far ends of Anatolia helped the Alevi path to take root. In most cases, Hacı Bektaş Veli is perceived as the one to establish the Alevi path by founding the brotherhood and assuring the *ocak*-system.⁴⁹ Because the teaching of Bektaş about the development of the soul according to the four gates and forty stations is seen as an integral part of the Alevi path, his role as a founding teacher and leader cannot be overlooked. In this perspective, Bektaş is perceived as a spiritual lighthouse through which followers can find themselves and understand who they really are. For example, one of the female *talips* noted that Hacı Bektaş Veli enables her to find herself to ensure her identity.⁵⁰ Hence, he is seen as someone who sincerely lived his teachings; he himself is the source of inspiration, not only his teachings. His task of helping the interviewees ‘to find themselves’ through his example and framework of the Alevi path also today indicates his timeless and universal character, which will be discussed below.

Why Hacı Bektaş was sent to Sulucakarahöyük and not elsewhere at the time is explained by the characteristics of the people who lived there. The righteous, sincere and worthy generation is one of the reasons for the saint’s arrival. As their needs were many, the saint was sent for help.⁵¹ Hence the people of the time are seen as one of the reasons why Hacı Bektaş Veli was sent; they are considered an ideal generation to take as an example. Consequently, according to the interviewees, one of the tasks of the saint was to meet the everyday needs of the people living in difficult times. He was sent to feed and dress, to organise village life. The miracles (*keramet*) of food appeared to help people in need. The ‘difficulties of the time’ are connected with uprisings against the Seljuqid rule, such as the Babaî revolt⁵² and the Mongol raids⁵³ during which Hacı Bektaş ‘motivated the people not to give up on ploughing the land’.⁵⁴ In some cases, ‘the difficult times’ are associated with Ottoman rule⁵⁵ as if Hacı Bektaş had lived during them. It is unsurprising as most of ‘the difficult times’ happened during Ottoman rule in Alevi shared memory. In addition to the historical difficulties, villagers’ social relations of the villagers receive attention. Besides daily concerns, he dealt with

⁴⁸ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

⁴⁹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁵⁰ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁵¹ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

⁵² Babaî revolt took place in the Sultanate of Rum in 1239-40.

⁵³ The Mongol invasions of Anatolia started in 1241, which ushered in the Ilkhanid rule over the Seljuqs.

⁵⁴ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁵⁵ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

several disputes raised among the community. His example as arbitrator and reconciler is seen as a role model up through today. He is believed to have been sent to show justice and protect the innocent.⁵⁶ At this point, both religious and non-religious Alevi agree that his role as a middle man in disputes is noteworthy. His wisdom and quality of knowing human nature are pointed out especially by non-religious Alevi.

Hacı Bektaş Veli is also associated with educational activities and enlightenment in a wide sense. He is believed to have been supervising people in addition to religious matters also in good manners, friendly speaking, building relationships, reading and writing. One of the female *talips* concluded that ‘he thought about everything’.⁵⁷ Leaving a cultural legacy as a teacher in all aspects of life widens his task from his time to the upcoming generations. His task of laying a foundation for Alevi culture is seen as important as his religious purposes. As noted before, Alevism is very often referred to as a culture by outsiders and insiders alike. Religious Alevi’s understanding of Alevism as a culture is often intermingled with the understanding of Alevism as a belief system. Because the border between the two is extremely vague, Alevism may be referred to as a cultural and religious phenomenon simultaneously. Also, Hacı Bektaş embodies both mentioned spheres in his life and teachings, according to the interviewees. Naturally, non-religious Alevi emphasize Hacı Bektaş Veli’s efforts as a philosopher and an enlightened thinker promoting equality and fraternity long before Western thinkers, not his religious properties. As such, he has an important role to play in the foundations of the Alevi worldview, which is in surprising concordance with modern thinking valuing nature in its variety and emphasizing the equality of race, sex and religious affiliations. Although non-religious Alevi do not associate Hacı Bektaş Veli with any predestined tasks, they value his extraordinary efforts in laying a foundation for Alevi culture.

The universal nature of the Alevi worldview associated with Hacı Bektaş Veli’s example and teaching is one of the common features shared by all the interviewees. Religious Alevi emphasize his religious teaching; the non-religious his humanist philosophy and cultural legacy. The claim of the universal character of Bektaş’s example and teaching emerging during his earthly test (*sinav*) reflect the interviewees’ understanding of the Alevi path as all-inclusive and comprehensive. The most frequently mentioned common human values, such as love (*sevgi*), respect (*saygı*), tolerance (*hoşgörü*) and justice (*adalet*) are perceived to emerge from the *ehl-i beyt* and are reflected by their followers. Hacı Bektaş, as one of the most important representatives of the *ehl-i beyt* in Anatolia, is pictured as a fine example of a perfect man. He is perceived to have spread peace and fraternity to all nations, not only the Alevi. Being against all sorts of injustice and quarrels, Hacı Bektaş is an example of an expert in reconciliation. Valuing life and emphasizing peace, along with condemning war and all sorts of violence, is seen as a legacy of Hacı Bektaş.

⁵⁶ Interview F38-16, 27.03.2019.

⁵⁷ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

His task was to reach beyond the peoples of Anatolia, such as Turks, Kurds and Greeks, to all nations of the world, of whatever religious or racial background. His acquaintances with Christians, as narrated in the *Velâyetnâme*, shape him as a supra-religious personality. Although he was sent to the people of Sulucakarahöyük in the 13th century to help and teach, his task is not limited to this certain place and time. His universal task is to show the way to a better world through personal examples beyond time. The Alevi notion of ‘not discriminating by race, gender or religion’, originating from the *ehl-i beyt* generally and from Hacı Bektaş in particular, is considered as one of the main principles on this path.⁵⁸ Promoting the ideas of enlightenment before the Enlightenment, as it is perceived in the case of Hacı Bektaş, the interviewees consider him a universal teacher of human values, living before his time. As one of the *dedes* put it, ‘If there is anything good in Anatolia, it is because of Alevism’.⁵⁹ Hence this ‘good’ is meant to be spread and take root for the benefit of all people; it is positively viewed when outsiders, such as researchers, take an interest in the questions of the origins of goodness (*iyilik*).

3.3.4 Lion and gazelle

As we have seen in the first part, the visual representation of persons of religious significance is common in Alevi community houses. Portraits of Hacı Bektaş Veli are found in most areas and rooms of the Buca *cemevi* from the very entrance through all the floors until the main gathering hall (*meydan*) on the highest floor. The most common image depicts Hacı Bektaş Veli wearing a wide robe (*hırka*) and the *Elifî Taç*,⁶⁰ a high headgear in the shape of *elif* – the first letter of the Arabic alphabet (Figure 3). Hacı Bektaş Veli is portrayed together with a lion and a gazelle that are both held in his arms. While the lion is depicted under one of his arms, the gazelle is embraced with the other hand. His face radiates peace along with confidence, and his gaze seems to be directed to further dimensions. The symbolism of the picture is usually explained by the all-embracing nature of Hacı Bektaş Veli, who welcomes people of different backgrounds, whether powerful or weak, to live in friendship and peace as brothers. This explanation is given, for example, among others, in Seyit Derviş Tur’s *Erkânname* (Book of Rules of Conduct) (Tur 2012: 431), which I was presented as a guidebook in Alevi matters by one of the *dedes*. In this way, the composition of the otherwise opposing characters that are calmed and reconciled by the saint serves as a visualization of his teachings of love, respect and tolerance (*sevgi, saygı ve hoşgörü*).

⁵⁸ Interview with *dede* Hüseyin Gökçe D49-01, 07.03.2019.

⁵⁹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁶⁰ There are a number of different types of crowns (*taç*) representing different brotherhoods and ranks within a brotherhood in Turkey. In Bektashism there are five types of crowns – *Elifî Taç*, *Horasânî Elifî Taç*, *Hüseyinî Taç*, *Kalenderî Taç* and *Ethemî Taç* (Ağirdemir 2011: 368–369).

The portrait of Hacı Bektaş is approached from the outer (*zahiri*) and inner (*batıni*) levels of understanding by the interviewees. In the following discussion, the literal and symbolic interpretations are approached as tools of outer meaning, reachable to everyone seeing the picture. The esoteric interpretation bringing forth the inner meaning is believed to be accessible to the *dedes* or through the spiritual guidance of a *dede*. While the *dedes* include both levels of interpretation in their narratives, the *talips*, as a rule, concentrate on the outer meaning.



Figure 3. Iconographic image of Hacı Bektaş Veli.
Buca *cemevi* concert hall (Photo by Helen Haas)

According to the literal interpretation, occurring predominantly among the *talips*, Hacı Bektaş Veli is seen through this picture as someone close to nature, associating with different animals and living in harmony with all creation.⁶¹ This level of interpretation is creation-centred, dealing with harmonious and respectful co-existence with all created beings. As we have seen before, closeness to and harmony with nature are seen as a kind of precondition for the ideal Alevi lifestyle, which is difficult to achieve in urban conditions. In this regard, the portrait is seen to represent a role model of a human living in harmony with animals in particular and all creation in general. *Dede Hüseyin A* noted that ‘All people and other created beings are loved and respected because of the creator. All that lives –

⁶¹ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

including trees and plants'.⁶² Closeness through love and respect for nature and creatures is thus seen as part of the Alevi path that is included in the portrait of Hacı Bektaş.

The symbolic interpretation leads the interviewees to reflect on ideal peaceful relations through reconciliation within and beyond the community. As such, this level of interpretation is community-centred, dealing with matters that ensure peaceful coexistence among people, families, relatives and the wider community. It is believed that consent through reconciliation is possible between essentially different parties while submitting to the teachings of the saint. The lion⁶³, as a predator which needs to be feared and the gazelle as a naïve being who needs to be protected, symbolize the different parties that need to be reconciled. In the picture, the opposing characters are seen together, which would never happen in real life without external intervention as the lion would, according to his nature, try to gain power over the gazelle, and the gazelle would try to escape from the sight of the lion. However, in the picture, this does not happen, as if the laws of nature had been turned upside down. Consequently, the most common symbolic meanings, shared both by the *dedes* and *talips*, is related to reconciliation and peaceful co-existence between different people living in the community.⁶⁴

One young *talip* described his view of the portrait as a 'picture of reconciliation, where you see that the different parties have agreed with each other'.⁶⁵ The role of solving misunderstandings and disputes among people was highlighted as one of the important roles of Hacı Bektaş Veli through the picture. Whatever the dispute is about, it needs to be solved in order to ensure participation in common religious life, and thus the coherence of the community in the long run. As we have seen, the precondition for someone to participate in the *cem* ritual is peace and consent (*rızalık*, *razı olma*) with others. In turn, peace and harmony with fellow people open the way to be united with God in perfection, which is the ultimate goal in the Alevi path. In this matter, the saint is a role model as a reconciler to be followed by Alevi spiritual leaders today. Just as Hacı Bektaş Veli is seen as embracing and open to all who came to him seeking advice and reconciliation, the *dedes* of today are expected to follow his ideal example. It is also expected by the *talips* that the example of the saint would be practiced by the *dedes* in this matter. On the other hand, people should also be active, submitting to the spiritual leaders representing the holy lineages and becoming reconciled.

The esoteric (*batınî*) interpretation of the picture, which takes the symbolic meaning of opposing parties to an inner level, was especially emphasized by a

⁶² Interview D63-10, 16.03.2019.

⁶³ Since Imam Ali is known as the lion of God (*Allah'ın Aslanı*, *Haydar*), the interviewees make efforts to find positive meanings about the lion. It is associated with the qualities of a protector and a wise ruler. However, the whole composition of the picture does not lead the interviewees to interpret the lion as a positive character – it is seen as the one to be subdued. Here it is not the *Allah'ın Aslanı*, but some other character depicted as a lion.

⁶⁴ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; F63-03, 11.03.2019; F41-04, 12.03.2019.

⁶⁵ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

certain *dede*. According to him, this level of understanding leads the viewer to imagine the esoteric journey within one's inner being, from the darkest places to the highest goals of the soul.⁶⁶ This level of interpretation is person-centred and deals with the deep inner realms of human beings. The lion is seen as the darkness of the lower soul or ego (*nefis*) that needs to be tamed and educated until perfection. The gazelle represents the light and purified soul (*ruh*) that is the aim and result of spiritual development according to Alevism. The gazelle, at the same time, is seen as a sacred animal, a guide for people who are lost or misguided in their activities.⁶⁷ In this light, the pure and developed soul (*ruh*) depicted as a gazelle is seen as the source of knowledge and right decisions. The two poles of the spiritual being of a human are mutually exclusive and collide until the pole of darkness is subjugated, and the pole of light achieves superiority. In this level of understanding, the composition of the lion and gazelle is seen as a visual example of the constant struggle for dominion of the opposing poles inside a person – darkness and light or the lower soul and the pure or mature soul.

The lower soul or ego (*nefis*) identified with the darkness is as the active pole of the two, depicted under the control of the arm of the saint, tamed and harmless. The pure soul (*ruh*), on the contrary, is depicted in the state of ascent. This is the ideal reached through the inner journey whose aim is the destruction of the lower soul and the emergence of the pure soul able to perceive oneness with the truth. This vision of fighting one's *nefis* until its annihilation and reaching the state of pure soul (*ruh*) is common in Islamic mysticism. To die before dying (*ölmeden önce ölmek*) is another way to explain it. To die to one's lower desires and deeds in order to develop the pure soul and reach the state of the perfect man is the goal of human life. The saying of Hacı Bektaş 'control your tongue, hand and waist' (*diline, eline, beline sahip ol*) provides the moral basics of this path, a routine of self-examination. *Dede C* characterizes the relationship between the two poles as a constant struggle between darkness and light, whereby the one that is more supported and fed will take control.⁶⁸ Hacı Bektaş Veli is shown as a perfect man who has reached spiritual maturity and perfection. In this perspective, the portrait is like a visual reminder of correct behaviour, endeavour and aim in life for those who understand.

⁶⁶ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁶⁷ The story about sheik Abdal Musa, taking the form of a gazelle and leading the son of Alanya Bey, Kaygusuz Abdal, to his lodge and accepting him as one of his disciples, was frequently referred to during interviews.

⁶⁸ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

3.3.5 Hacı Bektaş Veli reflected in later leaders

In previous subsections, we saw how Hacı Bektaş Veli is acknowledged as a historical and timeless spiritual authority. As a *velî* and *pir* of *pirs*, he is raised above all others except the Prophets and the Twelve Imams, as a spiritual leader who did not die but changed his form (*don deđiřtirmek*). He is believed to have washed his own dead body as the Imams, thus being in their likeness. Descending from the Prophet through Ali's and Fâtima's son Hüseyin, he is identified as a *seyyid* and a 'reflection of Ali' and 'Ali himself'. Hacı Bektaş has left an ideal example of a spiritual leader in the Alevis' religious imagination in the Anatolian lands. Is there anyone who can be compared with him in his wisdom, maturity and perfection? Is there anyone of his likeness to point at through the centuries after him and today?

Answering these questions, I will start from the most pessimistic visions about the continuation of spiritual authority and sainthood (*velîlik*) in its ideal form. As shown above, the past is idealized in terms of both ordinary people and spiritual leaders. A perfect leader in the form of Hacı Bektaş Veli was sent to the people of a certain era because of their purity and sincerity, which are, according to most of the *talips* not found anymore in the modern world that is corrupt and insincere. Although idealizing the past is common among the *dedes* and the *talips* alike, however, the *talips* tend to share a more pessimistic view about the possibilities of their spiritual development until maturity and perfection – a condition that is also reflected in other people. Female *talips* especially express their views about not living worthily, which would be needed for the arrival of a saint such as Hacı Bektaş Veli.⁶⁹ This perceived moral and spiritual inadequacy is, in turn, believed to be a result of the changed era, thus something inevitable and even fatal. At the same time, it is acknowledged that everything is in God's hands, and His intervention is expected in due time in all matters of life. A *talip* concluded that 'just like the Prophet Muhammed was the last prophet, no *velî* came after Hacı Bektaş'.⁷⁰ Still, there is hope that someday the world will change into a more righteous place to be able to transform souls for the better. However, the wish for someone like Hacı Bektaş Veli to appear in the world again is certainly there (*keřke gelse*).

Comparing the saint to someone else of his kind is a confusing task for the female *talips* as he is perceived to be above all the other known holy men. Such well-known names as Mevlânâ, Yunus Emre and Taptuk Emre are brought up as spiritual leaders and miracle-workers of their own right by the female *talips*, but even these names cannot stand in their imagination beside the *pir* of *pirs* as

⁶⁹ Interview D41-04, 12.03.2019; F17-06, 15.03.2019; F18-07, 15.03.2019.

⁷⁰ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019. It was the only reference during the interviews to the notion of the Seal of the Friends of God, an idea of Sufism first introduced by al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (Green 2012: 47–48).

equals. In more recent times, the names of Işık Ruhan⁷¹ and Şimşek Dede⁷² are mentioned as powerful carriers of the Alevi values and spirituality, but they are not comparable with Hacı Bektaş.⁷³ Nevertheless, the female *talips* are content with the situation of having the *dedes* they may encounter in the *cemevi*. Neither are they comparable with Hacı Bektaş Veli, but they are still there as the continuations of the holy lineages and thus as spiritual leaders and representatives of Alevi values. Some of the *dedes* are still believed to heal and perform simple miracles, as bigger and more complicated miracles are expected from the *türbes* of the saints. Also, in this case, Hacı Bektaş Veli's *türbe* with its surroundings is considered of more importance and spiritually imposing compared to other *türbes*, which will be discussed in a later subsection.

However, besides the prevailing vision of the end of the saintly era and fading miracles among female *talips*, there are some outstanding differences in opinion which are in line with the views of the *dedes* and male *talips*. One of the common opinions about Hacı Bektaş Veli is that he did not die but changed his appearance or physical form (*don deęiřtirmek*)⁷⁴. He is believed to be 'still on our side'.⁷⁵ As recorded in the *Velâyetnâme*, in his earthly life he changed his appearance, occasionally becoming a dove and a falcon (Korkmaz 2015: 27, 31). He is believed to be able to perform similar transformations after his death. It is narrated in the *Velâyetnâme* how he appeared as a stranger on a horse, washed his own dead body and buried it. As a consequence, he is believed to live in different forms. One of the outstanding examples is his identification with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. However, the situation is more complicated as, in turn, both Hacı Bektaş Veli and Mustafa Kemal are believed to be manifestations (*tezahür*) of Ali. From this perspective, there is always a possibility for new appearances of Ali,⁷⁶ who just needs to be noticed and recognized.

The *dedes* are in unanimous opinion about the fact that there are always Friends of God (*velî*) in the world. Also, one female *talip* agrees with them by saying that 'there must always be such persons as Hacı Bektaş Veli; otherwise, the world would perish'.⁷⁷ Dede Hüseyin Akçay is convinced that from time to

⁷¹ Mehmet Ali Işık (1928-1995), also known as Derviş Ruhan, Işık Ruhan and Ali Dede, was a spiritual leader, a dervish, and *ozan*, whose lineage is traced back to Erdebil (Işık 2017: 137–160).

⁷² Ali Erdem, known as Şimşek Dede, is a prominent Alevi *dede*.

⁷³ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019;

⁷⁴ Death is not an end in Alevism but a new beginning in a different form. Expressions like changing appearance (*don deęiřtirmek*), walking to the Truth (*Hakka yürüme*), becoming a mystery (*sır olmak*) and leaving this world (*bu dünyadan geçmek*) are used instead of dying (*ölmek*) or death (*ölüm*). Death is seen as salvation from the 'form' to the 'self'. *Don deęiřtirmek* can be understood as a freedom of perfect souls to choose whatever form or quality for further immortal existence (Küçük 2020: 99-100).

⁷⁵ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

⁷⁶ According to a belief among some Alevis, there are 1001 appearances of Ali in the world (Küçük 2020: 99)

⁷⁷ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

time, such men as Hacı Bektaş Veli come into the world to meet people's needs and show the way of love, peace and fraternity.⁷⁸ The other question is to know them. To notice and recognize the holy man of the era is not an easy task, and it is not possible for everyone as it is connected to the concept of Alevi mystery or *sır*. However, this mystery of the Friends of God (*velî*) is continuously present and revealed to those who are mature enough to understand.⁷⁹ One of the *ocakzades*, who experienced a condition (*hal*) of reaching the state (*makam*) of *evliya* (plural form of *velî*), narrated how visions and dreams of heavens and angels interfered with his quite ordinary life and made him question his identity. His encounters with unbelief and suspicion of sorcery while sharing his experiences led him to believe that people are not ready for such encounters.⁸⁰ The *dedes*, in general, agree with this view about people not being able to recognize the saints of their time since the world has changed.

However, since the potential for spiritual improvement of every man and woman is central to Alevism, there are also optimistic opinions about the continuation of spiritual maturity, especially among the *dedes*. One of them argued that during the 600 years after Hacı Bektaş Veli's departure, 6000, i.e. countless mature men (*eren*) have emerged.⁸¹ Among them are well-known minstrels (*aşık*, *ozan*), dervishes and political leaders, as well as current Alevi *dedes* such as the interviewees themselves. It is believed that the light of Ali enters the Friends of God and may also enlighten anyone as it wishes. One of the *dedes* explained:

As long as there are people who fight for goodness, beauty and tolerance, there is Hünkâr! He is always here in his changed form...The most precious example of Hünkâr today is Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy, who sits on his *post* there. Although not much is heard of him, it does not mean that he is not there.⁸²

Thus, everyone holding to the Alevi path with love by protecting the oppressed and innocent is seen as a manifestation of Hünkâr. Also, the Alevi *dedes* living and teaching the principles of Hacı Bektaş Veli are seen as his manifestations. The *dedes* are quite convinced about their mission and predestination as to the carriers of sacred knowledge. Compared to the female *talips*, who are rather pessimistic about the current era in the question of miraculous manifestations, the *dedes* are positive-minded and dedicated to their mission to develop their own and their *talips*' spiritual beings until maturity.

⁷⁸ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁷⁹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁸⁰ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

⁸¹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁸² Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; he is the only one to point to the current sheik (*postnişin*) of the Bektashi order, Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy (born in 1942). Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy is also the head of the Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş Veli Foundation (2012) and has made efforts to unify and formulate Alevi rituals and their meanings.

As seen, the question of the arrival of someone in the likeness of Hacı Bektaş Velî into the world after his departure finds much attention. According to the *dedes* and male *talips*, there are many examples of important figures in older and more recent history reflecting and manifesting the spirit and ideals of Hacı Bektaş Veli. In addition to the *dedes* themselves, who are equipped with wisdom and *keramet* because of their holy bloodlines, dervishes such as Abdal Musa and Yunus Emre and the Seven Great Minstrels (*Yedi Ulu Ozan*), of whom Pir Sultan Abdal, Fuzûlî and Shah Hatayî are mentioned by name, are associated with the likeness of Bektaş.⁸³ In more recent history, Seyyid Rıza (1863–1937), who was a political and religious leader of the Zaza-speaking Alevis in Dersim (Tunceli), is one of the persons mentioned in the long line of Alevi leaders (*önder*).⁸⁴ It is not surprising that he is remembered as a martyr for justice and truth among the Zaza speakers as ‘he was fighting against the persecution and did not give up’⁸⁵ and thus also comparable with Hacı Bektaş. Also, *aşık* Mahzuni Şerif (1939–2002)⁸⁶ is an example of a modern Alevi opinion leader representing the values of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Being tired because of his ideas and sayings, he is revered as one of the fighters for the innocent victims of the era, thus being in the likeness of Hacı Bektaş Veli.⁸⁷

The most outstanding example of the Bektaş’i likeness brought up by the interviewees is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is perceived as a righteous political as well as a religious leader, ‘the saviour of the time’.⁸⁸ Some male *talips* noted that he might have been an Alevi and even an *ocakzade*.⁸⁹ His political role in establishing a secular republic in the place of the sultanate and caliphate is perceived as a religious undertaking in addition to a political one. His visit to Hacıbektaş and meeting with the Bektashi leaders in 1919 are attributed to religious purposes in addition to political such as receiving blessings from the head of the Bektashi lodge or the *postnişin* for the upcoming campaigns.⁹⁰ Including Atatürk in the line of Alevi leaders (in addition to political reasons) has made his images appear beside Ali’s and Hacı Bektaş Veli’s in the *cemevis*, Alevi events and initiatives. As he is perceived as a manifestation (*tezahür*) of Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli⁹¹, his sayings are also endowed with religious meaning. Non-religious Alevis, on the other hand, do not ascribe Atatürk with religious

⁸³ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁸⁴ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Mahzuni Şerif (1939-2002) was a Turkish composer, poet and folk musician famous of his saying ‘Thank God I am a Kızılbaş and a secular. Not me, my lineage is Kızılbaş. If this is a crime, it belongs to my grandfather’ (*Elhamdülillah Aleviyim, Kızılbaşım ve de laikim, ilericiyim, çağdaşım*).

⁸⁷ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁸⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁸⁹ Interview M55-19, 20.03.2019, Interview M55-20, 20.03.2019.

⁹⁰ Interview M55-20, 20.03.2019.

⁹¹ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

significance. Instead, they make a clear difference between religious (*dini*) and secular (*laik*) connotations. In the case of Atatürk, they all see him mainly as a political leader.

3.3.6 The sayings of Hacı Bektaş Veli today

Until now, we have seen how Hacı Bektaş Veli and his legacy are integral to being an Alevi, whether religious or non-religious. In this subsection, I turn to the relevance and validity of the sayings and teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli among urbanized Alevis in Buca. We have seen that the ideas of love, respect, tolerance and equality, derived from the sayings of Bektaş, form part of Alevis' cultural memory and worldview. His legacy is kept alive and perceived as a basis and vehicle of Alevis' religious and cultural identity. The ideals and guidelines found in his life story, sayings and teachings are at the centre of Alevis' life, finding mention during religious and non-religious activities. I now turn to the practical use and personal opinions about his sayings.

The importance given to the sayings and teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli may be best described by the words of the chairman of the Buca *cemevi*, *dede* Hüseyin Gökçe, who emphasizes that his words 'hold the Alevis together and help against assimilation'.⁹² The two functions given to his sayings by the *dede* are closely connected with religious and cultural identity and sustainability. The words of the saint function as a refuge for a common identity, a medium of expression and a tool for transmitting knowledge. An example of this argument is the saying of Hacı Bektaş Veli 'let's be as one, let's be great, let's be alive' (*bir olalım, iri olalım, diri olalım*), also stressed by *dede* Hüseyin Gökçe that expresses the need for unity and development. Being together in unity enables the community to grow stronger and bigger, which in turn keeps the Alevi community alive and visible.

In general, all of the sayings and teachings of Hacı Bektaş are regarded as equally important by the informants. However, some sayings have found more relevance and use among community members on different occasions.⁹³ The most quoted sayings of the saint in the *cemevi* are as follows:

'Control your hand, tongue, and waist' (*Eline, diline, beline sahip ol*),

'Don't hurt, even you've been hurt' (*incitsen incitme*),

'There is no discrimination between man and woman in the language of friendly conversation' (*erkek dişi sorulmaz muhabbetin dilinde*),

'Educate women' (*kadınları okutunuz*),

'Whatever language, religion or color – good people are always good' (*dili, dini, rengi ne olursa olsun iyiler iyidir*),

'Let's be as one, let's be great, let's be alive' (*bir olalım, iri olalım, diri olalım*),

⁹² Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

⁹³ Fieldwork notes March 2019.

‘Seek and find’ (*ara bul*),
‘Whatever you are searching for, search for in yourself’ (*ne ararsan keninde ara*),
‘The greatest book to read is man’ (*okunacak en büyük kitap insandır*), and
‘Any road not following science, ends in darkness’ (*ilimden gidilmeyen yolun sonu karanlıktır*).

This excerpt from numerous sayings of the saint relates to the moral principles, equality and divine origin of humans, the search for truth and the importance of science and knowledge. These proverbs are used to guide, illustrate and confirm one’s arguments, legitimize viewpoints, and indicate that the speaker follows the teachings of the saint. *Dedes* mastering the art of combining their own words with the sayings of the saint on different occasions, whether organised gatherings such as *cems*, concerts or spontaneous conversations. The words of the saint are attributed with a mysterious power of agency that is expected to reveal the truth intelligibly when addressed at the right time and situation to listeners. The *dedes*, possessing the art of transmission, take the responsibility to carry out the truthful principles of Alevism. Right words at the right time by the right mediator are believed to lead to the truth.

Dedes explained various topics of life were to me as a researcher through the saint’s sayings. Occasionally, some sayings were expressed in shorter or longer versions within a wider context to ensure proper understanding. At the beginning of the fieldwork, longer versions were applied by the *dedes* while talking to me. As time passed, the shorter versions came into usage. For example, a shorter version of ‘control your hand, tongue and waist’ would be ‘your hand, tongue and waist’ (*eline, diline, beline*); a version often used among the Alevis during informal conversations. A longer form of ‘whatever you are searching for, search in yourself’, which is used for emphasizing and creating a wider context, is

It’s not the pan but the fire that gives the heat;
The miracle is not in the crown but in the head.
Whatever you’re searching for, search for in yourself,
It’s neither in Jerusalem nor Mecca, nor on the Hajj.

*Hararet nardadır sacda değildir
Keramet baştadır tacda değildir
Her ne arar isen kendinde ara
Kudüste Mekkede Hacda değildir.*

The *dedes* repeatedly used this particular verse to illustrate the distinct character of Alevi spirituality. Contrasting external and internal activities in the search for truth emphasizes the difference between Alevi and non-Alevi, i.e. ‘orthodox’ Sunni understandings of spiritual methods. It was essential for the *dedes* to make sure that I, as a researcher, would understand the difference between the methods and the distinct groups applying them, i.e. the Alevis and the ‘orthodox’ Sunnis. Reliance on the legacy of Hacı Bektaş in this matter indicates the significance and validity of his words in the teaching and guiding process.

Next to the wide practical use of the sayings on different occasions by the *dedes*, the interviewees express various opinions about the relevance and validity of the sayings in the contemporary urban environment. Even though ‘times have changed’, the sayings are still considered relevant as they are believed to carry timeless and universal values (*evrensel değerler*).⁹⁴ These values are argued to be relevant to millions of people, not only Alevis but also Sunnis and others. Both the *dedes* and *talips* agree that the teachings of the saint are not bound only to his own era or area but reach beyond these limits.⁹⁵ Since the problems faced by people today remain essentially the same, the solutions are believed to be continuously found by following the saint’s words. Since he is believed to comprehend both past and future events and generations, his sayings are still relevant and meaningful. Even when people did not follow his teachings, that would not change the truth they contain.⁹⁶

One of the *ocakzades*, who does not act as a *dede*, highlighted the compatibility and uniformity of the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli with the Qur’an, arguing that ‘his teachings are true and valid today because they are based on the Qur’an’ and ‘Hacı Bektaş thought the core values of the Qur’an – living in love and peace as brothers’.⁹⁷ He sees the teachings of the saint reflecting the eternal truth revealed in the Qur’an. However, most of the *dedes* do not focus on or emphasize the importance of the Qur’an as the sole basis for argumentation. Instead, they rely on personalities who stand out with their miracle-working abilities derived from their sacred lineages reaching back to Imam Ali and Prophet Muhammed.⁹⁸

The sayings are considered extremely important by the *dedes*, who see them as a tool to know and reach Hacı Bektaş Veli. The saint is believed to ‘live in his words’.⁹⁹ To the extent that the sayings have continued today, they must have a sufficient rationale – i.e. timeless meaning and relevance. This argument is in line with the opinion that holds that the sayings are worthy of being followed because they have been continuously followed until today, which in turn proves their significance.¹⁰⁰ Their meaning and relevance are revitalized during personal and common rituals such as morning prayers, *cems*, *sohbets* and in the pursuit of personal spiritual development. The path of improvement towards perfection is embedded in the most important teaching of Hacı Bektaş – ‘the four gates and forty stations’ (*dört kapı kırk makam*), which is considered by both *dedes* and *talips* the basis of the Alevi faith. Occasionally, my questions and uncertainties were answered with reference to ‘the four gates and forty stations’ as it is considered to be the most comprehensive and all-embracing way of knowledge acquisition.

⁹⁴ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

⁹⁵ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019; F63-03, 11.03.2019; D49-01, 07.03.2019.

⁹⁶ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁹⁷ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

⁹⁸ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁹⁹ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰⁰ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

In this perspective, the phrase ‘four gates and forty stations’ have found currency as a separate saying or proverb that includes the fullness of the Alevi path, thus answering all possible questions someone might have. The seeker of the truth should start with the first step by entering the first gate and continue progressing towards knowledge and the truth.

There are also some criticisms found among the interviewees regarding the sayings concerning originality and meaning. For example, non-religious Alevis tend to doubt the originality and interpretation of the words of Hacı Bektaş. However, the philosophical and humanist aspects of the sayings are appreciated by them. One *talip*, who has a master’s degree in history, puts the originality of the sayings under question but still respects and embraces the tradition of assigning the authorship to Hacı Bektaş as he is accepted as a great philosopher.¹⁰¹ Another type of criticism, which is related to people’s attitudes, occurs among female *talips* who find that the words have lost their practical outcome since people follow their own ego (*nefis*) instead. They argue that if the people followed the saint’s teachings, the world would be a much different and better place.¹⁰² For this reason, most of the female *talips* are quite pessimistic about the relevance and application of his sayings among contemporary people. His words, as such, are considered valid and valuable, but their validity in people’s lives is doubtful because of the rule of the ego (*nefis*). This criticism is also directed at one’s own behaviour. The *dedes* answer this criticism by suggesting that application starts sayings in personal lives first.¹⁰³ According to a *dede*, the words would never have relevance and validity without application. The *dedes* emphasize that the words must be applied in the correct order – oneself, spouse, children, home, neighbours and then wider society.¹⁰⁴ Becoming a perfect man is the only way to a perfect society.¹⁰⁵ This longing for perfection inspires both *dedes* and *talips* in their daily lives. Since the *dedes* feel the responsibility to apply knowledge and strive to educate themselves in order to have the knowledge to guide others, they are also more contented and confident about their spiritual journey. One of the young female *talips* expressed her way as ‘control your hand, tongue and waist and after that is how God wills it’.¹⁰⁶ Even though ‘the times have changed, there are always good people in the world, whose presence cultivates hope’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Interview M33-15, 23.03.2019.

¹⁰² Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019; F52-17, 27.03.2019; F17-06, 15.03.2019.

¹⁰³ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰⁶ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

¹⁰⁷ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

3.4 Miracles then and now

3.4.1 Miracles and the *Velâyetnâme*

A miracle, as a religious concept, generally refers to a supernatural event caused by God, a saint or other supernatural beings. It stands outside the reality of everyday experience and is difficult to explain. There are two different terms in Turkish indicating miracles in the Alevi context – *mucize* and *keramet*. *Mucize* refers to the miracles as acts of God during the creation and through the agency of the prophets, whereas *keramet* is associated with the miracles as acts of God performed by the saints or friends of God (*velî*) and mature men (*eren*) in their lifetime or posthumously. At the same time, the term *keramet* also indicates the condition of supernatural ability or the potentiality of the saints to perform miracles (Korkmaz 2015: 174). Because the aim of this section is focusing on Hacı Bektaş Veli, a miracle-working saint, I use the concept of *keramet*.

In the following, I return to the stories of the *Velâyetnâme* and their perception by respondents. There are different ways of perceiving the stories of the *Velâyetnâme* of Hacı Bektaş Velî. The stories may be understood as Anatolian legends and tales as part of broader Turkish folk literature. Or, the stories can be perceived as eyewitness accounts of the actual miraculous deeds of the saint which have reached us through the centuries. Josef W. Meri shows in his *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* that many medieval Muslims (although not all) believed that the *vitae* of the saints and their miracles were incontestable (2002: 66–68). Elevating belief beyond doubt is also the dominant attitude towards the stories among the religious Alevis included in this research. The stories of the saint are believed to be true and real because ‘they have been transmitted by the chain of residents of the *dergâh* until our days’.¹⁰⁸ There is great confidence, especially among the *dedes* and older *talips*, both men and women, towards the eyewitnesses of the past, who ‘have taken notes of the events’ and who ‘would not talk about events which are not real’.¹⁰⁹ The truthfulness of the stories is an important tool and basis for the Alevi belief system, ‘the reason why the Alevis are Alevis’.¹¹⁰ Dede Hüseyin Akçay sees another miracle in the fact that the stories have survived until today. ‘If the stories were not real, they would not have reached us until today’.¹¹¹ Thus, in the understanding of the Alevis, the stories speak for themselves and testify to the reality of the saint and his deeds.

This convincing thinking is further supported by the reality of the explanatory myths concerning the various natural objects in Hacıbektaş, also seen as proof of the saint’s life and deeds. For example, the Beştaşlar and Delikli Taş are both seen as witnesses of miraculous events. The Beştaşlar, which ‘can’t be moved by

¹⁰⁸ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

¹⁰⁹ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

¹¹⁰ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹¹¹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

any hoist,¹¹² are still there to give witness to the story. The stones, or more precisely large boulders or pieces of rock, situated on a wide field without any mountainous formations nearby, can make anybody wonder about their origin. The story explaining the reason for the stones being there as witnesses of the saint is thus a living reality that is believed to be true for the bearers of the tradition. The stories behind the Beştaşlar and the Delikli Taş are as real as the tomb (*türbe*) of the saint and the *dergâh* with its ritual rooms and kitchens as part of the same narrative.

Besides this convincing and supportive explanatory thinking, faith has its sound position in argumentation. Above all, the truthfulness of the stories is guaranteed by faith. Believing makes the stories real for those who believe. The reality of the stories is even compared with the existence of God. 'Is there a God? There is, if you believe! So is everything concerning our belief as we have read and heard.'¹¹³ A young *talip*, who is very familiar with the stories, noted that 'the truthfulness of the stories is arguable but foremost is the question of faith. However, when you are raised with the stories, you believe.'¹¹⁴ Thus, the reality and truthfulness of the stories are created through the interaction of convincing and explanatory thinking together with faith based on tradition.

In contrast to the *dedes* and older *talips*, male and female, who (with some exceptions) are confident in the stories' truth value, there are skeptics among the younger *talips*. In general, the miracle stories are valued and accepted as part of the Alevi belief system, but whether they have happened as told in the *Velâyet-nâme* is arguable.¹¹⁵ According to them, similar stories may have taken place, but not precisely as they have been communicated to our day through many intermediaries. The stories are not true word by word as they have been changed over time as 'back then it was written in old Turkish and has been changed by the translators.'¹¹⁶ Also, it is important to note the different understandings of miracle (*keramet*). Whilst the *dedes* and older *talips* do not question the supernatural nature of a *keramet* and tend to associate it directly with the abilities and the will of the saint, the younger *talips* try to find rational explanations for the miracle stories. According to a young *talip*, *keramet* occurs when 'the necessary natural conditions coincide at the right moment.'¹¹⁷ In this case, it means that *keramet* is connected to and depends on earthly conditions and is not above them. However, supernatural interference might be necessary to bring the natural conditions to coincide at the right moment. Thus, *keramet* is not an independent accidental occurrence of its own but still needs supernatural interference for occurrence.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

¹¹³ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹¹⁴ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹¹⁵ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹¹⁷ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The non-religious Alevis' attitude towards the miracle stories is, in a religious sense, indifferent. They appreciate the existence of the stories as a cultural heritage and reflection of the past, shedding light on the customs and traditions of previous generations. The most frequent term used for the stories, in this case, is 'myth' (*efsane*), a concept referring to the historical and cultural context of the past. The miracle stories that reflect the needs and hopes of the people of the time are believed to be useful for explaining contemporary human nature. However, as Hacı Bektaş Veli is not attributed with supernatural abilities by non-religious Alevis, his life and deeds, being filled with miracles, are considered of secondary importance next to his philosophical teachings by non-religious Alevis.

3.4.2 Miracles today

Insofar as the miraculous happenings described in the *Velâyetnâme* are, with some exceptions, perceived as real supernatural events of the past, the next question is whether similar miracles can be experienced in the contemporary world among the Alevis living in Buca. Are the urban Alevis still expecting to see similar miracles in their lives? The simple answer would be yes – the expectation and hope for miracles are always there, but these can happen only under certain conditions. As miracles (*keramet*) are associated with the miraculous power of a saint (*velî*), mature men (*eren*)¹¹⁹ and *dedes*, in theory, miracles are believed to be possible. In practice, similar miracles as described in the *Velâyetnâme* are considered, especially by the female *talips*, very rare and almost impossible as they depend on people's morals and pure hearts.¹²⁰

The reason for the miracles not happening is seen by the female *talips* in the ego (*nefis*), which prevents people from developing themselves in spiritual reality. Hacı Bektaş Veli is an example of a man who could conquer his lower soul and reach the station of the perfect man (*insân-ı kâmil*). However, only a few can do that as 'the *nefis* is very difficult to tame and discipline, and that is why the people are led by their desires and benefits'.¹²¹ As already mentioned, it is believed that God sent Hacı Bektaş Veli to live at his time among the people of Anatolia because they were 'worthy of it'.¹²² His contemporaries are idealized and attributed with purity and faith in contrast to contemporary people, who have degenerated in their thinking and attitudes. This self-critical view leads to seeking answers for a better end. For the miracles to happen, some preconditions must be met – the people 'should have faith and will, be just and in unanimity'.¹²³ However, the miracle also needs a performer, a *velî* or a mature man (*eren*) with his spiritual knowledge and experience. It is believed that in the villages, there still are such *dedes* who can perform miracles, but it is considered very difficult to

¹¹⁹ The *dedes* are expected to be mature (*eren*), the ones who are not led by their egos (*nefis*).

¹²⁰ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹²¹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹²² Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹²³ Ibid.

reach that stage and is thus rare today, especially in urban areas.¹²⁴ Since the close relations between the *dedes* and *talips* are fading and, in some cases, are non-existent, the *talips* are rather unhelpful. This leads to the criticism of contemporary times and urbanisation, which prevents the *talip* from having the necessary relationships with their *dedes*, as well as faith and will to tame the *nefis* and become a better human, which is one of the main aims of Alevism.¹²⁵ A young *talip* who has a spiritual mentoring relationship with her *dede*, notes that the miracles are still there in the urban environment but have become much simpler than before. For example, she has experienced during her hard times how the *dede* can feel her trouble from a distance and calls her for counselling.¹²⁶

The *dedes* and older male *talips* are more hopeful about miracles in the contemporary world than are the female *talips*. However, the idealization of the past, both times and people, as well as the village lifestyle, is peculiar also to the *dedes* and older male *talips*. Everyone agrees that in the old days, there were more miracles. When the *dedes* were visiting the villages, it was quite common for miracles to happen.¹²⁷ Today, the miracles are hampered since ‘the times have changed’ and ‘people’s faith has diminished’.¹²⁸ They are now ‘held back by God because of the peoples’ disregard’.¹²⁹ Still, there are miracles, but their types have changed according to circumstances. For example, some miracles described in the *Velâyetnâme* were ‘given to a certain period to spread Islam among the Anatolian Christians’.¹³⁰ The types of miracles described in the *Velâyetnâme* are seen as given to the time and place where they occurred. They were meant to answer the needs and hopes of the contemporaries of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Dede C noted that miracles today are different from the past. He compares technical solutions such as electricity and the internet as miracles performed by the progress of humankind. He also argued that some events might be seen as miracles from one side but as natural and ordinary happenings on the other side of the participants. He brought his family as an example of living in ‘natural and ordinary miracles’. As a *dede*, he understands healing as a natural part of his life and activities. This understanding has also been transmitted to his wife and children, who are daily witnesses of their father’s actions. *Dede C* explains healing as a congenital, inherited ability.

I can heal. I put my hand on my wife, and she gets healed; I put my hand on my child, and she gets healed. It is an ordinary situation for them. Let me tell you something...My small girls attend Taekwondo courses. Once, one of their friends fell severely, and my small girl started to give her energy with her hands. She takes it as an ordinary way of solving things because she has seen her father doing so.

¹²⁴ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹²⁵ Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

¹²⁶ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹²⁷ Interview M55-20, 20.03.2019.

¹²⁸ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹²⁹ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

But it is not a common thing for you! You think of it as an extraordinary happening, but for us, it is part of our lives; it does not seem like a miracle for us, it is a regular thing. This is our feature, the energy that we spread. The others would say that ‘Dede C performs miracles; he is healing and raising people to their feet!’ This is all how you see things.¹³¹

Such a miracle-working lifestyle as an ordinary way of being adopted by *dede* C occurs not only in healing but also in handling knowledge and spiritual guidance. He was the one who saw me as one of his *talips* and made me even talk about some of the issues in my life during our conversations. He gave me books for studying and expected me to see dreams after reading. Meaningful dreams as guiding tools in life are seen as marks of ‘being noted’ and, as such, are miraculous interventions as there are billions of people living in the world.

In general, it is believed that miracles happen daily; they just need to be noticed.¹³² However, the current era is not favourable for seeing miracles that are hidden amidst blinding daily worries. Even if noticed, they are often not talked about for fear of labelling,¹³³ since not everyone ought to understand the event as a miracle. A miracle is what is considered a miracle. For example, healing with hands is considered part of normal life for the children of the *dedes* as they have grown with it, but for the *talips*, it is a miracle, and non-Alevis may perceive it as sorcery.¹³⁴ For the *dedes*, the descendants of the holy bloodlines, the potential of a miracle (*keramet*) is always present; it just needs to be discovered under the right circumstances by the people who need it. It can be concluded that miracles have not disappeared but have been hidden and changed over time. An *ocakzade* who is not an acting *dede* noted that there have always been miracle-working *dedes* in his family up through today,¹³⁵ which means that the miracle culture is still alive.

In the contemporary world, there are places where miracles are believed to happen without fail. Even if the *dedes* fail to meet expectations, such places never do. These places are the *türbes* – the tombs of saints. There are countless *türbes* in Turkey, some known locally, some nationally – attracting visitors from afar and near. The common sacred sites have always been there, welcoming and embracing the visitors’ souls. Both *ocakzade* and the *talip* agree and believe that the tombs of the saints possess miracle-working qualities. *Dede A* noted that ‘there is no Alevism without *türbe*’.¹³⁶ Even non-religious Alevis find the tombs to have a special place in their Alevi self-definition. Regardless of any anticipation of miracles, they do not believe in, they still visit the tombs out of respect and solidarity. The cult of sacred tombs plays a central role in Alevi spirituality, which will be further discussed in the next part of this thesis in the context of the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

¹³¹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹³⁴ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹³⁵ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

¹³⁶ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

Conclusion of the third part

In this part, I researched how Hacı Bektaş Veli is imagined and perceived among Alevi living in Buca. In order to research the Alevi view in contemporary settings regarding his personage, the *Velâyetnâme*, sayings and a particular visual depiction were chosen as sources of knowledge and imaginaries. Furthermore, I looked for answers regarding the relevance and importance of his personage and how the miracles related to his person have shaped the expectations for supernatural interventions in the lives of modern Alevi today.

One of the primary sources of knowledge about the life of Hacı Bektaş Veli is his hagiography or *Velâyetnâme*, which is encountered mainly through oral tradition in the family or *cemevi* context, and less so through reading and the educational system. The knowledge about the content of the stories varies, especially between *dedes* and older male *talips*, who communicate their expertise with great confidence, and the younger and female *talips*, who may outline general facts about the stories. The stories that are supported by physical objects (*Beştaşlar*, *Delikli Taş*) are better known, especially by those who have been to Hacıbektaş. The *talips*, especially women, tend to share the opinion about the insufficiency of their knowledge and instead defer to the *dedes*, who are believed to possess the correct knowledge for the common cause. Sacralising the knowledge and memory of the *dedes* has a significant role in fostering a feeling of confidence about the sustainability of the Alevi community and worldview. The *talips* have confidence in the fact that the needed knowledge is preserved and available if sought for. In this light, the *dedes*' role as preservers and transmitters of spiritual knowledge were detected and confirmed.

There are three different opinions about the truth value of hagiography. The *dedes* and most religious talips tend to see the stories as true accounts of what happened. The knowledge about the saint is believed to be accurate as there is trust towards the saintly happenings and the generations of transmitters, who are believed to be designated to transfer the proper knowledge. Some younger *talips* think of the stories as real happenings whose content may have been changed through time and translations. Non-religious Alevi see the saintly stories as legends of a distant past that are integral to Alevi culture. At the same time, the historical Hacı Bektaş is not placed under question by any groups.

Hacı Bektaş Veli is associated with various characteristics and roles in the imagination of the interviewees. In addition to the following, it can be concluded that he is perceived as a personal, shared and experienced companion in the religious lives of Alevi. He is imagined as a multitasking personage taking roles in various spheres of life. Roles of religious, social, and political characteristics that are associated with the Bektaş reflect his comprehensive and versatile personality. Descended from the sacred pedigree, predestined and spiritually perfect makes him an ideal human without error in whatever he says or does. Therefore, his wisdom and miracle-working character derive from his divine origin and are natural. Meaningful titles like *velî*, *seyyid*, *hünkâr*, *insân-i kâmil*, *pir*, *serçeşme*,

eren and *zat* reflect his superiority and spiritual leadership among Alevis. Perceptions of Bektaş as a divine manifestation and an appearance of Imam Ali elevate him to an equal level with the Twelve Imams. His active presence through sayings and teachings has given him a position as a teacher and leader beyond many imams, whose names are rarely mentioned during the *cem* gatherings and other occasions. In everyday religious lives, he is referred to more than Imam Ali or Prophet Muhammad since his traditional life story, sayings and teaching of ‘four gates and forty stations’ has been adopted as the main verbal tools for confirmation of spiritual accuracy and authority, transmitting spiritual knowledge and shaping the Alevi worldview. Consequently, it can be argued that it would not be accurate to approach Alevism without discussing Hacı Bektaş Veli and his legacy.

Although Bektaş lived long ago and in different circumstances, he is perceived as a close companion. The relationship with him is often very personal, as expressed in terms such as ‘ruler of our hearts’ and ‘our beloved one’. He is believed to mediate the prayers conducted in his name and see the persons calling upon his aid in need. His predestined tasks of helping, guiding and teaching in Sulucakarahöyük are perceived as continuous activities that continue to have their impact today. The proximity of the saint is also expressed through his Anatolian locality, simple rural lifestyle and Turkish roots. Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis see him as an individual bearing Turkish tradition. Just as Alevism is opposed to Sunni Islam, Hacı Bektaş Veli’s way is opposed to the ‘orthodox’ way of life and is not associated with the Arab tradition.

In addition to the *Velâyetnâme*’s stories, his guiding and advisory sayings form the image of Hacı Bektaş. While the stories of the *Velâyetnâme* are longer accounts that need more time for focus, the sayings, as short depictions of his teachings, are quickly usable in various situations for guiding and advising. Mastering the art of illustrating and confirming spiritual guidance with the sayings of the saint is one of the quality marks of a *dede*. Using the right saying at the right time is perceived as confirmation of reliable spiritual maturity. The sayings are also depicted in written form in the *cemevi* and are perceived as a refuge for a common identity, a medium of expression and a tool for transmitting knowledge. Since Bektaş as a saint is believed to comprehend past and future events and generations, his sayings are still relevant and meaningful.

Besides the *Velâyetnâme* and the sayings, there are visual depictions of Hacı Bektaş Veli that transmit and affect the imaginaries of the saint. The portrait of Hacı Bektaş Veli with a lion and a gazelle, widely used in *cemevis* and buildings near the *türbes*, was often mentioned as the first intermediary about the saint. The portrait’s message confirms and supplements the imagination about Bektaş – his simple and harmonious life close to nature, his role as a reconciler between different parties and his example of spiritual perfection. All these aspects include harmony – whether with nature, in the community or within oneself. Based on these findings, it can be argued that one of the important messages attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli today is related to inner peace and harmony, which is the basis of external peace and consent in the community and beyond. This peace deriving from his being inspires his followers to achieve the same.

The non-religious Alevi don't attribute Hacı Bektaş with saintly abilities and supernatural powers. Instead, they see him as a humanist and philosopher who lived ahead of his time. His calls for tolerance and respect for other people are perceived as universal expressions of humanity and also as Alevi values. This approach is also common among the practicing Alevi, who also see him as a humanist philosopher, but not only that. Here the opinions of religious and non-religious Alevi diverge – the supernatural and humanist merge in the religious Alevi views, but the non-religious recognise only his humanistic side. This finding is consistent with Mark Soileau's argument that Hacı Bektaş is primarily a humanist and philosopher in the eyes of Turks unless this view has been influenced by other ideologies, such as Alevism, with its belief system in this particular case.

After the times of Hacı Bektaş Veli, there seems to have been a gradual process of spiritual degeneration among people in Anatolia and elsewhere in the imaginaries of the interviewees. There have been spiritual leaders, but not like him. Also, the *talips* are not comparable in their purity and sincerity to previous generations. This quite pessimistic view is mainly represented by female *talips* and is explained by the changing living conditions distant from nature and the power of earthly desires and needs (*nefis*). They agree that there have been some outstanding leaders and *dedes* also in later history, but not like Hacı Bektaş Veli. Because of that, also miracles are rare and much simpler than before. However, miracles are expected and seen in the *türbes* of the saints, especially the *türbe* of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Contrary to the opinion of the female *talips*, the *dedes* and male *talips* see the spirit and *keramet* similar to Hacı Bektaş Veli in various later leaders, including the *dedes* themselves – there are always friends of God; otherwise, the earth would perish, they just need to be recognized. One of the striking examples of Bektaş's likeness is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who is, on some occasions, seen as a manifestation of Hacı Bektaş Veli and Imam Ali.

4 HACIBEKTAŞ: SACRED TOWN AND ITS VISITATION

This part of the dissertation is dedicated to pious visitation (*ziyaret*) – a ritual performance typical to Muslims worldwide. As a non-Hajj pilgrimage that may be motivated by several factors on the individual level, it is widely practiced among other Muslim groups, in addition to the Alevi in Anatolia. Ingvild Flakerud and Richard Natvig have noted that the contrasts between Hajj, Umra and *ziyaret* should not be overemphasized as many pilgrims combine Hajj and Umra with visiting the grave of the Prophet, his companions and other local shrines on their way (Flakerud and Natvig 2018: 3). In general, I agree with this approach, however, in the Alevi vernacular view, this understanding might be contested.

In this part of the thesis, I overview the Alevi concept of pious visitation in terms of broader Islamic and pre-Islamic contexts. In particular, I focus on the construction of sacred space through beliefs, sacred objects, and ritual actions in the Bektashi lodge and its surroundings in Hacibektaş. I will research the meaning of the tomb of Hacı Bektaş in the light of Hajj and Umra, expounding the Alevi understanding of his tomb compared to Islamic holy sites in the Arabian Peninsula. As there are local shrines in the Muslim world that serve as alternative destinations regarded as analogous in status and function to the sacred sites of Mecca and Medina (Flakerud and Natvig 2018: 3), I also research the status given to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş – whether it serves as an alternative route reaching the further places for the Alevi or if it has gained a more elaborate meaning. Questions of ritual purity, the time of the visit and the welcoming of non-Alevi to the sacred area are brought into focus, especially the contradiction derived from the mosque built on the territory of the lodge.

Roland Grimes has said, ‘Although places and things may accompany or facilitate a ritual, they rarely drive one. An exception might be a pilgrimage to a sacred place in order to view or touch a sacred object’ (Grimes 2014: 242). I show how this exception fits within the Alevi context. Is it the place itself that has acquired a constant and unchanging extraordinary status in the visitors’ focus, or is the sacralised place constructed individually every time the visitor reaches the place, or both? As pointed out earlier, Coleman and Eade have shown how the sacred space is constantly constructed according to who is visiting (Coleman and Eade 2004: 6–10). These questions will be answered according to individual Alevi views.

In addition to the question of the construction of the sacred space, I focus on the aims, motivations and expectations of those visiting the places connected to the saint. Two of the main aims of a visitor to a sacred site have been pointed out by referring to Grimes – viewing and touching a sacred object (Grimes 2014: 242). These bodily sensations assure the visitor that he or she has reached the set goal, a sacred place. Whilst the goal of reaching the sacred place (viewing and touching it) is fulfilled, what are the expectations for what will happen there? How does

the visitor act in order to make these expectations come true? What kind of specific bodily movements and engagements are practiced at the places in order to find the answers to expectations? I also discuss the lived experiences regarding sacred places. Following the visitors' narratives, I move step by step through the sacred tomb of the saint, with the Beştaşlar, Delikli Taş and the mulberry tree mediating the expectations, fears, hopes, disappointments and satisfaction of the visitors as lived and perceived during their visitation. The corporeal testing of spiritual purity receives focused treatment as one of the most striking visitation rituals. I will show how the beliefs and imaginations about Hacı Bektaş Veli are lived and expressed through the bodily engagements at the places associated with the saint in the town of Hacıbektaş and why contemporary, well-educated Alevi plan and perform the pilgrimage to his tomb.

In this part of the thesis, I also give an overview of the town of Hacıbektaş and its particularities. Since the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli have formed the Alevi understanding of human life with its morals and goals, it would be challenging, in fact quite impossible, to expound on today's Alevi spirituality in Turkey without understanding the importance of the places and objects related to the saint. I will show why this town has gained such significance as a centre of spiritual gravity for Alevi. Because of Hacı Bektaş Veli's tomb in the historical Bektashi lodge, the town is situated in the centre of Alevi sacred geography as one of the most important destinations for Alevi visitations (*ziyaret*), attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. I give an overview of the lodge and its surroundings as a destination for pious visitation and refer to the physical trajectory inside the lodge as a spiritual ascent according to Alevi understanding.

In addition to religious visitation, the town has gained importance as a venue for political and cultural activities. Next to the historical sacred tombs and natural objects, more and more new monuments are erected, and museums are opened in order to live and preserve Aleviness (*Alevilik*). For this purpose, there are several festivals taking place throughout the year. Among them are the annual commemoration festivals of Hacı Bektaş Veli, held since 1964 from the 16th to the 18th of August. These festivals have turned into international gatherings and include religious, cultural, political and educational activities. I discuss the nature and objectives of the festivals in general and describe the festival held in August 2018 as a 'protest event' organised by the Alevi associations that did not agree to the change of traditional dates.

4.1 Town of Hacı Bektaş Veli

4.1.1 Overview of an Anatolian town

The municipality of Hacıbektaş within the province of Nevşehir, with its little less than eleven thousand people,¹ has been the focus of political parties, scholars, and cultural and religious visitors for many decades. Although the town of Hacıbektaş, former Suluca Karahöyük, is similar to any other Central Anatolian town with its main road dedicated to the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, administrative and educational facilities, small shops and some hotels, it has gained meaning and importance that cannot be overlooked. The town's significance, deriving from the places associated with the life of Hacı Bektaş Veli, the historical Bektashi lodge (*dergâh*) and the tomb of the saint within it, reaches beyond Alevis and Bektashis as well as Turkey, as evidenced by the UNESCO decision to declare 2021 the Year of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

The town, named after Hacı Bektaş Veli and is promoted as the centre of tolerance and enlightenment by the local municipality, attracts visitors with its sacred history and continuous spirituality. As a historical centre of Bektashi thought in Anatolia, it inspires its visitors with its alleged potential to lead Alevis, Turks, all nations and the world towards a more humane and enlightened future. This view is confirmed, for example, by the absence of prisons for detaining criminals. *Dede Hüseyin A* brought this matter up as proof of the special sanctity of the area and its powerful spiritual atmosphere inspiring its people.² The legacy of Hacı Bektaş Veli is made accessible in the town through his famous sayings, sculpture, events and museums. Town residents, headed by the local municipality, have taken on the role of keeping and promoting the saint's legacy. The *postnişin* of the Bektashi lodge, Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy, residing in Hacıbektaş and acting as a spokesperson and opinion leader in Alevi and Bektashi matters, contributes to the town's overall specialness.

Hacıbektaş is a town of spiritual attraction and commemoration that finds expression in the *dergâh*, museums, monuments and related events. In addition to the festival of Hacı Bektaş Veli, which will be focused on below, there are other annual events, among which are the commemorations dedicated to Atatürk's visit to Hacıbektaş in December and poet Mahzuni Şerif in May are organised by the local municipality.³ These festivals, which are inspired by historical events and the lives of significant persons connected to the town, are celebrated among others through museums and other landmarks, such as sacred natural objects and

¹ Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2021 (Address based population registration system results) (<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-SonucLari-2021-45500>).

² Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

³ Atatürk'ün Hacıbektaş'a gelişi (Atatürk visiting Hacıbektaş) (<http://www.Hacibektas.bel.tr/web/ataturkun-Hacibektas-a-gelisi/>); Mahzuni anma günü (Commemoration day of Mahzuni) (<http://www.Hacibektas.bel.tr/web/kategori/etkinliklerimiz/mahzuni-anma-gunu/>).

various monuments. There are several museums in that revive not only the history but the town's own story – first of all, the Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli, but also the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography, Atatürk House Museum and the Museum of Humanity from Darkness to Light (*Karanlıktan aydınlığa insanlık müzesi*). In addition, there is an excavation area of Suluca Karahöyük not far from the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex. The abundance of museums in such a small town testifies to the historical and cultural richness of the place and the willingness to promote it. The Archaeology and Ethnography Museum's exhibits from the bronze age until the last decades of the Bektashi brotherhood⁴ illustrate the area's diverse history. Elise Massicard has noted that 'the museum seems to promote Alevism as a culture-specific to Anatolia including elements of every people, culture and faith that has ever flourished here' (Massicard 2003: 6). However, the exhibits connected to the Bektashi legacy seem, in particular, to catch the interest of the Alevis, who see these as part of their spiritual inheritance transmitting the ideas and teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Not far from the ethnography museum is the Atatürk House Museum, one of the forty-five house museums dedicated to the founder of the republic in Turkey (Ötgün 2007: V). Atatürk visited Hacıbektaş on 22 December 1919 to grant support to the region during the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923) (Ötgün 2007: 24). However, in the light of the idea of Atatürk as a manifestation of Imam Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli and as the 'saviour of the age', his visit to Hacıbektaş and the current house museum are seen as being more than a mere political endeavour⁵ by Alevis.

The Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli, located in the historical headquarters of the Bektashi brotherhood, is considered by the Alevis as their common spiritual centre. It is also the heart of the town around which life revolves. Since I describe the Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli in a separate subsection, I will not devote more space here than mentioning two nearby historical buildings that the same museum manages. First of the two is a small house between the museum and the historical site of Suluca Karahöyük and is named after mother Kadıncık or Kadıncık Ana, who, according to the *Velâyetnâme*, was the one to offer the saint food and a roof when he first arrived from Horasan (Korkmaz 2015: 52–55). This stone building with a surrounding garden believed to be the first place of accommodation of the saint, is often included in the itinerary of the visitation of the sacred places. As the location of Kadıncık Ana's grave is unknown, this house has also been accepted as her mausoleum (*Kadıncık Ana türbesi*) and revered accordingly. After several years of campaigning by the Alevi organisations to restore the building, restoration works were started in 2020 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the restored house was opened for visitations in August 2021.⁶ Another historical landmark, managed by the museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli, is the mauso-

⁴ Hacıbektaş fieldwork notes 17.08.2018.

⁵ See section 3.3.5 of this dissertation.

⁶ 800 yıllık kültür mirası Kadıncık Ana Evi ziyaretçileriyle buluştu (the 800-year-old cultural heritage of Mother Kadıncık House met with its visitors) (<https://usak.ktb.gov.tr/TR-291210/800-yillik-kultur-mirasi-kadincik-ana-evi-ziyaretcileri-.html>).

leum of Bektaş Efendi, who, according to the inscription on the wall, was a representative of the lineage of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Both historical landmarks within the modern town – the house of the mother Kadıncık dated to the 13th century and the mausoleum that was erected according to the inscription on its wall in 1603 – are opened upon request by the Hacı Bektaş Veli museum authorities⁷.

In addition to the Bektashi complex and related Kadıncık Evi, there are several places not far from the town centre, such as Beştaşlar, Hırkadağ and Çilehane, that are identified with the life and activities of Bektaş. The sacred landscape, including also the Five Stones or Beştaşlar, which are about 7 km away from the town centre, attracts visitors as witnesses of the saint's miracle.⁸ The Mountain of the Robe, or Hırkadağ, which is located about 20 km from the town centre, is famous as a place where the saint used to have his ecstatic rituals together with his dervishes. According to the *Velâyetnâme*, the saint whirled around a bonfire forty times and threw his robe to the fire in ecstasy (Korkmaz 2015: 72–73). Çilehane, or a retreat house, with several natural sacred objects associated with the saint's spiritual activities, is the most visited place in Hacıbektaş after the mausoleum. The area, about two kilometres from the town centre, is identified with the hill of Arafat mentioned in the *Velâyetnâme*. This is the place where Hacı Bektaş Veli, according to the *Velâyetnâme*, had his retreats in a cave that became known as a Stone with a Hole or Delikli Taş,⁹ and where he created a source of water nearby that became known as the Zemzem fountain (Korkmaz 2015: 53–54). Altogether, nine historical fountains of drinking water are found outside the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex (Bayrkal 2010: 288), of which the fountain of Zemzem in the area of Çilehane¹⁰ is the most outstanding. As described in the *Velâyetnâme*, this fountain was created by Hacı Bektaş Veli while he was having his retreats nearby. 'A wonderful clear water erupted as he scratched the ground with his finger' (Korkmaz 2015: 54). According to one belief, this fountain is connected to paradise, and drinking from its water is associated with heavenly blessings.¹¹ In addition to the places associated with the saint, several new monuments and graves of Alevi figures have found their location on the hill of Arafat. For example, there are monuments of the Seven Great Minstrels (*Yedi Ulu Ozan*), as well as other well-known Alevi minstrels such as Aşık Veysel, Davut Suları, Yunus Emre, Aşık İbrahim and Feysullah Çınar, the poets Nazim Hikmet and Mahzuni Şerif, and Hacı Bektaş Veli, as well as a monument to the *semah* ritual. There is also a massive monument and the Museum of Humanity from Darkness to Light dedicated to Alevi martyrs (*şehit*) who died in various incidents in Çorum (1980), Madımak Hotel in Sivas (1993) and Kahramanmaraş (1978).

⁷ The information about the museums in Hacıbektaş is derived from fieldwork notes in 2018 and from museum brochures.

⁸ See more about Beştaşlar in 3.4.1 and 4.2.3.3.3.

⁹ See more about Delikli Taş in 4.2.3.3.4.

¹⁰ 'Suffering room', or a place for seclusion and solitude for dervishes.

¹¹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

As mentioned before, this small town of many museums and monuments is located in the Anatolian highlands, on the borders of Cappadocia, with cold and snowy winters and hot, dry summers. The natural and economic conditions of the region have certainly contributed to the town's development. Although the municipality of Hacıbektaş, with about thirty villages, is located in the region of Cappadocia, there are no traces of the geological formations Cappadocia is famous for. Instead, there are endless fields of barley and wheat surrounding the town. The soil and climate of the area that favour farming and animal husbandry may also be found in the *Velâyetnâme* of Hacı Bektaş. Between the fields, there are some rare groves of poplar, willow, oak and pine trees. Good groundwater sources allow the growing of sugar beet and grapes in some of the areas of the municipality. The abundance of groundwater has made possible the emergence of numerous fountains which have become part of the landscape.

In addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, cultural and religious tourism is an essential part of the local economy. Numerous small shops sell all sorts of visuals, books, magnets, etc., connected to Imam Ali and the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Alevi and Bektashi poetry and Atatürk. There are also various souvenirs and jewellery made of silver and natural stones, such as onyx and alabaster. We also find traders outside the stores, selling local stone pebbles as sources of blessing¹² to visitors. Some people trade with prayers and blessings at the sacred sites; others offer guidance about the sacred places for a tip (*bağış*). Small merchants, whether organised or spontaneous, take advantage of individual visitors and big crowds visiting the town during the festivals by selling souvenirs.

As there is a great need for sacrificial animals and butchers among the visitors to the town, the municipality has made efforts to make this local branch of the economy better organised. Visitors slaughter about ten to fifteen thousand animals annually as blood sacrifices in Hacıbektaş.¹³ Until 2005, there were stolen, sick or defective sacrificial animals on sale on the streets, and they were slaughtered anywhere. Also, there was a lot of fraud in price and weight. In 2005, an official butchery (*mezbaħa*) was established under the supervision of professional butchers and veterinarians. It is possible to cook sacrificial meat in special facilities in assigned areas of Çilehane, Beştaşlar and Dedebağ if the animal is slaughtered at the municipal butchery. In order to prevent unofficial slaughtering, it is not possible to cook meat of unknown origin on these official sites.¹⁴

As seen, Hacıbektaş, otherwise an ordinary Anatolian town, attracts visitors throughout the year with several events organised to commemorate meaningful persons associated with the town. The common becomes extraordinary, first of all, in the light of hagiographic stories and Bektashi history that materializes in the lodge of the order and graves of saints and dervishes, especially the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Other landmarks of religious significance, such as Kadıncık

¹² See 4.2.3.5.

¹³ See 4.2.3.4 about blood sacrifice.

¹⁴ Belediye mezbahası (Municipality butchery) (<http://www.Hacıbektas.bel.tr/web/belediye-mezbahasi/>).

Evi, various natural sacred sites and fountains that support and expand the meaning of the lodge, continue to inspire Alevis from Turkey and beyond to make this visit in order to experience and see the place. Since the town has gained a central role in Alevi spirituality and worldview, the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli have formed the Alevi understanding of human life with its morals and goals; it would be very difficult or even impossible to formulate and expound on today's Alevism in Turkey without paying attention to the person and teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli and his hometown where the events of his life are embodied in natural and artificial objects.

4.1.2 The complex of Hacı Bektaş Veli: an overview

The *dergâh* of Hacı Bektaş Veli was a residence of Bektashi dervishes and their spiritual leaders – *babas* – for centuries. Like other brotherhoods, the Bektashis' material conditions and state depended largely on the period's daily politics and specific rulers. Consequently, the history of the *dergâh* reflects the Ottoman stand and politics towards the brotherhood. The first Ottoman sultans showed great interest in building and expanding the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli and the surrounding lodge. It is known that Murat I (1361–1368) gave orders for the tomb to be built over the grave of the saint, Murat II (1421–1444) enlarged the enclosure of the tomb, and Bayezit II (1481–1512) covered the dome of the mausoleum with tinsplate (Kızılkaya 2019: 16). Nevertheless, the early interest of the sultans, who showed their sympathy in gifts and donations, changed during the reign of Selim I with hostility that was replaced with indifference after his death. A new wave of interest among state officials arose by the 18th century when the practice of donations was renewed. (Melikoff 2015: 205) However, the beginning of the 19th century ushered in a new period of persecution and struggle for survival for the Bektashis. Mahmud II's disbandment of the Janissaries also led to the closure of Bektashis' lodges because of their close relationship with the former (Melikoff 2015: 211). The main lodge in Hacıbektaş survived the closure only as one of the first of its kind in Anatolia and was placed under the leadership of the Naqshbandi sheiks (Kızılkaya 2019: 18). Before the arrival of the Naqshbandis, the whole complex was in deplorable condition. Nevertheless, the first investment was made by building a mosque, not restoring the existing lodge. The brotherhood lodge was extensively not restored until the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz (1861–1867) (Kızılkaya 2019: 19–20). The establishment of the Republic changed the fate of all Sufi orders, including the Bektashi order and the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex. In 1925, all brotherhoods (*tarikât*) and related institutions were closed by law. Consequently, the belongings of the lodge in Hacıbektaş were scattered between various museums and the complex itself was neglected (Norton 1992: 187). For a period, the *dergâh* was used as an agricultural school (Salman 2005: 39). The reopening of the *dergâh* as a museum reflected the political attitudes of the era and the ability of the Bektashi circles to defend their interests during the relaxation of the anti-religious drive. The restoration of the *dergâh* started in 1958 by the General Directorate of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), and efforts

were made to reclaim the relics of the Bektashi order and Janissaries. Hacı Bektaş Veli complex was opened as a museum after large-scale restoration works due to local and Bektashi initiatives on 16 August 1964 – the date that determined the time of annual commemoration ceremonies (*anma törenleri*) of the saint (Massicard 2003: 125). In 2012, the complex of the Bektashi lodge (*dergâh, tekke*), including the tombs of the founders of the brotherhood – the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli and Balım Sultan (1462–1516), the second *pir* of the lodge, was added to the tentative list of world heritage sites by UNESCO.¹⁵ This development adds to the importance of the complex, which is one of the best-preserved of its kind in Anatolia and values its underlying ideas as a heritage of all humanity and contributes to the popularization of the place to a wider audience.

As Anatolia's first and main Bektashi lodge, it has long acted as the centre of spiritual learning and dedication for Bektashis and Alevis. As the location of sacred tombs, it is vital as a destination for pious visitations (*ziyaret*). According to tradition, it was Kadıncık Ana who marked the grave of Hacı Bektaş Veli after his death and Abdal Musa who made the first visitation, after which the site became known as a sacred site (*makam*) and place of visitation (*ziyaretgâh*) (Kızılkaya 2019: 15–16).

The Hacı Bektaş Veli complex consists of three courtyards and their surrounding buildings. Entering the complex through the main monumental portal (*Cümle Kapısı*) leads the visitor to step back in time to the footsteps of seekers, dervishes, sheikhs and saintly figures. As the first of the four entrances leading to the sacred tomb, this portal marks the symbolic beginning of the 'four gates and forty stations'.¹⁶ Contrary to the mystical understanding of the place, the sign on the portal says that this is the Museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Turkish Republic. Since the most used term for the current museum among the interviewees is *dergâh* or a dervish lodge, it will be referred to as a Bektashi complex or a *dergâh* in the following discussion. Despite being a museum, according to the signs on its entrances, officials working on its territory, rules and opening hours, this place is still seen as a sacred arena for miraculous encounters and secret prayers and wishes. As a spiritual centre and meeting point for Alevis, its meaning goes far beyond being merely a museum. It is instead a centre of spiritual gravity and visitation, sometimes even seen as the destination for the Hajj (Oymak 2010: 202). Some interviewees included in this research also referred to the visitation to Hacıbektaş as Hajj, the main pilgrimage of Islam.

The saint's mausoleum is located in the depths of the four gates and three courtyards. To get there, the visitor must follow a particular route surrounded by meaningful buildings and go through symbolic entrances. The first courtyard (*Nadar Avlusu*) as the outer space of the *dergâh* included practical facilities such as stables (*At Evi*), guest house (*Mihman Evi*), bakery (*Ekmek Evi*), bathhouse (*hamam*) and laundry (*çamaşırhane*) that have not been preserved. There is a

¹⁵ Hacı Bektaş Veli Complex (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5735/>).

¹⁶ See about the four gates and forty stations in section 1.3.1.3.

secondary laundry house and the Fountain of the Three (*Üçler Çeşmesi*) that are still intact. The Fountain of the Three is one of the two fountains in the *dergâh* still used for drinking and freshening today.¹⁷ The number three has a significant symbolic meaning in Alevi-Bektashi's mystical understanding indicating the oneness of God, Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali (Birge 1994: 132–134; Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 128–130). Drinking its water is believed to have a blessing and healing capability. The space in front of the Fountain of the Three in the first courtyard has been used for several years for *cem* gatherings organised by Alevi associations during the commemoration festivals of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

In order to proceed, the visitor has to step through the Gate of the Three (*Üçler Kapısı*) between the first and the second courtyard. The second courtyard, also known as the yard of the lodge (*Dergâh Avlusu*), includes several important buildings such as the courtyard pool (*Meydan Havuzu*), kitchen (*Aş Evi*), the residence of the head cook (*Aş Evi Baba Köşkü*), pantry (*Kiler Evi*), guest house (*Mihman Evi*), gathering house (*Meydan Evi* or *Cem Evi*) and the residence of the Sheikh (*Dedebaba Köşkü*). The exhibition of the objects that once belonged to the Bektashi lodge in these buildings allows the visitors to learn the history and principles of the brotherhood. One of the most mentioned exhibits are the enormous cauldrons of the lodge, especially the Black Cauldron (*Kara Kazan*), the symbol of hospitality and saintly favour, and it is hoped that 'one day it will boil again'.¹⁸ As seen, the second courtyard has much to offer the visitor; however, before proceeding to explore the buildings and exhibition, the visitors usually spend some time at the Lion's Fountain (*Aslanlı Çesme*) for drinking and collecting its crystal clear waters, believed to flow straight from Paradise (*cennet*). While the area around the Lion's Fountain was one of the most crowded spots during my visit to the lodge, I didn't find anyone stepping into the mosque (*Tekke Cami*), which is located in the same courtyard.¹⁹

The third courtyard, or the sacred courtyard (*Hazret Avlusu*), is the innermost area of the lodge. Reaching the inner part, the visitor needs to enter three gates and pass two outer courtyards. The gate leading to the sacred courtyard is called the Gate of the Six (*Altıncı Kapısı*) and shows the way to the *Pir Evi* or the House of the Sheikh and the mausoleum of Balım Sultan, the second *Pir* of the Bektashi brotherhood. In front of the mausoleum of Balım Sultan stands the sacred mulberry tree,²⁰ which attracts visitors with its connection to the arrival of Hacı Bektaş from Horasan to Anatolia. The most important destination of religious visitation – *Pir Evi* – which houses the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli, also includes the Hall of the Forty,²¹ the retreat chamber (*Kızılca Halvet*) and numerous other tombs of sheikhs and dervishes of the brotherhood. In the Hall of the Forty, items

¹⁷ The information about the Bektashi lodge is derived from the fieldwork notes of 16–17 August 2018 and from museum brochures.

¹⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹⁹ See more about the mosque in section 4.2.2.3.

²⁰ See more about the mulberry tree in the section 4.2.3.3.2.

²¹ See about the gathering of the Forty (*Kırklar cemi*) in section 2.1.1.

once belonging to the brotherhood and used by dervishes and sheikhs are exhibited. There are oil lamps, beggars' bowls, musical instruments, banners, prayer beads and headgear such as the crown of Hüseyin (*Hüseyin-i taç*). Also, there are visual depictions of the *Zülfikar* sword, the twelve-edged stone of surrender (*teslim taşı*), the Perfect Man (*insân-i kâmil*) and Hacı Bektaş Veli. Entering the *Pir Evi* symbolizes entering the last gate of the 'four gates and forty stations' and attaining unity with the Truth (*Hakikat*), the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey. The main objective of the religious visitation for the Alevi – touching the sarcophagus of Hacı Bektaş and praying at his tomb – will be discussed in the later subsections of this part.

4.1.3 Hacı Bektaş Veli festivals

Numerous annual Alevi festivals and commemoration ceremonies (*anma törenleri*) occur throughout the country to live, perform and promote Alevi culture, solidarity and values. Festivals appearing in the second half of the last century are relatively new phenomena that are nevertheless considered and perceived as part of Alevi tradition.²² Usually, these festivals are connected to commemoration events during the summer months in the vicinity of the tombs of prominent saints, such as Abdal Musa in Antalya or Düzgün Baba in Tunceli. The commemoration of Hacı Bektaş Veli, which has been held since 1964, is the oldest and most significant event of its kind and, as such, has served as a model for subsequent Alevi festivals held in the name of various saintly figures (Soileau 2005: 99). Consequently, the new tradition of festivals, which includes, besides cultural, social and political factors, long-established elements of Alevi ritual life such as the veneration of tombs, *cem* gatherings, *semah* performances, and performing of poetry and music continuously facilitate the development and transmission of Alevi spiritual consciousness. Since the questions of 'What is Alevism?' and 'Who is an Alevi?' are still asked and discussed, the festivals contribute to answering these questions through live performances.

Mark Soileau has described Alevi festivals as 'ritual occasions in which elements of Alevi culture and a sense of Alevi identity are passed on to the current generation' (Soileau 2005: 92). These festivals, which bring tens of thousands of people, create an arena and an atmosphere for living and sharing common values and understandings of different areas of life. The festivals provide an opportunity to unite, express common concerns, and celebrate Aleviness through public events. They constitute a space for not only living Aleviness but also living it out in public and being seen. In addition to the fact that the festivals attract mass participation and are filled with common activities that contribute to forming and strengthening a sense of Alevi identity, they may also include deeply personal considerations, especially when the festivals are primarily participated in with religious motivations. Besides opening ceremonies, concerts, plays and panels, the festivals

²² Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

contain a particular religious dimension and are thus seen as pious visitation expressed in various rituals connected to the saint whose name a particular festival is organised. Praying at the saint's tomb, wishing, giving vows, performing offerings, sharing and eating consecrated food and participating in the *cem* gatherings are the most common religious activities taking place during the festivals.

The official programme is usually preceded by opening ceremonies that allow local and national politicians and political party representatives to share their views and seek the support of attendees. On the other hand, the representatives of the sacred bloodlines, the *dedes* and the heads of Alevi associations also take the opportunity to communicate their perspectives on Alevi issues and the shortcomings of the state (Soileau 2005: 95). Alevi associations and foundations that promote the festivals and organise joint trips for participation contribute to their popularity. Visits to home villages are often planned according to local festivals that allow one to take an active part in local life and renew relationships with relatives and old associates. In this way, festivals may include thousands of participants, with hundreds of thousands in Hacібektaş.

Among the many festivals, the festival of Hacı Bektaş Veli (literally the Commemoration Ceremonies of Hacı Bektaş Veli), together with events of Culture and Art (*Hacı Bektaş Veli anma törenleri ve kültür ve sanat etkinlikleri*) have become a major annual Alevi event, followed not only by Alevis but also by political powers and media channels and publications. The festival, which was inaugurated together with the opening of the museum in 1964, has come through different periods of political turmoil and stability, reflecting the conditions of the particular stages of the Republic. In the 1970s, the festivals became the country's major left-wing cultural festival (van Bruinessen 1996: 6) and reflected the yearning for radical political change under the leadership of the Hacı Bektaş Veli Culture and Tourism Association, which was closed down during the military cup in 1980 with the charge of establishing a secret organisation, after which the organising of the festival fell into the hands of the local municipality. In 1989, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture turned the festival into an international event, and after the Sivas massacre (1993), for the first time president of the Republic, Süleyman Demirel, visited the festival in 1994 and elevated the event to a higher political arena (Salman 2005: 7,59). There have been some alterations to the tradition since then. For example, some of the programmes were cancelled in 1999 because of an earthquake, the attempt to change the festival dates from August to October 2017 for organisational reasons and the coronavirus outbreak in 2019. Since the change of date found lots of criticism from the Alevi associations and visitors, the festival was again organised in August 2019. In 2020, after the spread of the coronavirus, the festival was not cancelled but held mainly outdoors.

Although festivals were influenced by and attracted political attention from the beginning, solid religious motives were also involved in opening and launching the festival. For political reasons, the festival's inauguration was labelled as a touristic and folkloristic event to obtain official permission for the gatherings (Norton 1992: 188), and the programmes were to be confirmed by the Ministry

of Tourism and formalized accordingly. For example, *semah* ritual dancing was described as a folk dance in the programme and whole ceremonies were celebrated similarly on public holidays with lots of Turkish flags and pictures of Atatürk (Salman 2005: 50).²³ Although the expression of religious feelings has become more relaxed and official during the festivals – the *semah* as such stands as a ritual in the programmes; *cem* gatherings are organised – the touristic nature of the event has not disappeared but has become even more promoted. Consequently, it is as challenging to define the nature of the commemoration festivities of Hacı Bektaş Veli in terms of defining Alevism. Elise Massicard has asked whether this festival is a touristic, religious, political or folkloristic event that lies somewhere between pilgrimage, festival and commemoration (Massicard 2003: 128). This ambiguity arises from several activities of different natures and is also reflected in the festival title, which includes references to commemoration, the name of the saint, culture and art. Political, social, cultural and religious aims and feelings are intermingled and find expression through political speeches, academic panels, opening ceremonies, art exhibitions, musical and staging events, *cem* gatherings and visitations to the sacred sites. Activities take place all over the town – in the Alevi houses of worship, the *cemevis*, secular cultural centres²⁴ and various outdoor areas connected to the life of the saint and the activities of the Bektashi brotherhood.

Since the term commemoration or remembrance (*anma*) may refer to both secular and religious meanings, the title of the event allows participants to interpret and see it from preferred and suitable angles. Also, since Hacı Bektaş Veli is attributed with various mundane and spiritual qualities and associated with various roles, as seen in the previous chapters, the festival celebrating his life and teaching has different options to follow and emphasize. Although it has followed a particular secular pattern, the religious dimension is present through the very person of Hacı Bektaş, revered as a saint. Depending on visitors' religiosity, the festival may be participated as merely a secular event; for some, it is also a pilgrimage; for others, it is a pilgrimage first and foremost. For visitors who visit the town outside of the festivals, the purpose of the visit is primarily religious. The aspects of visitation (*ziyaret*) to Hacıbektaş are discussed in section 4.2 of this thesis.

²³ Naming religious rituals as 'folkloristic' at the time and today found lots of critics by interviewees, since this is seen as an attempt to change the original meaning and importance of the ritual that stands at the heart of Alevi worship.

²⁴ One of the main cultural centers is named after Hacı Bektâş-ı Veli, the other after the current leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the initiator of the building of the cultural center Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

4.1.4 The festival in 2018

The festivals in 2017–2018 saw the lowest numbers of participants because of the change of the dates from August to October. As mentioned before, the municipality of Hacібektaş, the events' main organiser since the military cup in 1980, decided to change the dates for these years for organisational reasons.²⁵ The municipality's official website justifies its decision based on overcrowding is possible due to the warm climate in August, which allows visitors to sleep outdoors and stay longer in the area. Also, the same website says that about 2000 Syrian refugees participated in the festivals and remained in town after the festivals, which challenged the already overloaded town's infrastructure on accommodation and sanitary issues. With the change, the municipality aimed to lead people to perform their visitation throughout the year, not only on specific dates in August. The reason for the change was to avoid big crowds and related problems due to the small town's insufficient infrastructure. However, the decision received much criticism as racist and contradicting the teaching of Hacı Bektaş Veli, who calls for avoiding discrimination and treating all people equally. Consequently, there were alternative events (*etkinlikler*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli organised on 16 August by Alevi organisations, with the festivals in October seeing low numbers of people due to the criticism about racism and inconvenient timing during the school and working season. Consequently, the decision was revoked in 2019, and the festival was held again in August.

In 2021, the 750th anniversary of the saint's death was celebrated by UNESCO by declaring 2021 the year of Hacı Bektaş Veli. The theme of the festival – 'No to racism' (*ırkçılığa hayır*) – was framed with the sayings of the saint 'Do not blame any people or individual' (*Hiçbir milleti ve insanı ayıplamayınız*), 'Look at 72 nations with the same eye' (*72 millete bir nazarla bakınız*), 'The good are good whatever their language, religion or color' (*dili, dini, rengi ne olursa olsun iyiler iyidir*) that aimed to draw attention to worldwide racism and discrimination.²⁶ In this way, the organisers of the festival showed that their attempt to change the dates did not have anything to do with discrimination or racism; on the contrary, they are against it, sharing the views of Bektaş on the matter.

I participated in the festival in Hacібektaş in August 2018. At that time, the event was initiated by the Alevi Bektashi Federation (*Alevi Bektaşî Federasyonu*), which is one of the umbrella organisations for Alevi associations, as an alternative event to the official commemoration held in October. Even though the dates in August do not have a special meaning, such as the date of birth or passing away of the saint, changing the tradition of having the commemoration in August

²⁵ Hacı Bektaş Veli Anma Törenleri ve Kültür Sanat Etkinlikleri Neden Ekim Ayının İkinci Haftasına Alındı (Why the Hacı Bektaş Veli commemoration ceremonies were changed to the second week of October) (<https://www.Hacibektas.bel.tr/web/Haci-bektas-veli-anma-torenleri-4/>).

²⁶ 58.ulusal 32 uluslararası Hacı Bektaş Veli anma törenleri ve kültür sanat etkinlikleri programı (The programme of 58. national and 32. international Hacı Bektaş Veli commemoration ceremonies and culture and art events) (<https://www.Hacibektas.bel.tr/web/58-ulusal-32-uluslararasi-Haci-bektas-veli-anma-torenleri-ve-kultur-sanat-etkinlikleri-programi/>).

was, in addition to the complaints of racism, perceived as interference with Alevi internal affairs.²⁷ Consequently, an alternative or protest festival was organised during the regular dates. As it was an ‘unofficial’ event, it was much smaller than usual in scale and did not include customary festive opening ceremonies participated in by local and national political leaders and the giving of awards.²⁸ The opening was held in front of the first gate of the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex by relatively modest means.²⁹ Instead of formal speeches about democracy and human values by dignitaries, the festival was inaugurated by *dede* Hasan Kılavuz from the Mersin branch of the Alevi Culture Associations. In his short speech that preceded the common prayer and *semah* performance, he emphasized that the saint is undoubtedly alive and reachable in every difficulty and that those who came entered into his blessed presence to deliver their prayers and receive answers, not only to participate in the event in general.³⁰ The emphasis on spiritual aims and motivations followed the event, leaving political appearances out of focus.

Instead of the usual three or four days, the festival program lasted for two days, emphasizing the first day. The opening was followed by panels focusing on issues of different generations and gender – ‘Alevi youth and their demands’ and ‘Alevi women and their demands’. The *cem* gathering took place in the first yard of the *dergâh* and was led by *dede* Hasan Kılavuz. The day was concluded by a concert on the square in front of the *dergâh*. The second day was reserved for visitations and conversations (*muhabbet*) with the musical leaders (*zakir*) in front of the *dergâh*. All events took place in the open air and were unusually sparsely populated; there were no big crowds or related discomfort. For example, I could find accommodation in one of the closest hotels to the *dergâh* without a previous booking, which has been impossible during the festivals in August due to the great numbers of participants from all over the country.

This change in the dates seemed to satisfy neither side of the argument. The municipality succeeded in reducing the number of participants by moving the dates of the festival to October. Still, it became too small due to the boycott of the associations for the festival to be seen as a popular international event.³¹ The involved associations, on the other hand, could not persuade the general Alevi

²⁷ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

²⁸ The main award that is delivered during the festivals is the award of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî Friendship and Peace award. Also, occasionally awards for poetry competitions are given.

²⁹ The moderators of the opening apologized about the poor equipment, but at the same time pointed out that it is not the most important factor, as the gathering itself is the most important things. There was an incident where someone had to hold the microphone for the singer in front of him as there were no microphone stands available on the stage. This in turn raised the question among participants of why the municipality did not provide the event with needed equipment.

³⁰ Fieldwork notes 16.08.2018.

³¹ Also, the Buca branch of Alevi Culture Associations did not organise tours, not on the alternative events in August nor on the official event in October, but were in Hacıbektaş again in August 2019.

public to participate in the festival in August and provide proper programmes and venues compared to previous years. Consequently, the general understanding that the municipality, as the main organiser, needs the Alevi associations as promoters of the event and vice versa to ensure the festival's sustainability found confirmation in practical life.

Despite contradictions concerning the event's organisation, enough people had arrived to participate in the festival to cause congestion at the Lion's Fountain and the sacred tombs in the territory of the *dergâh*. One of the visitors was a middle-aged woman, Songül,³² whom I met in the local minibus operating between Nevşehir and Hacıbektaş. She joined the ride in one of the villages on the road and became my guide during the event. As she was eager to invite me to be part of her sacred visitation as a companion during her journey, I brought her to be part of my journey as a researcher. This shared journey allowed me to look closely at a visitor's trajectory inside the *dergâh* and observe her focus of attention.

First of all, Songül had come to venerate the saint and deliver her prayers and wishes and paid little attention to the activities outside of the *dergâh*. Her approach towards the most important object – the saint's tomb – was marked by stops that had gained particular significance for her from previous visits and that she certainly wanted to draw my attention to as a foreign visitor. Before taking me to the inner parts of the *dergâh*, she insisted that we should dive into the crowd around the Lion fountain and drink from its blessed waters. This stop seemed somewhat necessary in order to proceed closer to the sacred areas. She took me on to the kitchens and the gathering house, passing the mosque as if it was not there. She pointed out the vast cauldrons in the kitchens and asked me to imagine how many people were blessed by their food. She wanted me to gain as much knowledge as possible before stepping into the mausoleum and acquiring an informed and meaningful experience of the saint. When we arrived at the mausoleum, she seemed to have forgotten that I followed her at every step. She joined the other pilgrims at the tomb in their circumambulation of the sarcophagus, touching and kissing its head whilst saying simultaneous prayers. As the tomb is small and visitors are many, the pilgrim has to be prepared to use all opportunities to be as close as possible to the saint's sarcophagus. Many left their scarves on the head of the sarcophagus in return for blessed presence. Songül did not leave anything because she was critical of the museum workers, who occasionally collected the items into rubbish bags.³³

³² The name has been changed for the sake of anonymity.

³³ Fieldwork notes 16.08.2018.

4.2 Mausoleum and its visitation: expectations and lived encounters

4.2.1 Pilgrimage and visitation in Islam and Turkey

Pilgrimage is one of many religions' primary expressions of faith and devotion. In Islam, the pilgrimage to Mecca, or the Hajj (*hac*), is one of the five pillars of faith introduced by the Prophet Muhammad and is required of the believers who can afford and undertake the journey.³⁴ The Hajj must take place at a specific time, in the last month of the Islamic calendar (*Zilhicce*), and meet certain conditions such as ritual purity and clothing requirements; otherwise, it is seen as a lesser pilgrimage or Umrah (*umre*) (Waines 2003: 130–131). However, the Hajj and Umrah are not Islam's only religiously motivated journeys. Besides Mecca, there are various other destinations of religious visitation (*ziyaret*) in the Islamic world containing the sacred shrines of holy men such as Sufi saints, Imams and martyrs of the faith. These mostly local visitations go far beyond the Hajj to Mecca, as millions of Muslims visit sacred sites to receive blessings from holy persons daily throughout the Muslim world (Luz 2020: 7–8). These voluntary visits (*ziyaret*) differ from the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca by rituals, motives, and aims. While the Hajj to Mecca is a religious obligation following specific rules and requirements prescribed by the Quran and the Sunnah, the *ziyaret*³⁵ is a voluntary visitation motivated by personal needs and wishes.

Even though such local holy places attract millions of Muslims in their religious lives, they do not compete with the House of God in Mecca, which is seen as the centre of the world (Bhardwaj 1998: 78). However, Alevis as Muslims don't give Mecca and Medina such central meaning as the Sunni or Shi'a Muslims in their religious life and do not regard the physical Hajj as a pillar of faith. Furthermore, physical Hajj is not encouraged. Instead, the Hajj is interpreted on esoteric grounds and given a meaning based on its inner or hidden significance. An example is how Hacı Bektaş Veli became a *hacı* – a person who has completed the Hajj to Mecca – through a visionary journey (Bozkurt 2015: 19).

Ziyaret, or voluntary visitation, takes Muslims to local sacred places of spiritual attraction, often Sufi shrines that are attributed with miraculous power. Simon Coleman and John Eisner characterize Sufi shrines as 'alternative routes to the sacred' (Coleman and Eisner 1995: 69). Surinder Bhardwaj argues that shrines of holy men complement Muslim religious circulation but cannot replace the centrality of Mecca, even though some Shi'a clerics may argue otherwise, and promoters of a particular shrine, such as Ajmer in India, may speak of it as a 'second Mecca' (Bhardwaj 2011: 75). The Alevis, as we will see, do not argue for Hacı-bektaş as the 'second Mecca'; instead, they consider Hacıbektaş as 'our Mecca' and a human being as Kaaba (*Kâbe*). Physical Mecca and Kaaba are perceived as

³⁴ The obligation of Hajj is derived from the Qur'an 2: 196

³⁵ The word *ziyaret etmek* carries the meaning of 'going and seeing someone or some place' in Turkish, with *ziyaret* indicating the act of visitation (seeing) and also the place of the visit.

secondary importance, while the spiritual significance and meaning of the sacred place have been integrated into the Alevi belief system. I argue that, from the Alevi perspective, a holy shrine (*türbe*) in general, and the shrine of Hacı Bektaş Veli in particular, serve in the context of pilgrimage as *the route* to the sacred and not only as an alternative to Mecca.

In Turkey, visiting sacred shrines is widely practiced, not only among Alevis but also by Sunni Muslims. According to the research conducted by Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak in 2000 under the auspices of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), 52.4% out of 3053 respondents across Turkey, of whom only 3.9% identified themselves as Alevis, visit sacred tombs and shrines (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2000: 13). This survey shows that more than half of the respondents visit sacred shrines and thus consider them important in their religious life. Another recent research by Aysel Tan in the small town of Baskil (Elazığ) shows even greater involvement in visitations. According to her findings, gathered through interviews by random sampling, every single interviewee has visited a sacred tomb at least once (Tan 2020: 401). Whilst there are regional differences that must be considered in this matter, it can be argued that sacred shrines (*türbe*), as well as the acts of visitation (*ziyaret*) and votive offerings (*adak*) connected to the tombs, constitute an essential part of vernacular religion in Turkey.

The number of sacred tombs visited in Turkey for religious purposes exceeds two thousand. Ünver Günay has shown in his work the diversity of buried sacred persons such as saints (*velî, evliya, mübarek*), mature men (*eren, ermiş*), ascetics (*zahit, sofî*), learned men (*alim*), descendants of the Prophet (*seyyid*), warriors of faith (*gazi*), spiritual masters (*pir, dede, baba*), dervishes (*abdal*) and martyrs (*şehit*) who are venerated in burial places referred to as *yatır, türbe, kümbet, tekke, ziyaret* and *mezar*. These sacred sites, associated with miracles and blessings, continue to function as centres of religious attraction for wishes, prayers and vows (Günay 2003: 7). The reason for this lies in the miraculous power (*keramet*) and blessing (*bereket*) believed to still radiate from the buried saint and the surroundings of the tomb, as well as the places and items he or she was connected to during his or her lifetime. Various miracles the saints perform during their lives are believed to continue through their tombs and the surrounding objects such as caves, boulders, trees, stones, waters, hills and mountains. People's demand for such sacred places continuously exists as hope for various benefits from their abundance and blessings has not vanished (Günay 2003: 17).

Visitors may have different aims for their visit – either purely spiritual such as prayer and veneration, or connected to some need, such as praying for healing for people and animals, praying for rain, reversal of fate, having a child, guidance for decision making, gaining ownership of land or goods, protection against dangers, disasters, protection against the evil eye, meeting with a loved one, finding lost things, knowing the sex of a child before birth, etc. (Atasağun 2006: 51–53). The fundamental idea of visitation lies in the performance of specific practices and rituals which enable the visitor to communicate with the sacred to achieve the desired outcome (Kıyak 2021: 161). To ensure that wishes and prayers come

true, visitors may make a vow (*adak*), such as sacrificing an animal and sharing the meat, providing financial help to the needy or donating money to the shrine. The *adak* should be certainly fulfilled if and when their wish is granted (Canel-Çınarbaş et al. 2013: 18)

The sacred tombs are not only sources of blessings and healing but may likewise cause harm and misfortune if certain customary norms are not followed. Specific rules of conduct should be followed in their vicinity. For example, smoking and consuming alcoholic drinks, stealing and swearing, improper clothing and all sorts of infringements and damage to the tomb should be avoided. Those who do not adapt to these rules may, according to belief, cause misfortunes and disasters for themselves. Among Sunni Muslims, there are also religious norms and customs to be followed, such as ritual purity and women wearing headscarves. Also, there are specific passages of the Quran to be read at the tombs, such as *Fâtiha* (Quran 1: 1–7) and *Ihlâs* (Quran 112: 1–4), and often the visitation is combined with ritual prayer (*namaz*) in a mosque or at a tomb. (Atasağun 2006: 54–55)

The roots of the visitation phenomenon in Turkey may be traced back to the pre-Islamic past of the Türkmen tribes. However, the notion of the direct connection between the visitation of tombs and the cult of ancestors (*atarlar kültü*) is still under discussion (Kıyak 2012: 166; Günay 2003: 30–31). Still, the reverence and great esteem towards ancestors and hope for the help of their forefathers' souls in dangers and difficulties among old Türks is well known. Wishes were expected to be fulfilled by the ancestors' souls, especially the souls of the shamans (*kam*) to whom sacrifices and bloodless offerings were brought (Yörükkan 2014: 35). In addition to the veneration of forefathers, the old Türks revered boulders (*taş*), rocks (*kaya*), trees (*ağaç*), springs (*pınar*), lakes (*göl*) and mountains (*dağ*) in the framework of the earth-water (*yer-su*) belief system (Kıyak 2012: 165–166). Hacıbektaş is one of the good examples of how different pre-Islamic cults have been adopted and practiced in connection to the veneration of Hacı Bektaş Veli.

Continuous contacts with other religions such as Shamanism, Manichaeism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam contributed to the exchange of concepts and ideas and the eventual conversion of the Turkish tribes to Islam since the 10th century, a process that lasted at least until the 14th century (Günay 2003: 30). The veneration of sacred Islamic tombs reached Anatolia together with migrating semi-nomadic Turkish tribes, who had incorporated the pre-Islamic cult of forefathers (*atarlar kültü*) into their new religion (Oymak 2010: 202). The emergence of local sacred Islamic tombs happened after the battle of Manzikert (1071) during the process of Turkification and Islamisation of Anatolia, which produced numerous martyrs of faith (*şehit*) as well as learned men (*alim*) and Sufi saints (*veli*)³⁶ who had taken over the role spiritual mediators from shamans (Güvenç 1997: 102). During this period, the Sufi dervishes known as the saints of Horasan (*Horasan*

³⁶ There are also earlier sacred Islamic tombs in Turkey such as the tomb of Ebu Eyyûb el-Ensari (Istanbul), a companion of the Prophet.

erenleri) who reached Anatolia with the Türkmen migration especially stood out with their activity in making disciples and working miracles. The tombs of these martyrs and miracle-working saints became objects of reverence as they were associated with the same miraculous power these persons used to possess during their lifetime. Also, revering natural objects, such as hills, mountains, stones, waters, etc., in the vicinity of tombs and beyond continued as part of lived Islam. These objects were incorporated into a new belief system through legends and stories connected to Islamic personages. The spread of the saintly stories and legends (*velâyetnâme*, *menkıbnâme*), such as those of Hacı Bektaş Veli discussed above, contributed to the expansion of the cult of saints (Kıyak 2012: 165–166).

4.2.2 Alevi visitation unveiled

4.2.2.1 Visitation as an act of knowledge, faith, and love

Josef W. Meri has said, ‘pilgrimage is a drama, pilgrimage sites are the stage upon which it is enacted, saints and their devotees are the *dramatis personae*, and God is the director’ (Meri 2002: 120). The following subsections unveil the ‘drama of pilgrimage’, as the Alevis imagine and live it. The meaning of *ziyaret*, Alevi and Sunni places of worship (namely *türbes* and mosques) and some striking aspects of visitation will be discussed from the Alevi perspective. The circumstances, aims, and outcomes of the visitation to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli will be focused on. Also, since visitations to the tombs of saints in general and the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli in particular are charged with expectations and hopes to be fulfilled, I highlight the meaning given to the visitation and ritual acts during the visitation. Whether personal or communal, my approach to visitation is a devotional act aiming to achieve spiritual fulfilment, healing, protection, etc., through prayer, supplication, and contemplation.

Hugh McLeod has shown that ‘there are major differences between those pilgrimages where the destination is all-important, and the journey and mode of travel are of minor significance and those, where this order of priorities is reversed’ (McLeod 2012: 188). As a result of my fieldwork in Buca and Hacıbektaş, it can be said that Alevis do not attach importance to the mode of travel and the method of reaching sacred places. Whether on foot, if the destination is nearby, or by plane, private car, or public transport – the means of arrival is not the focus of the visitation. No one of the interviewees reached the sacred destinations on foot in order to include the walking journey as a purposeful part of their visitation. Walking is used to visit nearby sacred objects in the villages as a practical way of movement. On the other hand, the sacred destination plays a significant role as the ‘all-important destination’. For this reason, the mode of travel is not considered of interest during this discussion and will not be focused on. McLeod has also distinguished between ‘those pilgrimages which serve primarily as an expression of collective identity and those where each pilgrim is essentially making the journey on their own and for their reasons’ (McLeod 2012: 188). As I show below, collective participation in spontaneous common meals and sacrifices is integral to

Alevi visitation, contributing to the sense of belonging. Organised memorial festivals at the tombs of saints, on the other hand, certainly provide another opportunity for collective identity expression. Moreover, visiting in groups, whether as a family or in an association, is practical and secure. However, individual visitations with particular aims, such as giving vows for urgent needs, praying for blessings, peace of mind or just for the sake of veneration, are represented in the villages or local environment where the visitation can be done on foot.

In most cases, the private and collective mode of visitation is intermingled as the long journeys are rarely undertaken alone. A visitor, accompanied by family members, friends or fellow Alevis from an association, is the most common type of Alevi visitor. However, this is not an obstacle to personal prayers and experiences. Personal wishes and needs are presented to the saint during joint visitations and often together by supporting each other. Regarding collectivity, I caused surprise and amusement among co-visitors as I arrived at Hacібektaş on my own from a faraway land without any companion as the journey was long and full of unpredictabilities.³⁷

In the Alevi vernacular religion, visiting a tomb (*mezar*) or a mausoleum (*türbe*) of a saint and natural sacred places connected to saints stand at the centre of personal and communal religiosity. Whilst in the Sunni vernacular religiosity visitations and prayers at tombs are seen as an alternative to the Hajj and mosques, the Alevi vernacular religion elevates sacred tombs to the centre of religious affiliation. From the example of Baskil (Elazığ), it can be noted that, generally, Sunni interviewees³⁸ do not see a significant difference between visiting a mosque or a sacred tomb in the spiritual sense, as both are considered places of worship (Tan 2020: 406). The Alevis, on the other hand, prefer visiting the tombs and neglect mosques as well as conducting normative rituals or reciting the Qur'an in Arabic at the tombs.³⁹ As noted during the fieldwork in Buca, visitation to sacred tombs is seen as an unconditional and central part of the Alevi belief system, not an alternative or a parallel tradition to 'mainstream' Islam, as it is not recognized by the interviewees. However, despite different understandings about approaching the sacred tombs and their role in religious life, there are also many commonalities among Alevis and Sunnis in aims and rituals such as lighting candles, circumnavigating and touching tombs. Also, as is seen in the work of Fevzi Rençber (2014) conducted in Adiyaman, there are common sacred tombs visited

³⁷ Fieldwork notes 16.08.2018.

³⁸ Although the author of this research did not distinguish religious identities and thus it is not noted whether the 24 informants were of Sunni or Alevi background, I presume that they are predominantly Sunnis. The reason for this is that there are only three Alevi villages out of 60 in Baskil (<https://www.nufusune.com/baskil-mahalleleri-koyleri-elazig>, <https://www.alevihaber.com/elazig-baskil-alevi-koyleri-42608h.htm>)

³⁹ There are differences and discrepancies between *ocaks*, regions and single persons about religious attitudes and rituals. Generally speaking, Alevis do not follow normative Islamic rituals such as ablution, *namaz* or Hajj as pillars of faith. However, there are differences between specific *ocak* communities and regions that can be researched through focused case studies.

by both groups. I noted during my fieldwork that the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is visited and revered by both Sunnis and Alevi. Still, there are sacred tombs visited only by Alevi and are considered particularly Alevi sacred places (Rençber 2014: 211–213).

Praying and worshipping at the tombs is not seen as a form of idolatry⁴⁰ by Alevi. The informants argue that they don't pray to the saint but in his name (*yüzü suyu hürmetine*), for the sake of the memory (*hatırasına*) or beauty (*güzelliğine*) of the saint, and through the mediation (*vasıtasıyla*) of the saint to God, who is the only source of all blessings (*bereket*). The saint is seen as a perfect man reaching unity with God, a locus of divine mercy and a mediator of benefaction. The tombs are believed to continually possess God-given miracle-working power (*keramet*) which the saints used to have during their lifetimes. A young *talip* who has visited the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli sees the miracle (*keramet*) as a result of connecting the energy deriving from the tomb with the visitor's intentions and faith: 'If the holiness of the tomb and your intentions, your true will, meet with each other, the miracle is possible. I can't break the rules of nature just by myself; I need help. A miracle is such a thing...I have to believe and feel! I have to do my part.'⁴¹ Physical and spiritual nearness to a tomb through rituals and prayers by a needy person is believed to bring about the desired result.

In the imagination of the respondents in Buca, there are 'countless' *ziyarets* or places of visitation among other tombs of saints⁴² across Turkey visited and revered by the Alevi population. This imagination points to an understanding of the land of Anatolia as a land of saints and saintliness. Some of the saints are known locally, such as Höbek Baba and Oğulveren⁴³ in Erzincan and Tercan, whilst some are known across the country, such as Abdal Musa in Antalya, Elmalı and Hamza Baba in İzmir, Kemalpaşa and, most of all, Hacı Bektaş Veli in Nevşehir, Hacıbektaş. Visitations of the tombs of the saints remain an essential part of Alevi religiosity also among migrants living abroad in the diaspora, who visit the tombs of saints of their home villages as a natural part of their holidays.⁴⁴

As mentioned above, the concept of *ziyaret* in Islam includes voluntary elements as an act that is not demanded by religious rules. However, the *ziyaret* may become a personal religious obligation through a vow (*adak*) taken in the name of a saint. A vow to visit a saint's tomb or to sacrifice at the saint's tomb may be given for different reasons, mostly for health and success in personal life or business. In his book *Hakk Muhammed Ali Aşkı: Adıyaman Alevîleri*, Fevzi Rençber analyses, among others, the phenomenon of *adak* and shows that if the promise is not fulfilled after the wishes have been realized, it is believed that the blessing

⁴⁰ Worshipping at the tombs of saints has been condemned as a form of idolatry by numerous Islamic scholars, among others Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhâb (d. 1792).

⁴¹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

⁴² Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁴³ Literally 'the one giving a son' in Turkish.

⁴⁴ Fieldwork notes at Oğulveren (Erzincan, Tercan 05.09.2019) and Düzgün Baba (Tunceli, Nazımiye 07.09.2019).

received may be lost. Also, not fulfilling a given vow may cause mistrust towards the person as he or she is considered sinful for not keeping the promise (Rençber 2014: 117).

Alevi respondents living in Buca consider *adak* a very strong and powerful method of commitment which must be very well considered. The word *adak* is mainly referred to as an animal sacrifice, a costly means. The tomb's location is also considered as traveling is another financial outlay. All those considerations lead Alevis to give vows in the name of local saints as their fulfilment is more feasible. In this context, the popularity of the tomb of Hamza Baba, a disciple of Hacı Bektaş Veli, in Izmir province is understandable. Interestingly enough, some *dedes* who have visited the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli never gave a personal vow of sacrifice there but preferred Hamza Baba, since not being able to fulfil the vow given in the name of the saint of saints may have more significant negative consequences. One *talip* narrated how she failed to fulfil her vow for 5–6 years, which was a big burden for the whole family, which made her seriously consider whether to make a new vow during her visitation to Hacıbektaş.⁴⁵

Since the human being has a central importance in Alevism as a reflection of God (de Jong 1989: 9), the rituals' aim is seen to lift the human soul to its original state in unity with God, not to follow traditional religious rules. According to the belief shared by the Alevi *dedes* in Buca, God is present in all creation, especially in the human being, through love.⁴⁶ I was told many times by the *dedes* about the importance of knowing the essence of oneself and every human being, who all have the potential for perfection because of God's presence in them. A saying attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli, 'Whatever you're searching for, search in yourself; it's neither in Jerusalem nor Mecca, nor on the Hajj,' illustrates this attitude of human potential to be discovered. *Dede* Hüseyin Akçay emphasizes the notion of human beings as the Kaaba (*Kâbe*): 'Our Kaaba is human; God is in every human. Alevis believe that God manifests himself in humans. We say, "Whatever you are searching for, search for in a human."⁴⁷ Another *dede* confirms this understanding by saying, 'Love is our religion, and the human is our Kaaba. We can pray to God everywhere, every time, and every way. You can put your hand on your heart Kaaba and ask whatever you need from God.'⁴⁸ Comparing the human being with the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest physical object in the world for Muslims, leads us to see the Alevi concept of God in humans. This comparison shows the importance of all humans, both men and women, in Alevi spirituality. However, even though the potential to achieve the state of spiritual maturity and perfection is found in every human, not everybody can reach it. The ones who do are characterized by spiritual maturity, justice, knowledge and miracles (*keramet*). These ideal characteristics are fully represented in Hacı Bektaş Veli as the perfect

⁴⁵ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

⁴⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

man (*insan-i kâmil*) and saint of saints (*serçeşme*) and transmitted through his hagiography. His posthumous miracles have testified to his saintly character. For these reasons, his tomb is primarily attributed to miracle-working power accessible to those who reach out in faith.⁴⁹

The tombs of saints possessing *keramet* are out there, but to benefit from them is a matter of love, knowledge and faith. An example is the story of the tomb of Oğulveren in Tercan, narrated by two *talips*⁵⁰. According to the story, there was a man who wished to have a son. Reaching the village, he visited a tomb he thought to be the saint's tomb and gave his vows there. After his wish came true and he became a father, he returned to the tomb in order to fulfil his vow of sacrifice. Now he was told that the saint's tomb was on the hilltop, not where he had been praying. However, he stayed faithful to the 'wrong' tomb, gave his sacrifices there, and later on, the tomb became known as a locus for visitation. This popular story reinforces the notion of the (re) discovery of saints' tombs as described by Josef Meri in his *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria*. Whilst medieval Muslims were possessed with the wish to discover the tombs of well-known prophets such as Daniel (2002: 127), Alevis emphasize the saint's descent from the Prophet Muhammad and proximity to God manifesting in *keramet*. There are also examples of rediscovering the tombs of the hearths (*ocak*) forefathers, such as the tomb of Seyyid Cemal Sultan in Afyonkarahisar researched by Carolina Tee (2010). However, there are cases when the saint's identity may remain unknown; the importance lies in the miracle-making power, which is proof of God's proximity to the buried person, such as Oğulveren in Tercan, Erzincan.

In the villages, the relationships with the sacred tombs were part of daily life as it was a natural way to start a day by lifting eyes towards the resting place of a local saint and asking for his favor for the works to be done. In urban conditions, such immediate connections with saints' tombs are hindered by long distances that are sometimes exceeded by sacred substances such as pebbles or soil (*teberik*) gathered from the vicinity of the tombs. The use of the *teberiks* will be discussed in a subsection below.

4.2.2.2 Türbe: space and place in Alevi imagination

According to the findings of the fieldwork in Buca, the tombs of saints are a 'necessity' and a fundamental part of Alevism; without which, there would be no Alevism.⁵¹ The tombs act as reminders of the history of God's miraculous interventions in Anatolia and beyond. The tombs of saints are connected to the stories of families and communities, thus also forming part of personal histories. These eternal dwellings are powerful places for healing, prayer and wishes,⁵²

⁴⁹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

⁵⁰ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019; F37-17, 27.03.2019.

⁵¹ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁵² Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

where God helps people through his favoured saints.⁵³ As the saints are seen as intimates and friends of God, approaching the tomb of a saint is seen as approaching God.⁵⁴ It is believed that every miracle (*keramet*) is possible when the sanctity of the tomb and the will of the visitor meet and agree.⁵⁵ The tombs are also locations for honouring the memory of saints (*veli, evliya, eren*), of whom many are forefathers of the hearths (*ocak*).

As mentioned above, visiting the sacred tombs used to be part of the daily lives of the interviewees whilst living in villages. Moving to urban areas has prevented this practice from continuing as before. This, in turn, has led to spiritual anxiety and even identity crises, especially among youth, who described the local tombs as ‘safe havens in troubles’ and as places ‘where you can always turn to’. As there are no such tombs in the city of Izmir, the tomb of Hamza Baba, known as one of the 360 apostles (*halife*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli and which can be visited within a day, has become a popular destination for *ziyaret* for the Alevi living in Buca. However, the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli as the saint of saints (*pirler piri*), has captured a central position among the countless sacred tombs of Anatolia.

The sites of the tombs are often located on a hill (Oğulveren, Düzgün Baba), in the vicinity of a river or springs (Abdal Musa), surrounded by large trees, boulders and caves (Hacı Bektaş Veli) that are also considered sacred due to their relationship with the saints, which refers to the pre-Islamic origin of this religious system (*inanç sistemi*). Adopting pre-Islamic beliefs and ritual customs to an Islamic tradition is nevertheless seen as a contradiction by the Alevi *dedes* and the *talips* alike. *Dede Hüseyin A* notes that

Our religion is Islam, but about fifty percent of our worship rituals are connected with Shamanism. For example, the veneration of high hills, also lighting candles in nature, veneration of large trees such as plane trees, heaven, Moon, light... as it goes in our lyrics – Ali is the Moon, and Muhammed is the Sun. This belief has reached us from the generations... In the end, our forefathers accepted Islam.⁵⁶

Giving the objects of veneration and ritualistic behaviour Islamic meanings through a mystical approach has been a tool for adapting pre-Islamic practices under Alevi Islamic tradition. In this manner, the cult of the saints’ tombs is seen as an integral part of *the correct* Islam, which does not contradict its teachings and principles.

In the following, I point to the main ideas and functions associated with the tombs of the saints through the interviewees’ words. One of the main ideas they expressed was understanding the sacred tomb as a central arena for practicing religion and reaching spiritual fulfilment. Emphasizing the importance and central role of saints’ tombs in Alevism, *dede A* referred to numerous essential aspects of the issue:

⁵³ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

⁵⁴ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁵⁵ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

⁵⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

The tomb in Alevism...we must acknowledge that the tomb is a necessary part of Alevism! The absolute of Alevism. Why? We believe in the energy of the saints who lived before us, who are not dead but changed their appearance (*don değiřmek*). And the tombs are the places where the saints are still present. Visiting the tombs shows the spirituality of the people. There you get rid of the fatigue of the world, leave everything aside and meet with saints (*eren*) who draw you out of disturbances. It reminds us that we should calm down altogether, be more humane and love people. The tomb is in the centre of Alevism! I'm saying it in terms of the history of this belief in Anatolia; the tombs are points of blooming, the hearths. Still today, our Kureyřan hearth (*ocak*) is visiting the tombs of our elders (*dede*). I see the tombs as starting points. Everyone needs a reset; get out of all this hustle and bustle, remember what is essential, to see life from a distance. It's a precious place.⁵⁷

This selected section indicates the tombs of saints as depositories of spiritual power (*güç*) or energy (*enerji*) deriving from the buried saints. In addition to the religious dimension, the saints' tombs act as moral guardians reminding the visitor of the proper standards of conduct based on love and indicating the need to step out of daily routines in order to achieve peace of mind. It becomes clear again that visiting the tombs is seen as a sign of faith and hope connected to Alevi spirituality and identity. The tomb stands in the centre of Alevism as a religious, cultural and social meeting point connected to religious authority, namely the sacred bloodlines and their living representatives, the *dedes*. Referring to the long history of tombs' veneration in Anatolia, *dede A* legitimizes the tradition, which should be continued, not ridiculed or reduced.

A young female informant expresses similar ideas about the importance of the saints' tombs as places for socialization and centres of religious ritual for the Alevis:

I visit the shrines often because touching the places and praying there gives me spiritual satisfaction. We worship, do some rituals, and submit ourselves there. It has a distinct atmosphere there. It is necessary in terms of keeping my faith alive...The tombs are very important in Alevism. We share baked food (*lokma*), such as bread there with each other. Also, animals are slaughtered, cooked and shared with people who are present. This tradition is ending, I'm afraid, the new generation is not fond of those things anymore. But I don't want it to end because sharing food is a sacred condition for being together as one. To fulfil your intention (*niyet*), you have the food (*lokma*) as a tool there.⁵⁸

The concern about Alevi traditions being left out of the interest of the younger generation and forgotten was often mentioned by both older and younger informants. In this case, the common meals and sharing of food (*lokma*) as uniting rituals at the tombs of saints are under question. Food sharing is also common

⁵⁷ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁵⁸ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

during *cem*, *sohbet* and other gatherings taking place in the *cemevis* or homes, but the tombs of saints may be connected with a particular intention (*niyet*) or vow (*adak*) made by an Alevi in order to reach solutions for his or her needs. The fulfilment of intentions and vows is an important part of personal religious life that is often related to the community and its unity.

Another young female Alevi expressed her intimate relationship with the tomb of the saint of her home village. The tomb was the only religious gathering place she knew before migrating to Izmir with her family:

We have a sitting place at the tomb. We used to go there, sit there, talk and share our troubles. We live our Alevi spirituality and our culture by gathering at the tombs where the Qur'an is read, and the pictures of the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Mevlânâ, Yunus Emre are present. The tombs are, for this reason, very important! This is how we did it in the village. This is the place for prayer, candles and sharing food (*lokma*).⁵⁹

The cultural aspect is often synonymous with religion in the interviewees' narratives, as the border between the two is vague and imperceptible. Socialization in a friendly atmosphere by sharing food, stories and knowledge at the tomb of a saint goes in line with the Alevi understanding of spiritual unity. Since no such tombs are in the vicinity of Buca, this kind of socialization has moved to different places such as homes and the *cemevi*. However, she expressed her longing in the urban environment for such habitual conduct she grew up with by seeking and achieving peace and spiritual fulfilment at the tomb. 'The tomb is...how to say, like a place where you are carried away to Nirvana. I'm pouring out myself there; I feel deep peace there. But here, I don't have such a place; there is no tomb here.'⁶⁰ The lack of tombs of saints in the urban environment has led her to spiritual confusion and even identity crises, which shows the centrality of the saint's tomb during her life in the village. There is another example of the centrality of the saint's tomb in the village's everyday life. 'I have two tombs about my house in the village, one is a little further above the other. When I stepped out of the house, I saw the tomb from a distance. Since my childhood, I have always prayed towards it before leaving home. I miss it a lot.'⁶¹

The tombs and their surroundings are testimonials of God's miraculous deeds that he has accomplished through his chosen intimates in the past. Since the miracles were performed under the eyes of and for the help of the forefathers of the interviewees, the tombs of the miracle-working saints are perceived to be part of not only the Alevi sacred history in general but also family stories in particular. As such, they should be given due respect and attention. The tombs of saints are also a guarantee for resilience in the future if they are not abandoned but continually respected.

⁵⁹ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

The tombs are our history! If you don't care about your history and identity, foreigners will do it because they value our culture. It is a valuable treasure. We have to value these places and our culture, not deny their value, because these are our cornerstones.⁶²

The reference to 'the others' taking over the holy places is grounded in the example of Hacı Bektaş Veli's tomb, which was taken over by the Naqshbandi order in 1826 by the decree of Mahmud II and later closed to visitations between 1925–1964 (Kızılkaya 2019: 14; Dressler 2008: 25). The reopening of the place for the public as a museum in 1964 is, in general, respected, as it is seen as the state's due attention to spiritual values. The opening of the mausoleum aroused great interest among visitors of different backgrounds. Whether the visits are religiously motivated or not, the Alevis consider this as a positive development as, in this way, knowledge about the saint may spread. Visits of domestic and foreign tourists are perceived as seekers' attempts to *see and understand*.⁶³

Considering the saints as alive, not dead by the Alevis is very well illustrated in the fact that some families choose them as *kirve*⁶⁴ for their children: 'I have two sons, and both of them have the tomb of Oğulveren as their *kirve*. We are devoted there; we slaughter our sacrifices there on behalf of our children.'⁶⁵ The *kirve* is usually chosen among very close and trusted persons to the family insofar as far as they are supposed to support the child in the possible difficulties of life. Also, they are witnesses of the confession of faith performed through circumcision (Tur 2012: 748–751). Choosing a tomb of a saint as *kirve* for children shows a deep trust and faith in the saint and his miracle-working character to protect and guide children through life. It is also a means for linking the new generation to the beliefs and traditions of their forefathers.

Although there are numerous local shrines across Anatolia that are venerated and visited by the Alevis, none of them has gained such importance and popularity as the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli in Nevşehir. Reopening the *dergâh* of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a museum allowed Alevis to visit the saint's tomb after many decades. However, in the eyes of the Alevis, who also enjoy visiting the museum's facilities and learning about life and conditions of the time through the exposition, it is not a museum but, first of all, a *dergâh*, where the saint and his companions used to dwell. The dwellings, assembly rooms, furniture, and utensils are seen as a locus of sacred happenings known in the stories of the *Velâyetnâme*. The lodge (*dergâh*) and mausoleum (*türbe*) of Hacı Bektaş Veli are, first and foremost, holy places (*kutsal yer*). None of the informants referred to them as a museum. A young male informant expressed his feelings about the place. 'For me, it is a holy

⁶² Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

⁶³ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

⁶⁴ Traditionally a person standing beside the child in the process of circumcision. In later life, he is expected to take care of the child if necessary and help when needed.

⁶⁵ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

place. I don't accept the word "museum" for it, that is what I say!⁶⁶ It is also seen as 'our place' (*kendi mekanımız*) that is not 'in our hands'.⁶⁷ No one called the lodge a museum or said they visited a museum while in Hacibektaş. Rather, the visit to Hacibektaş was expressed as visiting 'the Pir's lodge' (*Pir'in dergâhına gitmek*) or 'visiting the Pir' (*Pir'in huzuruna gitmek*). The dichotomy between the notion of the museum and sacred space was aroused particularly in connection with the opening hours and the entrance fee. Being able to enter the sacred area for limited hours and activities is against the notion of the character of the ever-welcoming saint. *Dede A* finds that 'The gates of the dergâh should always be open for the people in need, also during nights. I wish for the cauldron to boil and the people to eat as they used to in the old days.'⁶⁸ Entering the museum with ticket was only one side of the coin at the time. Those who headed to the mosque in the museum territory for prayer, namely the Sunnis, did not have to pay for the ticket. The Alevis, whose visit was also religiously motivated, were not exempt from payment. The state took a position to decide on correct religious behaviour, which led to feelings of discrimination. The situation changed in 2014 when the entrance fee to the Museum of Hacibektaş was removed.⁶⁹

4.2.2.3 Mosque next to the tomb

As seen above, the contradiction between the two places of worship – mosques and *cemevis* – is one of the main questions of discussions between Sunnis and Alevis in Turkey. However, before the *cemevis* were built, the Alevis attended religious gatherings in the houses of their *dedes* or sacred places such as tombs. In rural areas, such as Tunceli, the Alevis still maintain their traditional worship practices and prefer going to *ziyarets* rather than the *cemevi* (Orhan 2019: 205). Worshiping in the *cemevis* or at the tombs of saints, together with the beliefs and rituals that accompany them, is not recognized as part of orthodox Islam. This is one of the reasons why 'Alevis are marked in the traditional apologetic discourse of Islam as heretics, bearers of a distinct "traditional culture", the practices and beliefs of which are understood to be outside of "the common share" of Islam' (Dressler 2015: 4).

Othering based on personal religious and cultural identity is experienced across the land; it was also detected during my fieldwork in Buca. We can also see it, for instance, in the findings of the study of Uyanık and Kala (2012) in Ardahan, the northeastern part of Turkey, where the main problems faced by the Alevis are inequality and alienation based on being an Alevi (Uyanık and Kala 2012: 124). Since Alevis are not trusted in personal and national matters by Sunnis, assimilation and integration politics are implemented by the state governed by

⁶⁶ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁶⁷ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The entrance fee was canceled also for the museum of Mevlânâ in Konya in 2014 (Yanardağ 2014).

the Sunni majority. Constructing mosques in Alevi areas as one of the tools of Sunnification of the Alevi population since the Ottoman era has increased since the 1980s (Aydın 2018: 17). This attempt has, in turn, caused Alevis to become increasingly alienated from Sunni institutions in order to protect and preserve their Alevi identity (Uyanık and Kala 2012: 117).

Since the first decades of this century, there have been projects initiated by the government and Sunni religious foundations of building joint worship complexes, including a mosque and a *cemevi*, offices for both *dede* and imam in order to bring the two camps closer together (Orhan 2019: 197). The mosque in the territory of the *dergâh* was conceived by its initiators as an example of a common site for worship. The current head (*postnişin*) of the Hacı Bektaş Veli lodge, Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy, opposed the idea as an attempt at assimilation without paying attention to the rights of the Alevis. Using the mosque of the *dergâh* as an example of a reconciliation centre rooted in history also finds criticism from Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy:

They say there is a mosque in the *dergâh*, next to the tomb. The Cemevi and Mosque Project has nothing to do with it. That mosque, built in 1834, is unrelated to us. Our lodge (*dergâh*) has existed since the 1300s, and having a mosque built in our lodge after 500 years is aimed at assimilation. In other words, it is a mosque built by force next to our saint of saints (*Serçeşme*).⁷⁰

Such criticism about the mosque's building projects in general and the one in the lodge of Hacı Bektaş Veli, in particular, is echoed back throughout the Alevi community across Turkey,⁷¹ including in the generally described in the introduction of this thesis, I highlight some particular aspects that are directly related to the opinion of the Alevis living in Buca. In this subsection, I analyse the attitudes and understandings about the question in general and by the example of the mosque built in the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex in 1834.⁷²

Not only do Sunni Muslims worship in the mosques, but there is a population of Twelver Shi'ites, known as *Caferi* in Turkey, who attend mosques for prayer. Like Sunni Muslims, the *Caferis* also involve themselves in missionary activities to convert the Alevi population to Twelver Shi'ism by offering education in Iranian seminaries and constructing mosques in the Alevi areas. One example is the building of a *Caferi* mosque called the *Ehl-i Beyt Cami* in Çorum. (Yeler 2010: 335, 337) Would it be Sunnis or Twelvers behind a mosque building

⁷⁰ See the interview with Veliyettin Hürrem Ulusoy by Deniz Güneş (Güneş 2013). See more about the Ulusoy family and their role as spokespersons for the Alevi cause in 'The transformation of the sacred authority of the Çelebis: the Ulusoy family in contemporary Turkey' by Yıkılmış (2022).

⁷¹ Notes of fieldwork observations and conversations in Erzincan (Tercan) on the 5–6 September 2019 and Tunceli (Nazımiye) 7 September 2019.

⁷² The mosque was built after 1826 by the order of Mahmut II who expelled the *Yeniçeri* troops that were closely related with the Bektashi *babas* and the complex was handed over to the Naqshbandi order of dervishes (Kızılkaya 2019: 14).

project, the situation is seen as implementing an innovation that was not there by the time of the Prophet and thus not inherent to the Alevi belief system.

There are religious, cultural and political reasons for the Alevi to be alienated from the mosque as such, and often these reasons are intermingled. One of the reasons for Alevi neglecting the mosque is rooted in the example of Imam Ali, who, according to the belief of most of the informants, did not pray in mosques. However, according to Sunni and Shi'a Islamic sources, Ali was assassinated in the mosque of Kufa during morning prayer.⁷³ Most informants referred to this view as groundless since Ali, according to their belief, did not pray in the mosque but in the *mescit*.⁷⁴ By distancing themselves from this narrative, the Alevi also distance themselves from 'orthodox' concepts regarding prayer in general. At the same time, this approach legitimizes the Alevi's position of not visiting mosques from the perspective of following Ali's example – not because he was killed in a mosque but because it was not his habit to pray in one. *Dede C* explains the context of the argumentation as follows:

Alevism is facing a severe problem of assimilation. There are two big lies used in this process – the first lie is about the murder of Ali in a mosque, and the second is the building of a mosque in the Hacı Bektaş Veli lodge (*dergâh*). You see a mosque there and think Alevi perform ritual prayer (*namaz*). It is very confusing. For example, they say that Ali was killed in a mosque. So why do Alevi not visit mosques if Ali did? Their objective is to get Alevi into mosques. The story would end there if I took my family to a mosque. Because they would adapt to the teachings, they hear in the mosque. They would teach them ritual cleaning with the water (*abdest*), but never to search within oneself. They make people occupied with the outer purity, but never with the inside.⁷⁵

The question of the place of Ali's attack seems to carry a fundamental meaning legitimizing the reasons for avoiding mosques among Alevi. Following the reputed example of Ali rather than the customs of the Sunni and Shi'a Muslims is in question. In addition, fear of assimilation and Sunnification through the mosques is another course of this attitude of repulsion. On the one hand, religious authority related to the holy bloodlines prevents the recognition of mosque imams as spiritual leaders and their teaching as legitimate. On the other hand, the feeling of being under constant attempts at Sunnification causes uncertainty and concern. Last but not least, the essential difference between the two Islamic belief systems

⁷³ It is accepted by the Sunni Muslims that Ali was assassinated in the mosque of Kufa during prayer. According to the online Encyclopedia of Islam by *Diyanet*, Ali was attacked by an extremist Kharijite with a poisoned sword, while attending the morning prayer in the grand mosque of Kufa (Fığlalı). The Twelvers of Iran also accept the same version (Al-Tijani 2000: 365) of the event. However, there is also a version of Ali's assassination at the entrance of the Kufa mosque, not inside it (Waines 2003: 211), and this is also largely accepted by the interviewees in Buca.

⁷⁴ A smaller mosque or a prayer room that is not used for the Friday prayers.

⁷⁵ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

expressed in the different understandings of ritual and spiritual knowledge is frequently highlighted by the interviewees as an obstacle to mutual consent. A female informant argued according to the same logic about the outer and inner dimensions of purity:

Prayer does not have a specific place. It is more acceptable in the natural environment. Is there any time or place for prayer? Is that reasonable? Would it be in the mosque? Inner cleanliness is essential; you can clean your body from the outside as much as you want...and then you worship? You have to clean your thoughts and heart, isn't that so? I think that time and place are not crucial.⁷⁶

There are other popular versions concerning the death of Ali and why Alevi do not visit mosques:

As far as I know, Alevi do not enter mosques because pictures of Ali were put at the entrance of the mosque after his assassination, so people would step on them upon entering it. Of course, I do not know how true this is, as there was no Alevism and Sunnism when Ali was killed.⁷⁷

Such stories offer some explanation about the question for Alevi themselves. However, there is a note of doubt in this young man's mind as he is not sure about the truthfulness of the story. He also regards praying at the mosques as suitable for an Alevi as it is, first of all, an Islamic tradition.⁷⁸

The question of the proximity of mosques and the state finds frequent mention in the interviews. Mosques in Turkey serve not only as religious but also as state institutions promoting the Sunni interpretation of Islam and related political movements (Shankland 2003: 63–64). Consequently, the mosque is seen as a representative of the state. The idea of the repressive Sunni state or ruler has deep roots in the Alevi cultural memory. Stories about the martyrdom of the Imams and later leaders of *Ehl-i Beyt* under the Sunni governance, as well as the bloody events in Maraş (1978), Sivas (1993) and Gazi (1995), narrated during the *cem* and *sohbet* gatherings and other occasions, enable the feeling of reluctance to continue. From this perspective, building mosques in Alevi areas, not to mention Alevi sacred places, is seen as repressive and unacceptable. However, as seen in the first part of this dissertation, there are also examples among the Alevi of positive and even supportive attitudes towards the question of mosques. Still, these examples are in the minority as the majority's view about the issue is univocally objectionable, especially regarding Alevi areas.

As seen, the exclusion of the mosque from Alevi culture is explained for different reasons. The argument about the mosque as a later innovation, which

⁷⁶ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

⁷⁷ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

was not there at the time of the Prophet, makes it foreign to the Alevi culture.⁷⁹ The mosque is seen as a representative of Arab culture, which is not typical of Alevi.⁸⁰ Insofar as the Alevi path is perceived to carry the original concepts of faith through the holy bloodlines, there cannot be any error in knowledge and customs. The original places of worship of the Alevi lay in nature and at the tombs. ‘The tombs were places of worship before the mosques. The tombs are places of supplication (*niyaz*).’⁸¹ Just as mosques are not associated with the Prophet and Ali, they are not associated with Hacı Bektaş Veli.

The presence of a mosque in an Alevi sacred place creates different feelings about the matter. Most of the interviewees who visited the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex did not enter the mosque and consciously avoided it. This was not always because of a negative view of the mosque in general but because of the ‘wrong’ and ‘unsuitable’ location of the building within the *dergâh*. In rhetoric, the *dedes* and the *talips* respect all religions and their ways of worship, and in return, they also expect to be respected. This particular mosque at the lodge of Hacı Bektaş Veli is perceived as a lack of respect and even insult (*hakaret*)⁸² by Sunnis towards Alevi. *Dede C* denied the fact about the mosque’s presence at the beginning of our conversation. Later, he said, ‘This mosque will fall over soon as there are some cracks on the walls already...’⁸³ An *ocakzade* noted that the mosque was built by the sons of Yezit in order to tease Alevi.⁸⁴

Reluctance towards the mosque is primarily related to its inappropriate location and disregard for the will of the Alevi community. However, the relevance of mosques for the Sunnis, in general, is accepted but seen as mostly irrelevant for Alevi. One of the informants concluded, ‘Obviously, this mosque was built for Sunni citizens as they also visit the place.’⁸⁵ Whereas this site is seen as a sacred locus by itself, independent of visitors, whether Alevi or Sunni, changes may take place anyway. For example, Sunnis may be changed in their attitudes and beliefs by the power of the *dergâh* while stepping on its territory. In popular narratives, the members of the Sunni Naqshbandi order, who took over the place after 1826, voluntarily converted to Alevism, as transmitted by *dede Hüseyin Akçay*: ‘The Naqshbandis converted to Alevism in this sacred atmosphere of the *dergâh* and didn’t enter the mosque for prayer despite imposing (of the state).’⁸⁶ The agency of the sacred atmosphere of the *dergâh* and its miraculous power of change in the surroundings of the sacred tomb of the saint is seen as

⁷⁹ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁸⁰ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019.

⁸¹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

⁸² Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

⁸³ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁸⁴ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

⁸⁵ Interview M63-21, 20.03.2019.

⁸⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

independent of people's religious and social belongings. This means it is open and welcoming to every sincere approach, regardless of background.

One of the *talips*, who had dwelled in Hacıbektaş for a more extended period due to her studies at a local university, has visited the *dergâh* numerous times. However, she never entered the mosque: 'The mosque doesn't have a place in my belief, so I never enter there.'⁸⁷ Another *talip* who visited the *dergâh* for one time expressed her great surprise at seeing the mosque there. 'Surely, it must be a later addition as there should be no mosque in a *dergâh* like this.'⁸⁸

As we have seen, there are religious, cultural and political reasons behind the reluctance of Alevi to attend mosques in Turkey. Whilst the mosque is regarded as a later innovation belonging to Arab culture, it is seen as distant from Alevi's understanding of life. Since most informants believe that Ali did not visit mosques for prayer, his example is regarded as necessary for spiritual life. Above all, since teaching and rituals are not conducted by the descendants of the Prophet in the mosques as required and customary in the Alevi belief system, it is not permissible (*caiz deđil*) to attend them, according to the teaching of the 6th Imam (Korkmaz 2013: 31). Hence, visiting mosques for religious purposes is not common with some exceptions among the interviewees. The lack of spiritual leaders belonging to the holy bloodlines in the mosques prevents Alevi from visiting them for counselling and guidance. Religious authority and transmittance of spiritual knowledge are acceptable only by *dedes* as representatives of the sacred lineages. According to this argument, various sorts of customary and ritual variations, such as the participation of women and the use of musical instruments and candles during gatherings, emerge as important differences. Also, because obtaining consent (*rıza*) between community members before proceeding with common rituals, whether in *cemevis* or the open air, is of utmost importance among the Alevi, it is problematic to attend prayers when it is not sought for. Also, in mosque's prayer context, the contrast between the inner and outer interpretation of things, especially the question of ritual purity compared with the heart's purity, is highlighted.

Mutual consent and high moral standards, vital for Alevi religious gatherings, are not associated with mosques. Political reasons for avoiding mosques are rooted in history. The building of the mosque in the Hacı Bektaş Veli *dergâh* is seen as one of the first attempts at assimilation initiated by the state in modern history. Consequently, the mosque has become a symbol of the Sunnification and assimilation of the Alevi population. These reasons cause the Alevi to avoid the mosque in the *dergâh* and elsewhere. However, the mosque is accepted and respected as an institution for the Sunni and *Caferi* populations by the Alevi, who expect to be respected in return for their religious traditions.

⁸⁷ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

⁸⁸ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

4.2.2.4 Three aspects of visitation

In this subsection, I highlight three aspects of visitation in Alevism – the question of ritual purity, the time of the visit, and the welcoming of non-Alevis to the sacred area. These three aspects were chosen as the most frequent issues raised by the interviewees. Alevis compare themselves and their religious understanding mostly with Sunnis, the local religious majority, due to their proximity in everyday life. To a lesser extent, this understanding is compared with *Caferis*, with whom the contacts have been more indirect and fragmented. Therefore, *ziyaret* to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is mainly compared with Sunni perspectives of the Hajj to Mecca.

Dede Hüseyin Akçay pointed out that visiting the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is the pilgrimage of Alevism. ‘The Alevis don’t perform their Hajj in Saudi Arabia but in Hacıbektaş. The destination of Hajj is there for Alevis...Our Kabe is a human being, and God is in the human being.’⁸⁹ However, a visit to Mecca is not excluded as a sacred destination. In some cases, it even ranks above Hacıbektaş as superior in importance. A *talip* said, ‘My late father used to say that three times to Hacıbektaş equals the Hajj. Our Sunni brothers go to Hajj and Umrah, but we go to Hacıbektaş. Some of us also go to Hajj.’⁹⁰ Even when Mecca and Hacıbektaş are compared in favour of the former through old sayings, Hacıbektaş remains ‘our place,’ whereas Mecca is seen as the destination of Sunnis.

In the context of prayer and supplication, the outward rituals characteristic of Sunni Islam, especially ablution, elicited a strong response among the interviewees. According to the Alevi respondents, purity is equated with the ‘purity of heart,’ which is connected to moral standards expressed as ‘control your tongue, hand and waist’.⁹¹ Since Alevism emphasizes high moral standards and righteous behaviour rather than ritual rules of purity, preparation for common religious gatherings and visitations to sacred places consequently includes an inner examination of oneself and relations with others. Ritual purification, as required by ‘orthodox’ Islam, is regarded as ‘pointless’ as it is only external and cannot reach the depths of the human soul.⁹² Performing only outer purification rituals is not enough, as purity is connected with morality and the community’s consent.⁹³ Occasionally, the comparison with Sunnis in this aspect is uncompromising and single-valued: ‘Religious belief (*dini inanç*) is a blind belief. The Sunnis are blind (*kör*).’⁹⁴ Therefore, visiting the tombs of the saints, and even more, the saint of

⁸⁹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

⁹⁰ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

⁹¹ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Consent of the community serves a social control within the community itself. Disputed issues are brought before the community and the *dedes* for reviewing and decision-making on both moral and other topics. Traditional *görgü cemi* (literally, a ‘seeing gathering’) rarely happens in urban conditions, but the general *cem* gatherings also include a reconciliation section before the rituals start.

⁹⁴ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

saints (*piler piri*), is accompanied by inner self-assessment and pursuit of consent with family members and neighbours. A female informant, whose husband is not religious, took it very seriously to get his consent to visitation.

When I go to the *dergâh*, my inside and outside must be harmonious; there is no place for lies. When I leave home, I go with consent. I said to my husband that I needed his consent to go. Otherwise, there is no meaning in going. If he had not given his consent, I would not have been able to go. Everyone who goes there has to do the same – they must obtain the consent of their spouses, children and everyone else in the house.⁹⁵

The person going on visitation wishes to be in consensual harmony with her or his self and surrounding people as a precondition for meaningful visitation and miraculous encounters. Personal and mutual consent are religiously motivated goals and achievements that lead to unity with the community and God.

Even though informal and voluntary, with no requirements for timing, clothing, etc., the visitation is considered a sacred ritual with ultimate religious significance filled with wishes and vows, expectations for spiritual fulfilment and answers to questions. Contrary to the Hajj to Mecca, the *ziyaret* to Hacıbektaş may be undertaken at any time of the year without losing its meaning. Whilst the Hajj draws the community of Muslims together not only in a single place but during a single, sacredly charged time (Coleman and Elsner 1995: 58), the *ziyaret* may be compared with going to one's father's house, which is always welcoming, no matter how or when one comes. Distinguishing the place as 'our place' by the interviewees shows a close and intimate relationship with the visitation.

There are numerous religious holidays in the Alevi calendar, such as *Nevruz Bayramı*, *Kurban Bayramı* and Imam Hüseyin's martyrdom, as well as cultural events with religious connotations, such as the commemoration of the events at the Madımak Hotel in Sivas in July, the Hacı Bektaş Veli festival in August and the Abdal Musa festival in June. However, there are no religiously determined dates for the *ziyarets* to the tombs of the saints, including the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli, as it is always 'welcoming'. A visit may take place whenever the need or possibilities occur. In many cases, the time of the visit is related to practical reasons such as transportation, weather conditions, time and financial possibilities. Most visits take place between May and September, when road conditions are safer compared to winter months.

With some exceptions, the *dedes* have been to Hacıbektaş several times, in some cases emphasized as 'countless' or 'numerous' times. Most informants (16) have been to Hacıbektaş on trips organised by *cemevi*; six have also visited it outside the festivals. One informant had visited it only once when festivals did not take place. Four of the informants have never been to Hacıbektaş. As noted, visitation during festivals is one of the most common ways of performing a *ziyaret*. Trips organised by *cemevi* during festivals are preferred for their safety and

⁹⁵ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

convenience, as well as because of the significant gathering from around Turkey at that time. This is especially so for one's first visit. Because of big crowds, commotion and lack of accommodation opportunities during the festival, some informants decided to return at some other 'more peaceful' time outside the festival.

The 16–18 August dates are not associated with any sacred time or meaning by the interviewees. Also, all of the *dedes* agreed that these dates do not have any religious meaning for Alevi but are instead chosen by the state or the Ministry of Culture. Only a few younger *talips* attempted to associate the dates with the birthday or the day of death of Hacı Bektaş,⁹⁶ which seems to indicate their need for justified rationales. *Dede C* noted, 'It's not a sacred time, but it has become a tradition.'⁹⁷ It is a place one may go at any time when one wishes or needs arise without any loss of meaning.⁹⁸ Hence, even though these dates are not sacred, they have become part of the Alevi tradition and calendar as the time for one of the essential gatherings during the year. Since the Hacı Bektaş Veli festivals started in 1964 with the museum's opening and have lasted for more than fifty decades, it has become a tradition for celebrating Alevi culture and identity and becoming an important venue for political propagation. Gradually, the festival has become a stage for various Alevi organisations and Alevi to be seen and heard.

Whilst the entrance to Mecca is allowed exclusively only to Muslims, Alevi are pleased to see non-Alevi visiting the sacred tomb also visited. As seen above, Hacı Bektaş Veli is understood as a teacher and spiritual leader who was, on the one hand, sent to live among the people of Anatolia during a particular time, whilst he is also perceived as a universal personage beyond his earthly limits. The non-Alevi's visits to the sanctuary are associated with religious aims and interpreted in the light of the stories of the *Velâyetnâme* as seekers' quest to reach the truth. As Hacı Bektaş Veli had converted followers of Christian and pagan backgrounds (Bozkurt 2015: 29–31), non-Alevi are seen as legitimate visitors and potential followers of 'the path'. Some people are considered to follow the 'path' without noticing it. 'Some people are Alevi in their hearts without being born as an Alevi.'⁹⁹ Whether conscious or unconscious, everyone is expected to come and pay their due attention to the saint of saints and to grasp their portion of blessings (*nasip*) that still lie at the saint's grave.

The sacred place is seen as a centre of spiritual gravity, attracting people from all around the globe. 'There are so many people there! There are people from every corner of the earth, not only from Turkey or among Alevi. There are Sunni, Christian, Jewish, all sorts of people coming for a visit.'¹⁰⁰ Such an impression of a plurality of people is easy to occur at crowded festivals with thousands of people visiting the sacred places simultaneously. To the extent that the festivals are also

⁹⁶ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019, F23-08, 16.03.2019.

⁹⁷ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

⁹⁸ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

⁹⁹ Interview with *dede* Hüseyin Gökçe D49-01, 07.03.2019.

¹⁰⁰ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

international events beyond national limits, many knowledgeable foreign visitors and occasional tourists gather in Hacıbektaş, who are seen as seekers of spiritual truths. The presence of people from every corner of the earth is natural for the interviewees since Hacı Bektaş is perceived to be present beyond any racial or religious boundaries.

Hacı Bektaş Veli is neither an Alevi nor a Sunni. He, as a *velî*, doesn't have a race, religion or belief system. We should not bind velîs such as Mevlânâ, Yunus Emre or Hacı Bektaş with Alevism or Sunnism or with a Turkish, Kurdish or Arab identity because these people are universal characters. For this reason, everyone should come without being discriminated against. He invited all the people to come without discrimination; he thought everyone, not only Alevis or Bektashis.¹⁰¹

The expectation and wish for the non-Alevis' participation in the events and visits are motivated by the universal character of the saint, on the one hand, and by the need for recognition, on the other. The quest for recognition and reconciliation through the saint is based on his reconciling character. Love, respect and tolerance, which are found in his teachings and example, motivate seeking solidarity among all nations, but most of all with one's closest neighbours Sunni Muslims. Their participation is particularly noted: 'Non-Alevis know about Hacı Bektaş Veli, all of them know! Some Sunni Muslims come for a visit, but not the radicals; they wouldn't think about it.'¹⁰² Visiting Sunnis are perceived as knowledgeable and friendly to the Alevi cause.¹⁰³ Radicals, on the contrary, would not come to pay respect to the saint even though they knew about him.¹⁰⁴ This is seen as a question of choice – whether to come and be part of the love radiating from the saint or stay away from his call for mutual respect and tolerance.

There is one requirement for all visitors to be met, whether Alevi or non-Alevi. This requirement relates to the holiness of the place that should be respected and not spoiled by inappropriate behaviour. 'Let them not spoil the holiness! Let them respect the things, the utensils there, and those walls! Let them come with good intentions, not only there, but also to other shrines, visit our places of worship, places of all beliefs, showing respect!'¹⁰⁵ Those circumstances which are perceived to violate the sacredness of the *dergâh* are connected with a lack of respect (*saygı*) and decency, not with the non-Alevi background of the visitors. For example, people selling soil and stones of the vicinity or other small souvenirs around the sacred places are perceived as taking advantage of the sacredness of the place and thus being seen as violating its holiness.¹⁰⁶ Whilst repairing and keeping the *dergâh* clean is seen as a confirmation of its importance as a sacred

¹⁰¹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹⁰² Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

¹⁰³ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁰⁴ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

¹⁰⁵ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹⁰⁶ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

place, the opposite behaviour is perceived as violating its sacredness. Some of the most disturbing behaviour is smoking and extinguishing cigarettes on the spot, as well as spitting, swearing and causing a commotion.

4.2.2.5 Various aims of visitation to Hacıbektaş

According to my fieldwork in Buca, visiting the tombs of saints is not only a religious endeavour but also has a secular dimension. Especially in the eyes of non-religious Alevi, for whom being an Alevi is considered first of all as a cultural, not religious belonging, including various customs, tastes, and values, visiting the tombs is seen as a process of learning and paying respect to great historical characters. Non-religious Alevi visit the tomb of Hacı Bektaş for the sake of respect towards a great Turkish philosopher and humanist, whose ideas of equality and tolerance are ideals to reach in Turkish society today, especially in the context of Alevi rights and freedoms. Also, other tombs of prominent Alevi figures, such as Mahzuni Şerif, are places of interest in Hacıbektaş. In addition to the tombs, visiting the *dergâh* of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a museum and seeing the actual buildings, the environment and historical utensils used by the great man and his students are considered part of education and means for broadening understanding about historical events and cultural developments. Visiting during the commemorative festivals also offers many opportunities for participating in different cultural, educational and political events during these three days.

Whilst the above-mentioned motives and aims are common for religious and non-religious Alevi alike, religious Alevi's quest for spiritual fulfilment through supplication and expression of wishes by employing various rituals about the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli takes precedence. The various religiously motivated aims detected during the fieldwork may be summarized by the following key-words – prostration (*yüz sürmek*), surrender (*teslim olmak*), supplication (*niyaz*), taking refuge in God (*sığınmak*), prayer (*dua*), spiritual purification (*arınmak*), fulfilling vows (*adak*) and intentions (*niyet*), examination (in Delikli Taş), sense of unity with God (*Hak*) and community, participation in *cem*, confirmation of faith, guidance for the future, protection against evil, healing, help in troubles, different wishes (*dilek, temenni*), having a child, spiritual discovering and learning.

Whilst the different wishes and prayers, both personal and for the loved ones, seem to take precedence at the place through rituals, being present at the place is understood as the greatest blessing connected to the visitation and considered a precondition for any other possible blessings connected to the place. Since the people of Anatolia at the time of Hacı Bektaş were granted blessed portions through a personal encounter with the saint,¹⁰⁷ the personal visitation and physical

¹⁰⁷ There are many examples in the *Velâyetnâme* about people coming to the saint with different needs and wishes which were granted, whether immediately or on the basis of various conditions. For, example the story about how the saints of Rum got their 'portion of blessing' (*nasip*) by visiting and welcoming Hacı Bektaş in the land of Rum and how a special 'portion' was given to Karaca Ahmet (Korkmaz 2015: 40).

presence in the vicinity of the sacred tomb is seen as a natural prerequisite for the hope for wishes and needs to be met. *Dede Hüseyin* noted that all visiting Alevi have particular wishes and prayers, which are expected to be heard and answered. 'Everyone who comes has a wish! Someone's son is in the military, and they wish for his safe return. Someone is sick, and they wish for a cure. The doctors leave it to you, and they say that this is a road with no return. So, they come and take refuge there. They take refuge in God. *Hacı Bektaş Veli* is not God!'¹⁰⁸ Whilst it is a general view that everyone comes with a particular and articulated wish that should be answered, there are also examples of visitors who are 'visiting because of the visit'. An *ocakzade* differed in his narration from this general view by noting that he didn't have any particular wishes to bring forward. 'I didn't have any wishes or prayers to bring with me. I didn't go because of that. I only went for visiting and showing up.'¹⁰⁹ With or without wishes, a personal presence is essential for seeing the saint's place (*makam*) and being seen by the saint.

For this reason, immediate personal contact with the sacred place (*kutsal yer*) is considered an essential aspect, the core, of the visitation. Experiencing the sacredness of the place through immediate personal contact through different senses in order to grasp the blessings (*bereket*) and perceive its sacredness (*kutsalılık*) was mentioned as one of the main reasons for the visit. Seeing the place and its surroundings 'with your own eyes', touching the doorposts of the various buildings of the *dergâh* and the *türbe* 'with your own hands', breathing the air of the place 'into your own lungs', and sensing the atmosphere 'with your own heart' revive the miraculous power (*keramet*) of the saint and allows it to continue in the lives of the believing visitors.¹¹⁰ *Dede B* highlighted the aim of being personally in contact with the place as 'seeing the saint, breathing the air of the place, praying for help in the name of the saint, trusting in the saint, receiving aid from God.'¹¹¹

Personal bodily presence at the sacred place is believed to change circumstances for those who reach out in faith. Seeing and touching it is perceived as a method of spiritual learning and strengthening one's faith on the one hand and as a means of gaining blessings and answers on the other. Breathing the air of the sanctuary into one's body is perceived as a purifying procedure. *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* noted that 'whilst the water washes the body, the sacred air washes the soul'.¹¹² Sensing the sacred atmosphere is believed to lead to a deeper understanding of love. The sacred place and its spiritual atmosphere are attributed to the mystical power to lead one towards truth (*hakikat*) and change even unknowing hearts. As mentioned above, it is believed that the Naqshbandi dervishes, who dwelled in the *dergâh* after 1826, became Alevi and started to worship at the

¹⁰⁸ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁰⁹ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

¹¹⁰ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹¹¹ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

¹¹² Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli instead of the mosque.¹¹³ Belief in the active and changing power of the sacred place is one of the reasons why the non-Alevi visits are so favoured and seen as a positive sign. Also, as Hacı Bektaş Veli himself welcomed all people despite their differences during his lifetime, his tomb should, according to the interviewees, be accessible to everyone today around the clock, not only during the working hours of the museum.

Although visitation is, first of all, a personal religious endeavour, it also has collective and intercessory aspects. As seen above, meeting at the tombs and sharing food and sacrificial meat with the people present is an important part of Alevi spirituality. The communal character of the visit is especially dominant in trips organised by the *cemevi* during the festivals. In that case, the visits to places of interest such as Delikli Taş and Beştaşlar outside the town centre are performed together by organised bus trips and accompanied by the explanations and teachings of the *dedes*. Coming together from ‘all corners of Turkey’ and participating in a *cem* gathering¹¹⁴ is one of the culminations of the visitation during the festival. *Dede Hüseyin* noted, as speaking for the wider Alevi community, that ‘the purpose and desire of every Alevi are to breathe the godly air, to see the *türbe* of Hacı Bektaş Veli, to organise and participate in the *cem*. We go with these aims in mind, and for some reason, I always experience calm and peace.’¹¹⁵ As noted, visiting and being present at the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is understood as a common desire of Alevi, which culminates in unity and solidarity as a spiritual condition (*hal*) derived from the common rituals performed during the visitation. Worship and supplication at the particularly sacred ground enable the visitors to feel unity with the wider Alevi community and God (*Hak*). Even though spiritual satisfaction is not distinguished as a separate aim by the interviewees, as we will see below, it was noted as a welcome consequence of the visitation.

Most visitors related an intercessory aspect of the visit, expressed in particular prayers for particular people or general concerns such as world peace. In some cases, the interviewees noted that their visit was either initiated by someone else or coincided with someone with whom the visitor joined in prayer. For example, one woman, who had never been to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş before, accompanied her mother-in-law, who had undergone chemotherapy, for the visitation to Hacıbektaş¹¹⁶ in order to support her in her striving for complete healing. Another woman accompanied her brother, who travelled from Germany to Hacıbektaş to carry out his vow (*adak*) for a fulfilled wish.¹¹⁷ A young woman joined in prayer with a friend of her mother with whom they were visiting with the collaborative group organised by the *cemevi*, praying for her to have a child after ten years of

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Usually it is a *birlik cemi* or unity *cem*.

¹¹⁵ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹¹⁷ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

marriage.¹¹⁸ Another female informant visited with her son, who lives in Germany, and prayed together for him to have a child after six years of marriage.¹¹⁹ It can be seen that the communal and intercessory aspects based on compassion and solidarity, the belief in the power of unity and consent, also form an important part of the Alevi spirituality during visitations.

Personal spiritually motivated aims, as seen above, are often expressed as simply as ‘go and see’ (*gitmek görmek*), which could be interpreted as ‘to experience’ or ‘to sense’ the place to allow the sacredness of the place to overflow the visitor’s being. Since the sacredness of the place and the visitor’s intention are believed to bring forth the desired solution, the visitor’s arrival at the place is needed. Experiencing the immovable sacredness rooted in the tomb(s) and surrounding objects through different senses and actions lies at the centre of the visitation’s spiritual motives. Another aspect of the ‘go and see’ aim is to learn and gain detailed knowledge about the saint’s life. A talip narrated that one of her aims was to ‘see the places connected to the saint, to learn how he arrived at the place, where exactly he first settled, where he came from, how he descended from the hill, where he talked to the stones, how he crawled through the stone...I would like to know these things better. His tomb is there; may his place be in paradise.’¹²⁰ Visiting Hacı Bektaş Veli, who is buried but not considered dead, is seen as a continuation of the actual events taking place at the spot many centuries ago. Since the people of Anatolia arrived at the saint with different aims such as spiritual fulfilment, guidance, blessing, economic needs, etc., the people of today walk in their forefathers’ footsteps by following the proven way of supplication and help in troubles (*dar*).

As the various troubles people are seeking solutions to by praying at the sacred tombs in Turkey have already been mentioned, in the following, I highlight some above-mentioned spiritual aims of the visitors to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. It must be noted that no one among the interviewees went on visitation to Hacıbektaş just because of traveling or because everyone was going. Not one of the interviewees got there by accident or in connection with another trip, but according to previous plans. Neither did anyone say that they did not have any particular reasons and aims for the visitation. All informants, including non-religious Alevis, noted some particular reasons for the visit being important to them. It is understandable, as the distance from Izmir to Hacıbektaş is about 800 km, taking a few days to make the journey. Also, since traveling is costly and requires extra time, not all the interviewees could afford the trip. In these circumstances, the visitation to Hacıbektaş is well planned and executed according to certain aims and wishes. For example, one male informant, who has been willing to go to the visitation of Hacı Bektaş Veli all his life, has postponed it until his retirement.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹¹⁹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

As the saint is believed to know people's conditions and hidden intentions, visitation is seen as a process of repentance, reconciliation and spiritual purification or, as *dede A* put it, a reset (*sıfırlanma*).¹²² Approaching the saint's tomb with a sincere heart leads the visitor to self-reflection and examination, which in turn leads to feelings of spiritual purification (*arınma*) and peace (*huzur*). A saying attributed to Hac Bektaş Veli – 'the knowledgeable is pure and purifying' (*arifler arı ve arıtıcıdır*) – carrying a general meaning of the usefulness and necessity of knowledge, takes a particular meaning in the vicinity of the sacred tomb. The purifying character of the saint's tomb is perceived as an important aspect of the visitation as the purity of the heart is considered one of the most important conditions of a human being. The examination of hearts and deeds, analysed below, takes place a few kilometres from the grave at the site of Delikli Taş.

Another important aim of the visit is connected with the need to be protected against evil (*kötülük*) and misfortune (*uğursuzluk*). While there are many wishes represented for achieving something, there are also wishes to protect the present condition, property, health, business, etc. Seeking protection for loved ones, especially for children as the most vulnerable ones, was the request most frequently mentioned by interviewees. Praying for protection before a trip or a particular undertaking is also very common. For example, a young *talip* who studied in Hacıbektaş used to visit the tomb to pray for protection and blessing before her trip home to Izmir.¹²³ Also, protection from all sorts of dangers and toils for sons in the military service is a common theme for prayer.¹²⁴ It is believed that whilst evil and all sorts of dangers exist in the world, it is also necessary and possible to be protected against them. One of the ways to be protected against evil and all sorts of misfortune is to seek shelter (*sığınmak*) in the saint by confirming allegiance and faith by visiting his tomb and making vows. Hacı Bektaş Veli (like every other saint) is seen as a refuge (*sığınak*) from evil, with those seeking protection from them being delivered from any effects of evil circumstances. However, if troubles are already at hand, it is always possible to pray for relief and to be rescued from them. According to the interviewees, visiting sacred tombs daily in times of trouble (*dar*) while living in villages was customary. Nevertheless, in urban conditions, this habitual conduct is impossible; thus, preventing evil by seeking shelter through Hacı Bektaş Veli whilst at the site is even more relevant.

Visiting the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is also carried out with the aim of personal religious belonging and self-determination. On the one hand, it is a question of the common Alevi faith in general; on the other, it is a question of 'my faith' in particular. The younger informants tend to express concerns about being rooted in the correct way of believing and living as an Alevi. As Hacı Bektaş Veli is the most important saint of the Alevis (*serçeşme*) and his tomb is seen as a place

¹²² Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹²³ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹²⁴ Interview M63-21, 20.03.2019.

where answers to all sorts of questions are expected to be answered, visiting the tomb as a confirmation of faith, as an open sign of being an Alevi for oneself and the bystanders, was manifested by visitors. The *dergâh*, as an Alevi place or ‘our place’, turns out to be also ‘my place’ in the eyes of visitors through personal contact with it. A young female informant, for whom visiting tombs is a very important part of being an Alevi, noted that visitation to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is different in comparison to the other tombs from the perspective of keeping the faith alive and purposeful.¹²⁵ Such understanding, in turn, confirms one’s faith in the centrality of the saint and his teaching for the Alevi belief system.

One of the ways to receive saints’ interventions and guidance in seekers’ lives is through meaningful dreams, occurrences and situations taking place during the visit. Since the visitation is very often a question of spending the night at the site, guidance and answers are expected to appear through dreams whilst sleeping in the vicinity of the sacred tomb. One of the *talips* noted that ‘to dream there adds even more value to the visit.’¹²⁶ Another *talip* who has been to the tomb several times narrated how she had a meaningful dream that answered her hesitations during her visitation to the sacred tomb.¹²⁷ Since the visitors’ expectations for divine interventions through dreams and visions are incredibly high, natural incidents occasionally happening here and there daily are attributed with spiritual and personal meanings in the tomb’s vicinity. An example of this was the spectacle of flying birds in the early morning light before the eyes of *dede A*.

It was a very remarkable experience to see pigeons flying above the tomb in a circle like whirling dervishes performing *semah*. It was about six or seven o’clock in the morning when I saw the pigeons turning around the tomb’s dome...It was a significant and precious moment as the day warmed up.¹²⁸

Such a symbolic vision is perceived as a special gift and confirmation of being in the right place at the right time. Hacı Bektaş Veli’s shapeshifting into a pigeon and flying from Horasan to Sulucakarahöyük, as narrated in the *Velâyetnâme* was reflected in this spectacle during the sunrise in a meaningful way for the witness. Such dreams and visions that give rise to meaningful interpretations and understandings affirm the site’s sanctity and importance and strengthen personal connections with it. All expectations, like prayers and wishes that people came up with that were fulfilled during the visitation or because of it, contribute to the continuous popularity of the place as a visitation destination. In a later subsection, I analyse the role of feelings during the visitation and the importance of the answered prayers and needs. As we will see, positive feelings have a crucial role in a successful, fulfilling and satisfactory visitation.

¹²⁵ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹²⁶ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹²⁷ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹²⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

4.2.3 Visitation as experienced

4.2.3.1 Visitation as a mark of blessing

Hacı Bektaş Veli's tomb, as one of the most desired destinations for visitation, is loaded with various expectations and imaginations about the place. Since not everyone has the opportunity to make this visit due to different reasons, the ones who can feel chosen and particularly blessed. Very often, the expression 'it was granted or bestowed to me' (*bana nasip oldu*) was used to explain the circumstances behind the visitation.¹²⁹ On the one hand, the willingness and intention of a person; on the other hand, the will of God makes the visitation happen. The only *ocakzade* who has not been to Hacı Bektaş Veli's tomb yet notes that 'I was not able to go yet, but I will if it is granted (*nasipse*), after having retired.'¹³⁰ Such hopes and expectations for 'being granted' are also represented among younger informants, who wait for their opportunity for the visit.¹³¹

Once 'being granted', the questions of being good enough as a person and pure in heart are raised. It was already shown above how the visitors seek the consent of their spouses, children and neighbours by receiving their good wishes for the journey and food (*lokma*) for sharing with visitors coming to the tomb. Although the visitors are perceived as favoured, they should still be aware of their condition as erroneous humans and thus test themselves before and during the visit. *Dede C* expressed his criticism about the visitors who seemed not to care about their heart's situation during their visit and explained how and why the self-examination should be carried out:

There is a very sensitive issue in our belief. The saints (*eren*) know everything inside you, your shortcomings and strengths. If you have committed an offense towards someone, you cannot just go and stand before a saint. I tested whether I was a person with the heart to confront the saint with my will, my life, my thoughts and my experiences. After testing myself, I thought that I would be fine. I thought that if I had a problem, I would receive some trouble (*bela*) anyway. I thought that I would receive it from there for sure. I was thinking this way because we have it in our belief! If you go to the saint, you must be clean or else don't go. Because if you do, you have to face the outcomes; you have to endure the consequences. Everyone should go there with this awareness! There are stories about crawling through the stone... it should be done before going to the saint.¹³²

This kind of self-examination and reflection in the light of the saint's presence is aimed at determining the person's possible shortcomings changing their spiritual conditions for receiving blessings and being part of the continuous story of the saint, who is not dead but considered alive. As the saint is attributed with the

¹²⁹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019; D24-13, 19.03.2019.

¹³⁰ Interview O50-11, 18.03.2019.

¹³¹ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019; interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

¹³² Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

ability to know the depths of the seeker's heart, an attribution heard and learned through stories of the saint's life and deeds,¹³³ approaching his presence is carried out with excitement and anticipation about upcoming experiences and outcomes. In order to receive blessings instead of troubles, self-examination is highly recommended and expected. The same kind of self-reflective and respectful attitude is also expected from the co-visitors. For this reason, all sorts of disruptive behaviour, such as smoking, making noise and squeezing, are highly criticized as disrespectful towards the saint and co-visitors, as I show below.

Experiencing the opportunity for the visitation as a gift or special blessing from God is also reflected by fellow visitors. The thousands of visitors are seen as being drawn by the same spirit of inquiry led by the desire to experience the sacred atmosphere, show respect and receive blessings and answers. Alevi or Sunni, atheist or foreigner, all are perceived to be drawn by the same sacred power of the saint.¹³⁴ As Hacı Bektaş Veli did not make any difference based on religion, language, race or gender (*din, dil, ırk, cinsiyet*) by welcoming all people as seekers of truth and reconciling them with themselves and each other, co-visitors are seen as part of the saint's same story despite their different backgrounds.¹³⁵ A *talip* noted that non-Alevi visitors are drawn by curiosity and eagerness to know more about the saint:

I am sure that whether a tourist or our Sunni brothers, they come to visit because they have heard about his miracles and they are curious about the place. They understand and acknowledge the power. I think that they also come because of curiosity. They want to come and see because of his miracle-working power (*keramet*) and wisdom. I was surprised to see so many of them there.¹³⁶

However, this curiosity towards the truth is not there to be taken for granted but originates from a certain level of spiritual development or enlightenment (*aydınlanma*) that, in turn, is expressed in willingness for a visit. Even though Hacı Bektaş Veli has a certain place in Turkish cultural history, which is also taught in schools, knowing him as a miracle-working saint necessitates a different kind of knowledge, spiritual enlightenment, that enables the 'veil to fall' (*perdenin düşmesi*) and understand. A female informant expressed her feelings about Sunni visitors as follows:

¹³³ See, for example, the story of how Hacı Bektaş led Yunus Emre to make a choice that would change his future (Korkmaz 2015: 95–96).

¹³⁴ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019; F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹³⁵ Interview D49-01, 07.03.2019.

¹³⁶ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

Non-Alevis, everyone knows about Hacı Bektaş Veli as a great man, a good person. And for this reason, I want all of them to come and see the place. Some Sunnis, the enlightened (*aydın*) Sunnis, are willing to go and want to see it. But of course, those who are insensitive and strict (*kati*) do not think of going anyway.¹³⁷

Seeing people of different backgrounds, such as Sunnis and tourists, gathering about the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is thus seen as a positive sign of enlightenment and spiritual progress. Still, cautious tones are detected about non-Alevis' tendency to take the initiative in the sacred place. One of the striking examples was already discussed above, namely, the building of a mosque in the *dergâh* of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Another example, also mentioned above, is connected to the opening and organising of the *dergâh* as the museum of Hacı Bektaş Veli by the state. Additionally, the festival of Hacı Bektaş Veli, initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, being popular among Alevis, Sunnis and tourists, is seen as an opportunity and, in some aspects, as a restriction. *Dede* Hüseyin A noted that

in our *dergâh*, we want to organise things in our way, the Ministry of Culture wants to do it in its way...We don't want to worship under your control but keep our faith alive in our places of worship, our centres of faith. We don't want to do it through you and by your leadership!¹³⁸

On account of disagreement about organisational questions that affect and restrict Alevi ways of worship, non-Alevis' initiatives are not welcomed at the site. However, as we have seen, this cannot be said of the non-Alevis, who come as sincere seekers and extend themselves in faith. This contradiction, based on power relations on the one hand and the welcoming teaching of the saint on the other, creates different feelings about sharing the sacred space. Valuing the place by visiting it with enlightened expectation and a sincere heart helps to keep the secrecy alive and the story of the saint continuous. Whether Alevis or not, the visitors are the ones who have been granted the opportunity and should be aware of the blessing of 'being granted'.

4.2.3.2 Protecting the sacredness

The privilege of 'being granted' is not always taken seriously or paid proper attention to, according to the interviewees' reflections on co-visitors' behaviour and the authorities' omissions at the sacred places. The critique of the improper behaviour can be explained by the veneration and high expectations of the holiness of the place. Certain notions are associated with a sacred atmosphere, such as cleanliness, courtesy, reverence, sharing and tolerance. The lack of these qualities during the festivals has led many informants to decide to return between memorial events in order to have a more peaceful visitation for the undisturbed experience of the place. *Dede C*, the only one to admit that the visit did not meet

¹³⁷ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

¹³⁸ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

his expectations, mentioned that this might have been due to the large crowds and the site's peculiarities:

I couldn't get that spiritual energy that I got when I visited other sacred places. For example, there is someone called Hamza Baba. When I went to Hamza Baba's garden, I felt like I was in heaven. I experienced incredible calmness and peace of mind in that garden. It happens only if it's not too crowded and not a festive time.... This is how the saints are – when you approach a saint undisturbed, you feel peace and calmness. You need to feel something! I went with this expectation, but it was not there. I was wondering if the reason for my expectations not being met was the large crowd, the people who disrupt the energy of the place, or else the energy of the place is not great enough!¹³⁹

The understanding of the 'energy of the place' is closely related to the expectations and feelings that the visitors experience. Positive feelings affirm the sacredness and power of the place; negative or disturbing feelings may cause doubts about its energy, as seen by the example of *dede C*. However, there are many examples among the interviewees who, despite negative experiences, focused on the purposes of their visitation and kept the sanctity of the place alive for themselves. A young *talip*, who arrived with great expectations with the association's group during the festival, also criticized the behaviour of the crowds as disturbing but managed to focus on her goals.

The shrine is sacred (*kutsal*), but only if people don't misuse it, if people truly pray there in faith and don't harm it.... Cigarettes are smoked and extinguished inside and around the shrine, spitting – all of this wounds the holy places. You must value it; you should see it as a valuable pearl. You need to leave the place clean. For example, I also visit churches sometimes. When I enter there, when opening the door, I open it very carefully. Someone may be praying inside, I may disturb him, I may interrupt his intentions, or I could damage the door. These are essential things! Because people do not pay attention, the places are losing their sanctity. I had a moment like this in Hacıbektaş. People disturb the holiness of the place. However, I think that the sanctity of Hacı Bektaş Veli in his tomb continues.¹⁴⁰

The circumstances accompanying large crowds are generally seen as disturbing, especially in a place considered sacred, as these are perceived as a violation of holiness. Along with directly unpolite behaviour, commotion in queues removes spiritual enthusiasm. The crowds prevent visitors from participating in seminars during the festivals and listening to the *dedes'* talks during their guidance at sacred places such as Delikli Taş and Beştaşlar.¹⁴¹ However, trusting the holiness of the motivates visitors not to give up on their goals. Or, in some cases, this leads to postponing their fulfilment for the next time. This happens in Delikli Taş,

¹³⁹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹⁴⁰ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹⁴¹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

which is one of the main goals next to the tomb during visitation.¹⁴² As crawling through the mouth of the stone is time-consuming, and people would make several attempts in order to succeed, the queue of visitors progresses slowly and causes withdrawal until the next time.

Another disturbing factor perceived as a violation of the feelings of holiness is connected to the fierce trade of tiny objects attributed with spiritual significance. There are many traders of small pieces of local stone (*teberik*) as sources of blessings and power for healing on the town's streets during festivals.¹⁴³ Some people sell prayers or, for example, symbolic objects such as keys for those who need a home.¹⁴⁴ This kind of religious trade was met with disappointment and condemnation as the visitors had arrived with a desire to experience their own way by collecting the small stones from the sacred places and conducting their own prayers. The local traders, offering tiny objects and religious services, were perceived as turning the sacred space without justification into a beneficial religious property. Such conduct was seen as disrupting the personal sphere of the ritual of collecting stones or earth and saying prayers.

They have turned that place into a source of income (*rant*); I didn't like it at all that some things have turned into trading. I don't know what people think. Are they really Alevi? I don't know if they use us because they know we are merciful. For example, they sell you a key for five liras and say you will get a house. They make you buy it, but that doesn't make sense. I think it's wrong; we shouldn't turn the shrines into profits! They should be there without any payment. For example, we were praying at the Beştaşlar in our hearts, within ourselves. Someone came to us, said a prayer and wanted a tip (*bahşiş*) for it. I didn't ask him for prayer; he just came and read it and asked for a tip. So you have to give it. It was wrong. In other words, the attitudes and behaviours of the people there seemed wrong to me.¹⁴⁵

In addition to the trade with prayers and religious objects, there is strong criticism towards various political parties, especially the coalition parties, which use the opportunity during the festivals to make their political propaganda among the Alevi and thus disrupt their religious feelings. The parties are accused of criticizing Alevi organisations and their aspirations between elections but praising Hacı Bektaş Veli during the festival.¹⁴⁶ "Praising" Hacı Bektaş Veli during the festivals by government parties is also perceived as hypocritical because the streets and the town infrastructure are in very poor condition, and this becomes especially evident when it is necessary to accommodate large crowds during festivals.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Interview M55-19, 23.03.2019.

¹⁴³ Fieldwork notes 16.03.2018.

¹⁴⁴ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁴⁷ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

Very often, the town of Hacıbektaş, which is seen as purposefully underdeveloped, is compared with Konya with its large parks, lit roads, trams and cultural centres. Seeing the town of Hacıbektaş in such a poor condition was a ‘bad surprise’ for the visitors. It is understandable for the respondents that a small town cannot offer proper accommodation and services for thousands of people gathering once a year. At the same time, they would like to see the local and state governments pay much more effort to develop the town of the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. It was often noted how the lousy condition of the unpaved and unlit streets made it difficult to move around the city whilst only the museum square, where the official ceremonies take place, is paved and lit.¹⁴⁸ This criticism is in line with the general discontent with the direction and usage of the state resources and taxpayers’ money between Sunni and Alevi villages and institutions. However, the criticism focuses not on the unpaved streets in an Alevi town in general but on the most sacred town in particular. From this perspective, the unclean and disordered environment is perceived as a purposeful violation of holiness by a state that does not pay proper attention to the town. As Mevlânâ is believed to be a student of Hacı Bektaş, it is not acceptable that the town of the teacher is not developed in the same way as that of the student.¹⁴⁹ In this question of investments and development, where political and religious motivations meet, Alevis have felt powerless but still consciously articulate their understanding of the situation.

In Hacıbektaş, our accommodation was a bit far, and we had to go on foot. The road is made of earth and stone, with broken pavements, and no street lamps; you go there in the dark. But as we went to Konya – the tram passed in front of Mevlânâ! Yes, Mevlânâ is also a very important saint for us, he is also someone who teaches equality and justice, but they do something different! They say that Hacı Bektaş is the saint of Alevis and Mevlânâ of Sunnis, and thus they separate Muslims from each other. I was very saddened by seeing the place accommodating such a valuable person who left such a beautiful legacy in such a poor condition... After all, we want something to be done for those places. We pay taxes; why isn’t it done there? I am not a bigoted Alevi; I am not a fanatic Muslim. I respect every language, color, and belief, and I pay taxes for the work to be done! Why don’t you do it? It’s my belief, I’m going there, I’m using it... The provinces of Nevşehir and Konya are not far from each other. Nevşehir is abandoned and neglected, but Konya is like heaven. Even the street stones shine there! I think Hacıbektaş is not valued because of political reasons, and it made me very sad.¹⁵⁰

Despite the various criticisms and negative feelings, visitation is deeply valued as a privilege and opportunity. Various miracles, guidance through dreams, meaningful signs during rituals, spiritual encounters, etc., testify that the miraculous

¹⁴⁸ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019; D42-09, 16.03.2019; F41-04, 12.03.2019; F23-08, 16.03.2019; F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁴⁹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁵⁰ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

power (*keramet*) and the holiness (*kutsallık*) of the place are not permanently corrupted or disappeared but continue to exist despite many unfavorable circumstances and situations. This is the proof of the miraculous power (*keramet*) of the place, that it has kept its holiness and remains spiritually attractive, and continues to draw thousands of people seeking answers for their needs. The crowds, with their resulting inconveniences, which so many people criticize, at the same time act as a testimony of the place as powerful, meaningful and holy.

4.2.3.3 Experiencing the sacred through the tangible

The tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli

Generally speaking, the whole town of Hacıbektaş and its surroundings are considered, from a spiritual perspective, to be good, beautiful and effective.¹⁵¹ Consequently, visitors try to grasp the goodness and beauty of the town and keep themselves spiritually alert to receive and understand marks of blessings and dedicate themselves to prayer at every step during their visitation.¹⁵² Since all the sites are seen as important and worthy of attention, ‘every whole is examined and researched (*incelemek*) with great interest.’¹⁵³ However, some places marked with meaningful objects stand out for their uniqueness. These objects are visually easily distinguishable; they have been widely talked about, and their existence is known to the visitor before the visitation.¹⁵⁴ The *dedes* stand out by attaching great importance to the gathering hall (*meydan*), as a place where the people stood in front of their *dedes* and became reconciled with each other, as a place for friendly conversation (*muhabbet*) and unity (*birlik*).¹⁵⁵ In the following, I proceed in the footsteps of the interviewees to the places of spiritual attraction included in the visitation’s itinerary to Hacıbektaş. Starting with the most important place – the saint’s tomb – I continue to the mulberry tree, Beştaşlar, and Delikli Taş.

Reaching the goals of the visitation – to prostrate one’s self (*yüz süremek*), to surrender (*teslim olmak*), to wish (*dilek dilemek*), to pray, to see, to feel, to breathe, to have fellowship at the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli – requires first of all the visitor’s physical presence. In order to live a whole experience and to receive a ‘share’ (*nasip*), love, faith and a resulting commitment towards the saint are also felt to be necessary. Since love towards God and people is one of the leading spiritual qualities often mentioned during the interviews, it must be addressed as a motivating force accompanying the entire visit besides or above faith. As one *talip* put it, ‘You believe, what you believe, from afar. But you have to touch it for once! If you love someone but don’t reach out, it doesn’t make any sense.’¹⁵⁶ In this light, the visitation to the tomb becomes a journey and confession of faith

¹⁵¹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁵² Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

¹⁵³ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹⁵⁴ Interview F18-07, 15.03.2019.

¹⁵⁵ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019, D24-13, 19.03.2019.

¹⁵⁶ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

and love towards the saint. All the activities during the visitation are, or at least ideally ought to be, led and motivated by love.

This journey of love to the saint's tomb as the central aim of the visitation raises different expectations and feelings that are confirmed, refuted or whose meaning is made clear. Walking through the three courtyards of the *dergâh* towards the tomb resembles a spiritual crossing within oneself towards acceptance and approval by the saint, towards healing and answered needs. The distance of about three hundred meters from the main entrance to the shrine may be taken directly and quickly or, on the contrary, slowly and attentively by visiting all the buildings and rooms located in the three courtyards before reaching the tomb. The latter allows the visitor to adapt to the sacred environment and atmosphere and accomplish the final inner preparations for meeting the saint.

Visitors who have been to this place several times are more likely to head directly to the saint's tomb, turning aside only to drink water from the Lion Spring (*Aslan çesmesi*) (Figure 4). First-time visitors are attracted by different areas, the fountain and exhibited objects of the *dergâh* and are eager to learn about the meaning and connection of the objects to the saint and his students.¹⁵⁷ This process of seeing and learning is experienced as spiritual growth since knowledge acquired about the life of the saint and his companions causes confidence and strengthens faith in matters previously only heard through others, whether by *dedes* or family members, but are now seen with one's own eyes. The same kind of affirmative experience takes place by visiting the Beştaşlar, Delikli Taş, Hırkadağ and other places known through the stories of the *Velâyetnâme*.

Despite being officially part of the museum, the building, including the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli, is entered without footwear and accompanied by touching and kissing its doorposts. As mentioned above, the entire complex is perceived through its initial function as a *dergâh*, not a museum. All the more so, the building known as the Master's house (*pir evi*)¹⁵⁸ contains the tombs of Hacı Bektaş Veli, other saints of Anatolia (*Rum erenleri*) and following sheikhs of the Bektashi brotherhood, is approached with great respect. Once inside, it becomes clear that not all the rooms and corners of the building are open for closer examination. For example, the seclusion or suffering room (*çilehane*), which the interviewees mentioned as a place of great importance due to its significance in the saint's life, is open for viewing only, not entering. However, the spacious main hall of the master's house, known as the Square of the Forty (*kırklar meydanı*), which functions simultaneously as an exhibition hall and burial ground, welcomes visitors with its historical insight and meaningfulness.

¹⁵⁷ Fieldwork notes 16.08.2018.

¹⁵⁸ The masters house (*pir evi*) was built between the 13th to 16th centuries and includes separate rooms of the tombs of Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî and Güvenç Abdal, *çilehane* and *kırklar meydanı* (fieldwork notes and exhibition explanations in the museum August of 2018).



Figure 4. The Lion Spring (Photo by Helen Haas)

As expected, the greatest bustle takes place in the small room accommodating the saint's tomb that can be entered through the Square of the Forty. The white marble doorposts of the entrance are smoothed in places by caressing and kissing visitors, who have taken the time and paid for various expenses in order to 'come and see'. This 'come and see' phase, so often repeated in the context of the visit, resembling a large scale of various needs, intentions, wishes and expectations, reaches its culmination in this small room of the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. This sacred place, accommodating a dozen people, is the place for prostration and surrender, for prayers and wishes in the name of the saint, through his mediation to God, who is above all and everything. Here is where the two energies – the tomb's miraculous power and the visitor's intention – meet and result in changes, the awaited miracles.¹⁵⁹ In order to activate and experience the miraculous power of the site, various rituals are conducted, such as circumnavigating the sarcophagus whether on foot or knees, lifting hands in prayer, touching and kissing the covering fabric of the sarcophagus and hanging personal items such as scarfs on the tombstone.

¹⁵⁹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

I witnessed how loads of scarves grew so high on the headstone that the museum officials had to collect them, thus making room for newcomers to leave their scarves on the tomb. Very often, the rituals have to be conducted within some minutes as there is a long queue of seekers waiting for their turn behind the entrance, especially during the festivals. Whether rushing or taking time, the feelings experienced at the tomb are paid great importance and accumulated for long-term use, if needed for a lifetime. These personal experiences about the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli are turned back to and talked about as a confirmation of faith in the saint and his power (*keramet*).¹⁶⁰

Although all the other places inside and around the *dergâh* are relevant and important because of their stories and meaning, the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is the centre of ultimate significance, the place *per se*. For this reason, entering the shrine is accompanied by deep self-examination and wishes and prayers. The self-examination is loaded with the wish of being accepted and pure-hearted in order to feel worthy to stand before the saint and pass on prayers and wishes. Since visiting the saint's tomb equals visiting the saint himself, stepping into his house (*pir evi*) as a visitor is like stepping into the presence of the saint surrounded by his followers. It is believed that as a *velî*, the intimate of God, Hacı Bektaş knows the visitors, their intentions and needs from afar, and he is the one to meditate and release the blessings of God due to his proximity to God. This borderless proximity between the saint and God emerges, especially in the saint's tomb. It has led to criticism among some Alevi about associating the saint too closely with God and going too far in praying to Hacı Bektaş Veli as if he was God or God's embodiment.¹⁶¹ Being familiar with this criticism, many informants noted that they pray in the name of the saint, not to the saint.¹⁶² Dede B gave me an example of how to pray correctly to God in the name of the saint at the tomb:

In the name of Ali, oh Allah (*bismi Şah Allah, Allah*)! By the grace of God (*Hak*), help me. I seek refuge in your presence! I seek refuge in your mercy, your mercy, O God! Grant us our wishes in our tongues and hopes in our hearts for the sake of Hünkâr; do not let us down! Make us successful in our work! Grant our children a good life, long life, and endless patience! Don't lead us to trouble!... Whatever you pray! If you don't know how to pray, just say, 'God, you know everything that is in my heart!'¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019; F63-03, 11.03.2019, M55-20, 20.03.2019.

¹⁶¹ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

¹⁶² Interview D63-10, 16.03.2019. This is a very sensitive question in the light of Sunni theology and finds different answers, from sharp distinction between the saint and God to direct identification of the two. I should say, however, that the latter is a common view, as also seen above in the previous subsections. This theological problem is not addressed and thought of as something important in everyday religious life. As the 'unity of being' (*vahdet-i vücûd*) philosophy has paved the ground to the understanding of God, who is present everywhere and in everything, the sharp distinction between the saint and God is not as important as love towards God and his saints.

¹⁶³ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

This type of prayer, expressing trust and confidence towards God in the name of Ali and the saint, mentioning articulated and nonarticulated wishes still hidden in the depths of hearts, is widespread among visitors. ‘God of hearts’ is emphasized by the *dedes* as a God who sees the unseen and hidden. As God knows everything, believers should not be discouraged if they don’t know how to pray. However, the question of thoughts ‘passing through the heart’ is taken very seriously in the context of promising or vowing in the name of the saint in order to gain answers to specific needs or wishes. As the saint is believed to know peoples’ hearts, promising something in one’s heart is a promise that should be kept. For this reason, a *talip*, who has had difficulties with her last vow (*adak*), was careful not to let a promise emerge through her heart as it is ‘easy to give but hard to fulfil’.¹⁶⁴

It has been shown how visiting and seeing the tomb should not be taken as a matter of course as it is a gifted opportunity and granted occasion. What about the people working in the museum daily? What is their attitude towards the sacred place? I did not research this question; however, some occasions testify about the museum staff’s sincere appreciation and reverence towards the saint. A *talip*, who was a frequent visitor of the *dergâh* due to her studies nearby, told of her incredible experience connected with the staff working at the sacred place. She testified how the museum workers took up their duties only after visiting the tomb and showing their respect to the saint:

As soon as the doors opened in the morning, the people working there headed to Hacı Bektaş, prayed, made their wishes, and then went to work. This affected me a lot; I didn’t think it was like that, and I thought that after the place became a museum, people would work there like at any ordinary working place behind their desks. But as the door opened, the staff and I went together to the tomb. I was very impressed that people went directly to Hacı Bektaş’s presence, prayed and returned to their work after praying.¹⁶⁵

In general, at least respect towards the saint is expected from everyone visiting the site, whether Alevi, Sunni, Christian or atheist. However, seeing the museum workers starting their working day by bowing before the saint was unexpected to the informant. This incident brought the museum’s institution into a different perspective as a companion on the same journey, not as a stranger or interferer. This episode reminds me of the somewhat similar situation already mentioned above, where members of the Naqshbandi brotherhood chose, according to some narratives, to pray at the tomb of the saint instead of the specially built mosque.¹⁶⁶ Since the informant was there to pray for blessings for her upcoming journey, the prayer of the museum staff at the tomb before they started working reflected the informant’s aims and feelings and thus created a shared ground for devotion.

¹⁶⁴ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

¹⁶⁵ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹⁶⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

Common feelings towards the saint, such as respect, love, faith and expectations of protection and miracles, provide a basis for overcoming differences and misunderstandings between people, so the reconciling and uniting power of bringing together such different creatures as the lion and the gazelle continues its existence.

The mulberry tree

A certain mulberry tree (*kara dut ağacı*) is growing in the third courtyard of the *dergâh* that is impossible to miss. It grows not far from the *pir evi*, in front of the tomb of Balım Sultan (d. circa 1519),¹⁶⁷ who is regarded as the second *pir* or sheikh of the Bektashi brotherhood after Hacı Bektaş Veli and is also respected accordingly. A large old tree in front of the entrance of the tomb of Balım Sultan catches attention and attracts visitors to learn more about its story and meaning. A closer look reveals that half of the tree has dried out, and the lower parts of the trunk appear to have been burned. However, the other half of the tree lives on and even bears fruit. Since the tree is located on the territory of the museum, one is not allowed to tie ribbons on its branches, tear parts from it or write anything on its bark. It stands there to be observed, not touched.

The mulberry tree, which is a common feature in the Turkish graveyards representing the tree of life (Duran and Baş 2018: 425), stands in the *dergâh* as a witness of Hacı Bektaş Veli's dispatch by Ahmet Yesevi from Horasan to Anatolia. The *Velâyetnâme* tells us how Ahmet Yesevi blessed and sent Hacı Bektaş to Sulucakarahöyük as a spiritual leader to guide and rule. One of the dervishes of Horasan took a piece of a half-burnt mulberry log from a bonfire and threw it towards Anatolia as a sign of the saint's coming. One of the dervishes of Anatolia, a certain Haka Ahmet Sultan, caught and planted it in Sulucakarahöyük, where it is rooted and grows to this day (Korkmaz 2015: 35).

This tree is believed to originate according to the *Velâyetnâme* from Horasan, the 'land of 99 000 saints', followers of Ahmet Yesevi (Korkmaz 2015: 17–18). Also, it is believed to be contemporary to Hacı Bektaş Veli, still serving as a testimonial of his coming from Horasan to Anatolia. As such, it is distinguished from other courtyard trees and paid special attention. Even though binding ribbons to its branches and other ways of touching it is forbidden, it is still possible to stand or sit in its blessed shade. This opportunity is widely used while visiting the second *pir's* tomb. Making wishes while standing or sitting under the tree was reported, especially by female informants, as a meaningful act. Male informants did not pay much attention to this place as a special arena for prayer and wishes. However, they noted that this is important for women.¹⁶⁸ A female informant transmitted that there is a belief that the wish comes true when the fruit of the tree

¹⁶⁷ Balım Sultan played an important role in reorganising the Bektashi brotherhood in the beginning of the 16th century. Its division into two parts – the Çelebis, who claimed their descent from Hacı Bektâş-ı Velî and the celibate Baba's – began with the arrival of Balım Sultan (Birge 1994: 58; Kehl-Bodrogi 2017: 48).

¹⁶⁸ Interview 62-10, 16.03.2019.

falls on the body of the person making the wish.¹⁶⁹ *Dede Hüseyin A* confirmed this belief by telling how his wife was making a wish under the tree and waiting to be hit by the tree's fruit, which eventually happened. The mulberries are believed to fall on the heads of the claimants as signs of confirmation for the wishes to come true. It is also believed that the fruits may fall throughout the year regardless of the season.¹⁷⁰ On this occasion, belief in the tree's special nature was confirmed as the wish was granted.¹⁷¹

Beştaşlar

Significant natural landmarks such as hills, groves, boulders, stones and springs spread as a sacred belt around the tomb. Among the informants, the Lion spring (*Aslan çeşmesi*), the hill of Hırkadağı, the hill of Arafat, and the mulberry tree (*tut ağacı*) were frequently mentioned, in addition to Beştaşlar and Delikli Taş. Those natural sites associated with the life of the saint, such as Hırkadağ (the hill of the robe where he gathered with his dervishes for ritual dance) and springs that are associated with the waters of the Paradise around the town of Hacıbektaş. However, Beştaşlar and Delikli Taş stand out as the most talked about and well-known sites outside the town centre and, therefore, are not missed as a traditional part of the itinerary of the visitation. While Beştaşlar is a testimony of the saint's miracles and a site for prayer and wishes, the Delikli Taş is mainly visited for spiritual examination and curiosity.

Informants who visited between the festivals noted that they prayed their longest and deepest prayers at the tomb; the ones who visited during the festival admitted that, because of the crowds, they said their long prayers in different places, most commonly at Beştaşlar. This site of the Five Stones is located outside the town centre and is recognizable from afar as a sanctuary by ribbons fluttering in the wind attached to its fences. The site of Beştaşlar, known through the *Velâyetnâme*, attracts visitors as a testimony of the saint's foresight, justice and power to communicate with and influence nature. The story is told and retold by the informants as clear evidence about Bektaş and his power that is witnessed by natural objects such as stones.¹⁷² Visiting this place allows seekers to identify with the story as witnesses. Behind this attitude lies the opinion that if the stones could understand and testify, then a human should also be able to do the same. Seeing the Five Stones 'with one's own eyes' in their place confirms the story's truthfulness and strengthens faith in the possibility of miracles. One *talip* narrated how she prayed with her son at Beştaşlar from the inside out, believing in a miracle:

¹⁶⁹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹⁷⁰ There is story in the *Velâyetnâme* about Hacı Bektâş picking apples in the winter time as one of his miracles (Korkmaz 2015: 63–64).

¹⁷¹ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁷² F37-16, 27.03.2019; F18-07, 15.03.2019; M55-19, 20.03.2019.

I prayed together with my son. He married eight years ago, but they don't have any children. My son was also with me in faith – I fast, he fasts, I come, he comes. I prayed there with passion that I felt my heart boiling inside like a cauldron. ... First of all, I prayed, 'Oh Lord, I seek refuge in you, let our words be true, let our unity be true, let our health be true, let us stay in love, health, and peace, let all the children of the world be brothers, let there be no war but peace and love.' After that, I asked for health, peace, and blessings for my husband, children and myself. First for my next-door neighbour, my country, then my family. I prayed very broadly: 'Creator of the universe, you exist, you are one, you have no equal, you are from the light, you are no one's father, no one is your father. We do not seek refuge in anyone but you, oh Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş-i Veli! Like you, let our essence and word be true!'¹⁷³

Such prayers, which include confession of faith, general and personal wishes and needs, as well as mentioning the name of the saint, are common among the informants. Since the Beştaşlar is located in the open air as a natural site and has more space for visitors to concentrate on their prayers, many informants admitted that they had their prayer 'quality time' at Beştaşlar. Also, since Beştaşlar and Delikli Taş are located outside the museum territory, there are more options to take time for conversations, bind ribbons, place coins or pebbles on the boulders and light candles whilst praying. People place stones on top of each other, and if these small towers remain standing, it is a sign that the wish will be fulfilled. In these places, where there is more freedom and space for performing rituals, it's also possible for the *dedes* to take time and explain the stories connected to the sites and explain the meanings of these natural objects in the Alevi belief system.

A *talip*, who was especially critical of the commotion during the festival, noted that she had her most peaceful and meaningful prayers in a grove next to Delikli Taş.¹⁷⁴ She also observed that the natural environment allows one to fully experience contact with God and feel the power of prayer. As both Beştaşlar and Delikli Taş are located outside of the town centre and museum, between fields and groves, there are many more options for living out one's belief as wanted and needed, for example, gathering pebbles and earth (*teberik*) for taking away and for leaving ribbons and candles as a marker of one's visitation.

Delikli Taş

Delikli Taş, or the stone with a hole, is one of the most intriguing and controversial objects encountered during the visitation to Hacıbektaş. It is referred to as an integral part of the visitation that is not to be missed. Even those informants who have not been on the visitation describe Delikli Taş as something most attractive, whose power they desire to encounter. Whether religious or non-religious, they wish to see and experience the stone. Most religious respondents see Delikli Taş as a visible and tangible miracle. Non-religious Alevi, on the other

¹⁷³ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁷⁴ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

hand, regard it as an ordinary stone that, over time, has become associated with the life of Hacı Bektaş Veli and has therefore become endowed with miraculous abilities.¹⁷⁵ Also, some religious Alevis are skeptical of the particular stone's power, considering it a 'fabrication'.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the stone is a landmark that has been integrated into the continuous miracle-working present, accessible to those who believe and submit. The non-religious, on the other hand, either neglect the stone or demonstrate its indistinguishability from other ordinary stones by their successful crawling through the stone's hole.¹⁷⁷

Delikli Taş is a piece of rock with a small cave inside where according to the Alevi tradition, Hacı Bektaş Veli had his seclusions for prayer and fasting. Although there is no mention of a place called 'the stone with a hole' in the *Velâyet-nâme*, according to tradition, it is associated with a story in the hagiography about Hacı Bektaş having his seclusion in a small cave on the hill of Arafat with other saints (*eren*) visiting him there. Because the saints complained about the darkness inside the cave, Hacı Bektaş beat the wall with his fist and made a hole through which a man could crawl (Korkmaz 2021: 77). Because a *çilehane*, in general, was an ascetic place where dervishes secluded themselves from the needs and desires of this world for a certain period, fighting their ego (*nefis*) and aiming to reach higher levels (*makam*) of knowledge and spiritual reality, Delikli Taş, in particular, is seen as a unique place for the instant trial and ritual examination of morals and purity.

According to the religious informants, Delikli Taş is a stone that narrows and expands according to the person currently creeping through its hole. If the person is sinless and her or his heart is pure, the stone allows them to crawl through. If the person has sinned, he or she will be stuck in the hole and cannot reach from the dark cave to the light outside. Sometimes the stone grabs the person in such a way that he or she can move neither forward nor backward until he or she promises to bring a sacrifice. It is believed that crawling through the hole does not depend on how big or small a person is in size but only on whether he or she is a sinner. I was given many examples of how voluminous people came easily through the hole whilst some slender people got stuck.¹⁷⁸ These stories are also known to the non-religious Alevis without sharing their meaning and believing in their reality.¹⁷⁹

Delikli Taş is a place to examine hearts and deeds in the light of these beliefs. Being a good person, following ideals as taught by Hacı Bektaş Veli, such as 'control your hand, tongue and waist' and showing love and respect without distinction of race, gender, language and religion as part of the Alevi moral standards, the examination by the Delikli Taş is taken most seriously. This trial, which

¹⁷⁵ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019; M33-15, 23.03.2019.

¹⁷⁶ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

¹⁷⁷ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019.

¹⁷⁸ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019; F63-03, 11.03.2019; M63-21, 20.03.2019.

¹⁷⁹ Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019; M33-15, 23.03.2019.

is simultaneously desired and feared, is performed by the stone associated with the similar ability of 'knowing hearts' attributed to Hacı Bektaş Veli. The stone is associated with the conscious ability to distinguish between good and evil deeds performed by the people in physical touch with its walls. From this perspective, the stone is like a living creature, intelligent, competent and trustworthy. Its decision is correct but negotiable. As mentioned above, if a stuck person promises to bring a sacrifice, the stone lets them go. It follows that the stone is also attributed to the ability to hear verbal promises and read thoughts when the promise of sacrifice is made mentally. This animated stone releases feelings of happiness (*mutluluk*) once one has passed through it and disappointment if not one has not.

These beliefs have raised different attitudes towards the Delikli Taş among the informants. Most religious informants believe in the stone's ability to distinguish sinners from those without sin and discuss its power to examine people's hearts as a reality. It is seen as if going through the court of God. Feelings of fear and hope prevail in their accounts. Because of awe, some of the believing informants did not dare to try the stone, preferring to watch. The ones who have come through the stone describe the experience as incredible:

There was a lady before me in the queue, about 45 kilos, who should have gone through like a bird! I am 70 kilos. It is hard psychologically. 'I can't pass through,' she said. I told her that someone before you was more than 80 kilos, and she went through, you will pass through too! 'But I cannot go through,' she said. 'Look, my dear,' I said, 'you must let go, be clean-hearted, and you will pass through.' 'You talk too much,' she said. I said, 'If you'll excuse me, I'll go through'. I prayed as I entered. People have been stepping on the stone for years. How slippery it is! 'Oh, Hızır! Oh, Hünkar Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli! Help me, forgive my disgraceful mistakes! Let your word be true. I come to your examination (*dar*).' My feet are slipping, and the woman is still muttering there. I said to her to shut up for once. I told her, 'If I do not go through, you go through. If we do not go through, we go back. There is nothing to be done!' After that, I thought to support her foot, but it's not right because after you give support, everyone passes through; it's important to pass through without support! 'Oh, Hızır! Oh, Hacı Bektaş-i Veli!' We say that Allah Almighty has 1001 names, one of which is Şah-i Merdan! Oh, Şah-i Mardan, I didn't give up yet! Suddenly, I was upstairs! I never noticed how it happened. I thanked God! I didn't realize how I got above; I looked around, cried and prayed. It's a very good feeling, a very good feeling indeed! You have to feel it to understand!¹⁸⁰

Passing through the stone is more difficult for those who believe in its power. A claustrophobic effect and the fear of not going through, both associated with sinfulness, make some people turn back. Passing through needs physical and psychological concentration, but all the more so, the indescribable feeling of happiness after going through outweighs the effort. Those who have reached the other side

¹⁸⁰ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

of the cave find it to be a question of faith. 'It is not an ordinary stone. Passing through it is a question of faith, not size.'¹⁸¹ Some people go through several times in order to be sure about their passing. 'I passed through many times as it is an extraordinary stone, not everyone can go through it every time.'¹⁸² *Dede C* emphasized that passing through the stone should be a precondition for stepping before the saint.¹⁸³ However, some people try hard but turn back without reaching the other side. For example, a female informant tried to crawl through the hole but was afraid to try too much, as she had had an operation shortly before.¹⁸⁴

Some people pass quickly through the stone at the very first visitation. They do not want to miss the opportunity because it is one of their aims to see and go through the stone. In some cases, though, the opportunity to pass through it is postponed to another time because of the long queue.¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, some people have been to Hacibektaş many times and have never tried to enter the cave, let alone go through it. A *talip* who has been to Hacibektaş several times explained how she never tried to pass through the stone because of a lack of inner need or feeling:

I have visited Delikli Taş many times but never tried to pass through it....Sinners cannot go through. Good people pass through quickly. I have seen huge people passing through and thin people getting stuck in the stone. I don't know how it works. Maybe I could pass through it, but I've never tried. I've never wanted to enter the cave. I didn't feel like doing it. Maybe I will try another time....I don't think I would get stuck in there because of my sins, as I have seen people with many problems going through it. But I don't want to do it for the sake of only getting through it. Also, many people there notice the people who pass through and who don't. If I went alone, I might go through the hole, too. I would like this experience, but the ambiance is spoiled there. Will he pass through or not? This has turned into some spiritual race, and it bothers me. The spirit of this object has been broken.¹⁸⁶

There are different arguments among informants for entering and not entering. There is a fear of not passing through with others taking note. For some interviewees, the trial should be noticed only by the person involved and God, not others. In this light, the spiritual atmosphere of the stone is perceived as 'broken' if the others monitor the examination. The argument of not entering the cave because of the feeling of the 'broken spirit' of the place is also related to the chaotic behaviour of too many people. The feeling of a sacred object losing its sanctity through crowds of people acting spontaneously and without order makes some

¹⁸¹ Interview M63-21, 20.03.2019.

¹⁸² Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

¹⁸³ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

¹⁸⁴ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

¹⁸⁵ Interview M55-19, 20.03.2019.

¹⁸⁶ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

people give up and change their initial intentions. Another *talip* expressed her sadness about the racing crowds about Delikli Taş:

We have a saying about a free bread queue. The crowd over there reminded me of the years of economic crises when the state distributed free bread, and people were crushing each other and got injured in order to have bread. Delikli Taş was just like that, like a free bread queue. An incredible crowd! People are pushing each other in. They should have some control over there. I would have entered if there had been some order. But this scene made me very unhappy. I think this has caused Delikli Taş to lose its sanctity, and that's why I didn't enter.¹⁸⁷

The understanding of the 'broken spirit' or 'broken sanctity' of the place presumes that the place was originally sacred, and under certain circumstances, it can lose this sacredness or be 'broken'. And this is exactly how the places connected to Hacı Bektaş Veli are seen – they are originally sacred because of the connection to the saint's life and deeds but may become corrupted in the eyes of some informants because of the actions of visitors. Still, this condition of 'broken sacredness' is temporary since it is caused by the crowds' non-recurrent actions and expectations. As seen in the account above, the informant would have entered the cave if she had been alone, i.e., without others' surveillance and possible judgment.¹⁸⁸ The other informant previously referred to would have entered on the condition of more control and order.¹⁸⁹ Both circumstances are changeable, so for these interviewees, restoring the sanctity of the place is possible.

Some *dedes* also noted that they had not tried to enter the cave. *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* sees it as a needed and meaningful practice but has postponed his examination until 'next time'.¹⁹⁰ *Dede B* is critical of the idea and sees the practice as nonsense that breaks the spirituality of the site:

A man or a woman enters there and shouts, 'I'm sinless, I'm innocent' when exiting. It's nonsense! The spirituality of the place is broken! If you are pure, if you are right, you will pass through the eye of a needle, not just through Delikli Taş! If you are a righteous person, an honest person! So what can I say? For example, when I went this last time, I did not pass through. I did not enter!¹⁹¹

Informants who believe neither in a lost nor current 'power of the stone' were quite confident in proving their views by passing through the stone without any obstacle. A non-religious informant who deeply respects Hacı Bektaş Veli as a philosopher expressed his critical thoughts about the site:

¹⁸⁷ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹⁸⁸ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

¹⁸⁹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

¹⁹⁰ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁹¹ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

It is complete nonsense! I don't have any beliefs about it. When I entered the cave, I told my family I was an atheist. I don't believe in it. If it can squeeze me, let it squeeze me. I entered and exited the cave quickly. I don't believe the stone has any power! And the ones who believe are wrong because Hacı Bektaş Veli does not have such teaching, nor does he have such discourse about sinless people passing through and the sinful being stuck in that stone. It's a fabrication by Alevi. Because of this fabrication, people who feel guilty may have difficulties in going through the stone because they are psychologically disturbed and may not go through because of that. And people who are healthy and commit crimes can get through it. I don't think there is something to do with a divine presence or miracle. There is no such thing! Because as I said, I told my family clearly before I went in that if it can squeeze someone, let it squeeze me. But I passed through easily because I knew nothing like that would happen.¹⁹²

Nevertheless, even such counterarguments and criticisms do not affect the faith of people who are confident in their beliefs. Instead, these arguments are met with claims of unbelief, which closes people's eyes like a curtain (*perde*) so that they cannot understand and comprehend the miraculous power of the stone as well as other spiritual matters. People who do not seek open confrontation and do not wish to hurt someone else's religious feelings just pass through the stone without much noise and do not give it a particular spiritual meaning. A young *talip*, who does not believe in the stone's power as such, passed through the stone as a traditional part of the visitation:

It doesn't make sense for a stone to become smaller and bigger, you know, for people to pass through it. But people may have different feelings whilst entering and may not pass through because of that. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense to me to look for a miracle in a stone. I passed through it, personally....I'm glad I did. I don't think I've experienced anything spiritual in it. I had not been through Delikli Taş before, so I decided to go through it. That is it.¹⁹³

It can be concluded that the natural sacred objects in the town of Hacıbektaş, such as the mulberry tree, Beşaşlar and Delikli Taş, still act as reminders and testimonials of the saint's life and miraculous power. These sacred objects are seen as places of wishes and prayers, where needs are heard and met. Whilst tombs in general and the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli in particular lie in the centre of the Alevi spirituality, the objects connected to the saint's life serve as guardians of that spirituality. Those sites that can raise deep human feelings such as fear, love, faith, hope, happiness, unity and curiosity have attracted visitors to "come and see". The sacred town has been part of the saintly story from the beginning until today and continues to draw crowds to its vicinity. Informants who have not yet been to Hacıbektaş express their deep desire to do so. The place has great potential to remain a destination for spiritual searching. Whilst these sites are

¹⁹² Interview M50-14, 19.03.2019.

¹⁹³ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

perceived as places of miraculous interventions and encounters, the interviewees are determined to pass their knowledge and experiences on to new generations. It was detected during the fieldwork that the interviewees expressed their willingness to maintain their beliefs by revering the sacred places connected to the saint and passing them on to future generations. The key to the success of this process is seen in the spiritual heritage of Bektas, which is also confirmed by physical objects that can be touched and seen personally.

4.3.2.4 Sacred exchange

The interviews show that, in order to receive blessings and answers to prayers, one has to do or give something in exchange. Also, grasping the sanctity and power of the places and experiencing religious satisfaction requires certain circumstances, such as awareness, willingness, openness and a proper attitude on the visitor's part. Activating the power of the sacred places towards the visitor and his or her wishes and needs is perceived as a process of exchange. Sacrificing time and finances for the trip, and paying respect, love and dedication towards the saint are carried out with the hope of receiving something in return. As seen, the most crucial step towards receiving the blessings is to be physically present at the sacred sites. However, this precondition – to be present at the holy places – is often the most challenging condition to achieve because of lack of time, finances, and in some cases, consent of community members. In order to overcome these obstacles, help from God, *dedes*, family members and neighbours is searched for and expected. Also, as seen above, being present in Hacibektaş is perceived as a blessing in itself, granted by God.

Once at the site, visitors offer peace, love, respect and dedication from their hearts. Coming and giving up oneself (*teslim olmak*) in order to receive (whatever is given) is a method of spiritual growth and a sign of ultimate trust. Although giving oneself to God in spiritual submission in the name of the saint is one of the most radical steps and decisions on the path of dedication, many visitors also tend to mark their visitation by leaving some physical objects behind at the places as sacrifices. Small gifts such as scarves, ribbons, candles, coins, handkerchiefs, etc.,¹⁹⁴ confirm the visitor's stay in the places and his or her belief in their miraculousness (*keramet*). In rare cases, written prayers are also left in the holy places to confirm the visitor's longing physical form and memorialize her or his visit. Whatever small items given in devotion must belong to the person to commemorate the visit and help bring about a result. If there is nothing to give, one may take a piece of hair and leave it as a gift and reminder.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, it is also customary to leave behind the personal items of beloved ones who were not present to gain blessings and protection. For example, a female informant

¹⁹⁴ The bloodless sacrifice may include among Alevis all sorts of food, drinks, fruit, grain, candles, precious stones, weapons and peaces of cloth (Karaođlan 2007: 133).

¹⁹⁵ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

noted that she left a handkerchief for her husband and the shoes of her grandchild for their benefit.¹⁹⁶

Although leaving small gifts in holy places is a common custom, not all informants share the meaning and need for depositing such small gifts. Some informants are quite critical of the custom whilst staying neutral and leaving the decision up to the people involved. According to the interviews, this custom is more typical for women in the eyes of men. For example, *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* noted that it is more like a women's habit to bind ribbons and scarves at sites.¹⁹⁷ *Dede A*, who did not leave any gifts at *Hacıbektaş* either, still holds that if a person believes in the effect of such things as ribbons, it will work for the good since God is in everything.¹⁹⁸ *Dede C* noted that he 'is not fond of this kind of thing'.¹⁹⁹ *Dede B*, who did not leave anything himself, believes this is an ancient custom, a remnant of old days, and a question of faith²⁰⁰. Also, a young male *talip* narrated that he would not leave any gifts behind at sacred places since spirituality is more important than physical objects.²⁰¹

The tendency towards a 'more spiritual approach' is accompanied by criticism of the custom of leaving gifts at sacred places. Even some female informants noted during the interviews that they did not leave any gifts for specific reasons. A young female respondent expressed her critique as follows:

I left my prayers there, and I left my intention. I left my thoughts there, and I left my prayers there for everyone to be happy and for people to smile. I think my prayers are functioning there right now, and they continue to be effective. Let me just say that I did not pollute the place. I didn't load the stone by adding trash such as ribbons, napkins and hair pieces. I left my prayers.²⁰²

Perceiving small gifts as pollution of the sacred places was mentioned as a reason for not leaving anything behind, especially by the younger informants. This attitude is encouraged by faith in the power of prayers and intentions (*niyet*). Perceiving prayers, good thoughts and intentions as gifts and offerings that are left to the sacred sites offer the visitor confidence about their continuous effectiveness in fulfilling the objectives for which they were submitted.

Belief in the power of prayer without any physical amplifiers is characteristic of most male informants. The *dedes* related that offering one's own essence and availability is more reasonable than something physical in exchange.²⁰³ As noted, some female informants also agree with that view, as they would instead offer

¹⁹⁶ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

¹⁹⁷ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

¹⁹⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

¹⁹⁹ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

²⁰⁰ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

²⁰¹ Interview M25-18, 27.03.2019.

²⁰² Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁰³ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019; interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

their prayers and intentions without adding any physical objects. On the other hand, there is also criticism of those who do not practice and encourage this custom. *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* related that his wife criticises him for not following the regular pattern of leaving small gifts at sacred places and believing in their effectiveness.²⁰⁴ Small gifts are generally considered a matter of belief and tradition dependent on particular persons and their understanding. However, the principle of receiving by giving is dominant among informants. The offering may include small gifts or be presented as inner devotion expressed in submission (*teslim olmak*), love and prayers not accompanied by physical gifts.

In exceptional cases that may be characterized as complicated situations, the intentions to do something good (*niyet*) for someone or to bring a votive blood sacrifice (*adak*)²⁰⁵ in the name of the saint are applied. Since the votive blood sacrifices are considered a compelling means of achieving the desired result but also difficult to fulfil, the vows to do so are carefully considered.²⁰⁶ I detected only one example among the interviewees about a votive blood sacrifice performed in the *Hacıbektaş*.²⁰⁷ At the same time, there were examples²⁰⁸ of votive offerings elsewhere – in the vicinity of former and current habitats, for example, the tomb of one of the disciples of *Hacı Bektaş*, *Hamza Baba*, in *Kemalpaşa*, in *Izmir*. There are examples of how visitors take control of their thoughts during the visitation in order to avoid making vows in their hearts since this is easy to formulate but difficult to perform, especially when individuals have had a former experience of this situation:

When you vow to make a sacrifice (*adak*), it is a big load on your neck, and you must do it. My husband had a vow of sacrifice in *Hamza Baba*, *Kemalpaşa*. It is a commitment and responsibility. When you make a vow, you have to do it. That is why it didn't pass through my mind. When you sacrifice at home in the saint's name, it is also valid. That is why I didn't make a vow to sacrifice there. We had a vow that we fulfilled only after 5–6 years, so it was a late fulfilment. I don't want to be in debt. Because of the material situation...I can also perform the sacrifice at home in the name of *Hacı Bektaş Veli*; that is why I didn't make a vow for the sacred place of the saint.²⁰⁹

The main difficulty, in this case, is to make the votive offering in the vicinity of the tomb of *Hacı Bektaş*, cook and share the meat among the people gathering there. It is not easy, for one has to pay for the sacrificial animal and the trip, which can be a considerable expense for one family. For this reason, most informants

²⁰⁴ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

²⁰⁵ About 10 000-15 000 animals are slaughtered as sacrifices annually in *Hacıbektaş* (Belediye mezbahası (Municipality butchery) (<http://www.Hacibektas.bel.tr/web/belediye-mezbahasi/>)).

²⁰⁶ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019; interview F27-02, 08.03.2019; interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

²⁰⁷ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

²⁰⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019; interview F37-16, 27.03.2019; interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁰⁹ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

do not practice *adak* regarding Hacıbektaş but do *niyet* instead. Furthermore, Seyit Derviş Tur, in his book *Erkânname*, which is used as a guide by the *dedes* of the *cemevi*, does not encourage making an *adak* ‘in every difficult circumstance’ (Tur 2012: 758). There are also other reasons for not practicing *adak* that are related to how it is performed. These relate to similar criticisms of other rituals performed at the sacred sites, such as being distant from the original ideas and not having enough respect towards the different parts involved. A young *talip* who expressed her criticisms about different matters also noted that one of the reasons she did not make a vow (*adak adamak*) in Hacıbektaş was the corrupt way how it is performed²¹⁰ and preferred to make a *niyet* instead:

Adak is important in our belief, but I didn’t do it. I made an intention (*niyet*). I said, if my prayer comes true, I will fast for three days and help a child in need. Fasting is something for me, but if I help a child, buy clothes, a pen, and a notebook, then it’s beneficial for that child and me, that’s why I decided not only to fast. Do something; let that be the purpose of your fast. My prayer was accepted, and I fasted for three days. And as I said, I helped a child. The *adak* means slaughtering an animal, and I didn’t do that because *adak* is no longer the same as it used to be; people confuse it a lot. They slaughter lambs and chickens. They cook and eat. It should not be that way. I mean, *adak* is to slaughter, to cook, yes, but take a little for yourself and give the meat to those who need it. And since this is not the case anymore and things are messed up, I did not make a vow. I made an intention. I fasted and helped this child.²¹¹

While *adak* is a quite determined phenomenon, *niyet* gives more freedom of choice and can be done according to one’s preferences. Both means serve the same purpose – to express faith in the miracle of the saint and receive desired answers to wishes and prayers in exchange. As seen, the intention to give up food for a certain period by fasting and helping people experiencing poverty to gain answers is represented among informants. Furthermore, the intention to visit sacred places, such as the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli and distributing mouthfuls (*lokma*) as a bloodless sacrifice at the sites or during *cem* gatherings, is seen as a common choice for *niyet*.²¹² Coming to the visitation with full hands, whether within *niyet* or not, was mentioned especially among the female informants, who took with themselves home-baked food, usually of wheat, as *lokma* and shared it at the holy places or during the *cem* gathering organised in Hacıbektaş.²¹³ The *lokma* shared during the *cem* held in the framework of the commemorative festival in Hacıbektaş in 2018 found active participation – there were loads of *lokmas* brought together that were consumed by the people at the spot, hand over

²¹⁰ Two thirds of the sacrificial meat should be cooked and shared to the people in need; to those who cannot afford buying and cooking meat themselves (Tur 2012: 757).

²¹¹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²¹² Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019; interview F27-12, 08.03.2019.

²¹³ Interview F42-09, 16.03.2019, interview F63-03, 11.03.2019; interview F27-12, 08.03.2019; interview F37-16, 27.03.2021.

fist. Whilst I was observing the blessing and distribution of *lokma*, someone came to me and handed me a small package of it, so I could feel welcomed and part of the ceremony.²¹⁴

In addition to the individual process of giving and receiving during the visitation, there are also collective means of showing respect and love and conducting prayers in the name of the saint. Especially during festivals, various common activities take place that lead people to pay attention to the teaching and guiding of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Visitors may also take part in collective blood sacrifice (*kurban*) during the festivals.²¹⁵ In this case, the money is collected, the animals are bought and cooked, and the meat is shared between the people gathered at the spot. Dede Hüseyin A, who served as the chairman of the Buca *cemevi* for six years, noted that two to three big buses headed to the festival annually, and each time there was a collective blood sacrifice organised.²¹⁶ The number of sacrificial animals may reach 15–20 for the collective offering made by one particular participating group.²¹⁷ The slaughtering, cooking and eating are done all together, and the meat is also offered for free (*Hak lokması*) to the people who are present on the spot.²¹⁸ This kind of shared sacrifice enables visitors to be included as active participants at a communal level, in addition to personal involvement.

It can be concluded that it is essential for visitors not to appear in the saintly presence with empty hands or empty hearts.²¹⁹ This implicit attitude that ‘there is always something of yourself that you can leave as a gift’ is carried by the understanding of gaining blessings in return. The inner demand of offering something in the saint’s name for showing trust in his miracle (*keramet*), his intercessory power and hope for answers are perceived as part of ‘our belief’, a confession of faith. Material gifts and immaterial gifts such as respect, love and trust that are presented as marks of devotion remain as reminders of the visitation and prayers. Sharing home-baked mouthfuls (*lokma*) may be undertaken due to *niyet* or thanksgiving. Collective blood sacrifices (*kurban*) that are paid, cooked and eaten together are valued as a mark of consent and unity.

4.3.2.5 Teberik: owning the sacred

In addition to the blessings gained through visitation to the sacred places, it is common to collect small natural or artificial items such as pebbles, soil, branches and pieces of fabric from the tomb’s vicinity as objects of a spiritual power that

²¹⁴ Fieldwork notes 16.08.2018, Hacıbektaş.

²¹⁵ *Kurban* in general means blood sacrifice. There are different types of *kurban* depending on their aims. Whilst the *adak kurbanı* is a votive sacrifice, there are also festive (*bayram*), unity (*birlik*), thanksgiving (*şükür kurbanı*) and confession (*ikrâr kurbanı*) sacrifices in Alevism that are performed on due occasions (Tur 2012: 757).

²¹⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

²¹⁷ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

²¹⁸ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

²¹⁹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019; F27-02, 08.03.2019.

is believed to manifest itself through these objects. Every such small object, known as a *teberik*, carries the meaning of the saint's presence wherever it is taken. Usually, *teberiks* are preserved at home inside a clean green cloth in a drawer or hung on a wall.²²⁰ In the case of fabric, it may be placed between the pages of a meaningful book.²²¹ According to tradition, a *teberik* is taken out from its place at least once a year, in the sacred month of *Hızır* (January-February), washed and attended to with due care and then placed back in its chosen place. It is believed that a *teberik* should be attended to once a week, on Thursdays, but this has been changing since the interviewees migrated to urban areas.²²² Instead, the *teberik* is taken out for healing, blessings and protection when needed. The wash water is drunk or sprayed on people and animals, and the soil is eaten from a fingertip. It is believed to have a protective and healing power and is used mainly for children and the sick. In some cases, the *teberik* is always kept close, for example, in wallets.²²³

The very word *teberik* bears the connotations of gift (*armağan*), fortune (*uğur*), blessing (*bereket*) and memorabilia (*hatıra eşya*), or small things left behind by a deceased person. It is also understood as sacred soil, the sanctity of which derives from contacts with sacred persons' tombs, such as those of forefathers, founders of the *ocaks*, saints and miracle workers. Caner Işık, whose works are also read by the *dedes* of the *cemevi*, said in an interview that Alevis collect *teberik* in order to materialize spiritual power (Işık and Yıldırım 2020). This view is also shared by the interviewees – the power of the sacred places is believed to be carried by their *teberiks*. All the interviewees, apart from the non-religious, agreed that a *teberik* is a mighty object, representing the power of the sacred place from where it was collected and should be attended to with due care and attention. Regarding its role as an actual power source, there are various understandings and opinions about the ownership and usage of a *teberik*.

Some interviewees collect *teberiks* from every visitation (*ziyaret*)²²⁴; others are against collecting and owning them²²⁵. Insofar as a *teberik* is considered a spiritually mighty object, it is seen as a source of blessings, but it may also be a source of harm if not treated properly. Those who favour having *teberiks* at home tend to collect them on every visitation. *Dede A* pointed out that owning *teberiks* as sources of blessing and protection is characteristic of Alevis in the east of Anatolia:

²²⁰ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019; D42-09, 16.03.2019.

²²¹ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

²²² Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019; F37-16, 27.03.2019; F52-17, 27.03.2019.

²²³ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

²²⁴ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

²²⁵ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

We who have come from the East have *teberiks* from the graves of all the saints, and we have *teberiks* from the graves of Hacı Bektaş Veli, Hamza Baba, Abdal Musa and many others. We believe they care for us and protect us from evil – our home, our children, and us.²²⁶

Belief in the favour and protection that comes from the sacred presence embodied in the *teberik* motivates interviewees to collect them and keep them in their homes. A female respondent noted that she collected *teberiks* ‘from every place in Hacıbektaş – from the tomb of Hacı Bektaş and Mahzuni Şerif, from Delikli Taş, from Beştaşlar’.²²⁷ It is important to collect the *teberik* personally because only then is it known where it comes from. When I attended the festival in Hacıbektaş, people were selling stones and pebbles as *teberik*.²²⁸ The interviewees noted it as an unpleasant situation as it should not be on sale for money, and further, its origin may not be as told.²²⁹ As one of the aims of owning the *teberik* is to consume its wash water and eat it as soil for blessings, health and protection, one female informant noted that she collects *teberiks* only from clean and natural places, not from urban areas where the soil is polluted.²³⁰ Eating the soil of faraway beloved sacred places helps overcome difficult times and calms down the turbulence of life.²³¹ A *talip* narrated how she has *teberiks* at home from different places and sees them as connecting links to sacred places.

I have *teberiks* in my house as pebbles and soil. I took these from the tomb of Hacı Bektaş and also from the Beştaşlar. There are all kinds of *teberiks* in my house. For example, from Oğulveren, in my village, there is Hızır. I have a *teberik* from there. Here is the tomb of Hamza Baba. I have his *teberik*. We keep them in a clean cloth and put them in a clean, not too fancy place. We tie them up, and we keep them in our kitchen. It is a matter of faith for us. We believe in its blessing, and we keep them at home in a clean place. In the month of Hızır, we fast for three days and take them out and wash them. I tell you as I do – I soak the stones in water, wash them, dry them with a cloth and put them back. I drink that wash water myself and give it to my children and family for drinking. When I wash it in one glass, I divide it into four, so I drink that water by saying *bismillah*. It is as if I went to that tomb and drank the water of that tomb.²³²

The washing, drying and attending to *teberiks* are religious tasks accompanying their owners. The former account shows different possible ways to do it, as the speaker explained how and why she does this. Seeing, touching and drinking the water of the *teberik* creates feelings similar to those experienced during visi-

²²⁶ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

²²⁷ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

²²⁸ Fieldwork notes, 16.-17.08.2018.

²²⁹ Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

²³⁰ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

²³¹ Interview F17-06, 15.03.2019.

²³² Interview F37-16, 27.03.2019.

tations. In this light, the *teberik* is a window to far-away sacred places and connects them with the seeker. For example, a *talip* noted that ‘praying in front of *teberik* is like praying at the tomb’.²³³ Another *talip*, who has taken *teberiks* from all the visitations she has been on, noted that she opens them according to her needs and feelings:

I have *teberiks* from my home villages in Erzurum and Hacıbektaş. I take them out, kiss them, and pray in their name. I have them in a drawer in my bedroom. Whenever I open that drawer, I kiss them in prayer. However, I should do it every Thursday evening as my parents used to do.²³⁴

The interviewees hold that attending to *teberiks* should occur every Wednesday evening, the holiest time of the week, along with lighting candles. In reality, however, this ritual custom is hard to maintain because of the changing lifestyle in an urban area. Still, some informants tend to strive to keep the custom. A *talip* stressed that the *teberik* should be placed before the candles on Thursdays, and mouthfuls (*lokma*) should be baked and shared.²³⁵ Another *talip* confirmed that she does it regularly, taking all her *teberiks* out on Thursdays, placing them in front of candles and saying her prayers.²³⁶ However, attending to *teberiks* seems to take precedence according to needs and circumstances. Most of the informants with *teberiks* seem to relate to them as part of their daily lives. They are still taken care of since they are kept in clean places and are washed and attended to, but informants feel free to do this whenever the opportunity or need occurs, not following the pattern of sacred time, seeing all days and times as suitable. There is another example of how *teberik* is used daily, according to one’s needs:

We brought a *teberik* from Hacıbektaş. My wife is a very faithful believer who brought soil and pebbles. She also took some leaves from that mulberry tree for healing purposes. She took it and gave it to the children for drinking.... We have the *teberik* of Hacı Bektaş hanging on a wall in our house. In the mornings and every time we see it, we pray, ‘Oh, Hacı Bektaş-i Veli, don’t leave us in trouble, help us, grant goodness and beauty to our children.’ We pray that way because it is in our belief!.... We brought it from a holy place, and it is a value! When we see it, it takes us to that sacred place, Hacı Bektaş, and its divine atmosphere. So you expect something from it. For example, you wait for healing when you are sick. My wife goes to it when she gets into a difficult situation with the children. She prays to God and waits for healing. That’s what this belief has! It is a great value; whoever seeks, finds!²³⁷

²³³ Interview M55-19, 20.03.2019.

²³⁴ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

²³⁵ Interview M63-21, 19.03.2019.

²³⁶ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

²³⁷ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

As seen, Hacı Bektaş Veli and other saints are seen as being present in homes through the *teberiks*. And yet, precisely this view prevents some informants from collecting *teberiks* and taking them to their homes. These informants question their daily behaviour and wonder if their home is worthy of a sacred presence. They are very critical of themselves, comparing their life and deeds with the saints' qualities:

A *teberik* is taken from sacred places, but can we keep the teachings of these people? Can we reflect them in our lives? This is important to me! That makes sense, doesn't it? Can we be like them, can we live like them, can we be correct, do we help our companions, do we share? That's the important thing!²³⁸

This reasoning refers to deep devotion and faith on the one hand, and a conservative attitude about customary behavior on the other. If the *teberik* is not attended to properly, it would have been better not to have taken it.²³⁹ Since the *teberik* is considered the same entity as the saint's tomb, it is attributed with the same senses— it sees, feels, hears and knows people's hearts. Keeping it in a cloth and drawer does not diminish its spiritual power concerning the surroundings. Having this in mind, some interviewees see great potential for a *teberik* to act not as a blessing but, on the contrary, as a source of harm. If a *teberik* is not given due attention on Thursdays, or at least during the month of *Hızır*, by the people living in the household, it may become a harmful object. Furthermore, if the people in the household do not behave according to Alevi principles derived from *eline, diline, beline sahip ol*, the potential for harm grows:

I don't think every house can handle *teberiks*. If a *teberik* comes from its place to your house, its holiness comes with it. If you can't live accordingly, you don't deserve it. In my home, for example, my father doesn't believe, my mother believes a lot....but she doesn't live it. My brother is not a believer. My brother and his bride are atheists....I can't hold it by myself. It may hurt me because of its value. That's why I didn't bring it, and I recommend many people not to bring it. Too many people have pebbles in green cloth in their kitchens – from Munzur Baba, Düzgün Baba, Hacı Bektaş Veli. But when the *teberik* is present, and you are sitting in front of it gossiping or cursing behind someone's back....You may look at it and say something wrong about someone or yourself. That's why I'm against it. It is better for me to visit the places. I take a souvenir such as a neckless, glass, spoon or a book from the place, but wrapping pebbles or soil in cloth and taking it home is a too heavy for me. That's why I don't do it.²⁴⁰

Keeping an atmosphere at home worthy for a *teberik* seems to be taken very seriously by all interviewees. This view is shared by *dedes* and *talips* who do not collect *teberiks* out of prudence and critical self-evaluation. *Dede B*, who owns a

²³⁸ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

²³⁹ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

²⁴⁰ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

teberik from the tomb of Abdal Musa but not from Hacı Bektaş, explains the duties the ownership of a *teberik* brings with it:

Some people collect *teberiks* in Hacıbektaş, but I didn't. If you take it, you must give it its due attention because it is the stone of the sacred place....For example, in our faith, they are taken out every Thursday, candles are lit before them, and prayers are prayed. *Teberiks* are washed in the month of *Hızır*. Its water is drunk, given to the children, and added to food. If you can give a *teberik* its due attention, only then can you have it! I have not brought any *teberik* from the lodge (*dergah*) of Hacı Bektaş yet, but I have brought a handful of soil from the lodge of Abdal Musa Sultan. I have it at home.²⁴¹

As we have seen, the interviewees have different opinions about collecting and having *teberiks* at home. The sanctity of a *teberik* (which all the religious interviewees believe in) is why it is collected and not collected. Those who do have *teberik* assume the needed responsibility that comes together with it concerning Wednesday nights and during the month of *Hızır*. Moreover, they tend to relate to the *teberiks* in a more familiar way attending to them 'all the time' and 'every morning'. However, not all owners of *teberiks* acquired them from Hacıbektaş. Some interviewees did not collect *teberiks* from Hacıbektaş but still have them from other places. It is typical to possess *teberiks* from home villages as reminders of beloved places, the tombs of the founders of the *ocaks* or disciples of Hacı Bektaş, such as Abdal Musa. Just as it seems easier to vow on behalf of lesser saints, their *teberiks* also seem less harmful if not attended to with due care or when performing improper behavior in their vicinity. Hacı Bektaş Veli, as the saint of saints, is on the top of the spiritual hierarchy, and everything concerning his life or death stands above other saints and 'mature men' (*eren*). In order to prevent possible omissions and the resulting regret regarding the *teberik*, some informants replied that they never collected *teberiks* at all.

4.3.2.6 When expectations become reality

Performing a visitation to saints' tombs in general and to Hacıbektaş in particular, as we have seen, is an experience that helps maintain and develop the sense of being part of the Alevi community and a carrier of the continuity of previous generations. While the saints' tombs are an integral part of Alevism, visiting them is integral to being an Alevi. The tombs of the saints are essential not only for religious Alevi but also for non-religious ones. However, this thesis does not pay much attention to the non-religious aspects of the visitation of the saints' tombs since its main focus is to research the religious aspects of the visitation. Planning the visitation, meeting at the sacred tombs, sharing *lokma*, performing *adak* and *kurban* sacrifices, participating in the *cem* gatherings, and praying and wishing for miracles in the name of the saints are seen as activities that express the essence of being an Alevi. Visitations are looked back to as landmarks of this earthly

²⁴¹ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

journey that is supposed to train and lead travelers towards spiritual perfection. In this subchapter, I will concentrate on the interviewees' feelings and experiences during their visit to Hacıbektaş.

As seen above in a previous subchapter, many different aims were mentioned by interviewees for visitation. However, one of the most important objectives is to experience the holiness and miraculous power of the place that, in return, leads to spiritual satisfaction. The lived feelings were highlighted as proof of the power and miracle of the place. Even the non-religious informants admitted that the place is spiritually attractive; however, they don't associate it with religious or God-given matters: 'There is a spirituality (*maneviyat*) there, but it's not connected to the religious things. He is a significant person (*zat*), and his tomb is not comparable to the other tombs we have in our villages.'²⁴² Religious Alevi associate the spiritual attractiveness of the place unquestionably with the saint's powerful presence in his tomb. We have seen above how this particular divine atmosphere (*ilahî hava*), derived from the saintly presence, is seen as the reason for people 'to come' and for 'miracles to happen'. At the same time, this 'atmosphere' and how 'it works' is not explicable by earthly means.

Believe me, I have witnessed things happening! I was surprised to hear that a person who had never had a child came and made a wish in the tomb, and nine months later, she was pregnant. Nobody can understand how it happens. If this divine atmosphere finds an explanation, the end of the world will be at hand. So I have witnessed it. I'm a rigorous person. I am one of those who want to see with my own eyes and then believe. I am a person who does not lean on mystics, but I confess there are things that we do not know. There is a divine atmosphere, and there is divine justice! And it can manifest itself. Those who become right with God, who take refuge in Him, receive their reward (*karşılık*). I have witnessed it.²⁴³

This account shows us that there may also be some doubts about alleged miracles; however, there are genuine miracles that have been confirmed by one's 'own eye'. *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* made it his task to convince me about the miraculous power of the place as he had seen and experienced it himself. He argued that the one who has seen this could not be in doubt. Thus, miracles happen whether seen or not, but it is better for the people 'to come and see' in order to not be in doubt. On the other hand, it was often communicated that no one could question an experience as not genuine when it has been lived personally by someone. Whilst it was not my task and intention to question the 'reality' or 'authenticity' of the miracles, the interviewees often took a position of defending their standpoints, which might be a reaction to some previous encounters with non-Alevi outsiders or a general view of them as a party that does not understand. Interviewees often emphasized that outsiders might not understand or take the details of their

²⁴² Interview D50-14, 19.03.2019.

²⁴³ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

practices and experiences seriously, but this does not change the truth about what has been experienced and what is believed.

There are some preconditions for experiencing a divine encounter. We have seen that the primary necessary qualities are faith, love and the visitor's intention. Or, as *dede* Hüseyin put it, those who become right with God and take refuge in Him receive their reward. *Dede B* noted that it is necessary to be open-hearted. 'If you aren't open-hearted, you go empty and return empty. You have to go with love towards God and *Ehl-i Beyt*.'²⁴⁴ A male *talip* expressed that striving for the needed preconditions is the most important thing. 'If you go with a pure heart, you will get your answers. But you have to strive for purity, love and justice. You must know yourself, and only then can you control yourself.'²⁴⁵ Receiving answers for wishes and prayers as a return (*karşılık*) for love and submission is perceived as a result of being noticed or seen. This very personal encounter includes seeing the place and being seen by it, or as one of the *talips* put it – miracles happen when the energy of the tomb and the visitor's intention meet.²⁴⁶ Such mutual encounter makes the impossible possible, the tomb's power to manifest in people's lives as miracles, protection, a feeling of happiness, well-being, etc.

Positive feelings such as happiness, joy, love, confidence, tolerance, fullness in spirit and excitement that form the basis for spiritual satisfaction are mentioned whilst describing personal religious experiences concerning the visitation to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. Without spiritual or inner satisfaction, the visitation does not fulfill its purpose. Most informants were satisfied with their visitation, and I analyse their reasoning below. Before that, I will show why everyone was not satisfied. It will be seen that feelings and emotions experienced on the spot played an essential role in assessing the visitation as satisfactory and successful, or vice versa. A *dede* noted that he was not satisfied with the visitation as he did not feel what he had expected to feel:

You need to feel something! I went with this expectation, but it was not there. I was wondering if the reason for my expectations not being met was the large crowds, the people who disrupt the energy of the place, or else the energy of the place is not great enough.²⁴⁷

The large crowds were mentioned as reasons for not experiencing the 'energy' and as a confirmation of their holiness. At the same time, the crowds confirmed the visitors' attitudes about the continuing holiness and meaningfulness of the site. At the same time, bearing with the crowds and commotion about the sacred places was explained as a trial of tolerance. Preserving a friendly attitude and a smiling face despite discomfort affirmed the site's miracle (*keramet*). Since

²⁴⁴ Interview D24-13, 19.03.2019.

²⁴⁵ Interview M55-19, 20.03.2019.

²⁴⁶ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁴⁷ Interview D45-12, 19.03.2019.

tolerance (*hoşgörü*) towards other people is a significant value in Alevism, being tolerant amid chaotic crowds was explained as the saint's miracle:

I've never been so relieved and thankful in my life. Something happened. I was very calm, and I was smiling. Despite being very tired, I felt relieved. I may have been too emotional, but I had wanted to go a long time ago, and I went. I finally got what I wanted. I dreamed about it for years. Its atmosphere... I think that it is Hacı Bektaş who makes you feel that holiness there. And I didn't get angry. I usually am very nervous person. I am a person who can react very sharply to children, and I didn't get angry despite the many variances there! And now, whenever Hacı Bektaş is mentioned, I feel the joy of my visitation....Something was missing in my life – visiting Hacı Bektaş, and it was fulfilled.²⁴⁸

Thankfulness and joy over the fulfilled dream prevented negative feelings from taking precedence during the visitation. Also, as the holiness of the place is perceived as a varying factor in the people's attitudes, visitors began to behave (unexpectedly to themselves) in a friendly and tolerant way, even towards annoying co-visitors. Situations that would generally lead to contestation and argumentation were prevented by tolerance and sympathy:

I was very emotional at the time of the visit. When someone spoke offensive words to me, I was so tolerant! A lady, my neighbor, got involved in everything; God bless her! However, I was not offended. Oh my God, O Hünkar Hacı Bektaş-i Veli! I said, Oh Lord, I will not break anyone's heart. How peaceful I was! I came to Hünkar! The woman curses others because the food is spilled a little. The other women got involved. Look at me, and it's not clear where the *lokma* goes! If a person thinks well, it will be well! I noticed it there! Have you ever been filled with love? You become a lover, and you reach the Truth!²⁴⁹

Attaining an understanding of how to strive for the better, how to act and react in a better, i.e., a tolerant and mature way, among others concerning neighbors' shortcomings, was experienced as a milestone in spiritual development. Feeling inner peace and love was recognized as a condition for reaching God. Good and positive feelings during the visitation are perceived as an affirmation of its divine atmosphere, as the confirmation of the right and true intentions are met by the sanctity of the place. This is the place where the soul of the visitor feels nourished, the level of the spiritual feelings raised to heights,²⁵⁰ and at the same time, an enormous inner peace is experienced.²⁵¹ The feelings are compared to those during the Hajj by people who have never been there.²⁵² *Dede Hüseyin Akçay* also highlighted the process of spiritual purification during the visitation and

²⁴⁸ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁴⁹ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

²⁵⁰ Interview F41-04, 12.03.2019.

²⁵¹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁵² Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

subsequent peace of mind (*huzur*). ‘The visitor comes to a recognition of absolute values that matter and becomes able to give up burdens, which leads to inner peace.’²⁵³

The feelings experienced during the visitation may be characterized as deep, overwhelming and exceptional. The feelings that I found most mentioned during the interviews are happiness, peace of mind, relief, joy, excitement, spiritual purification and fulfillment, and fear of being insufficient or not worthy. The feeling of insufficiency, one of the negative feelings besides sadness about the underdeveloped town and disappointment about not feeling the expected effects, is closely connected to self-criticism about not being worthy of the saintly presence. Testing oneself in the light of the teachings and deeds of the saintly Hacı Bektaş Veli leads to recognizing human weaknesses. The question of ego (*nefis*), which is seen as the reason for all sorts of shortcomings that prevent the current generation from living the way the saint and his companions did, is considered and thought of during the visitation. Examining oneself before reaching the saint’s grave highlights various critical thoughts, which, however, are resolved in his loving reception:

One feels drawn to more profound spirituality, fulfilled, and also a little helpless compared to his greatness. Because you keep your faith alive with his stories. When I think about the miracles he showed, I question myself. Life is easier today compared to all these difficulties of that time, but we don’t live our faith, keep it alive, and explain it adequately. We don’t strive to follow his example, and I question how much we deserve him. A legacy has been left to us, but how much do we claim it, and how much can we spread his thoughts? Can we really explain it to people? I am a little critical on that subject.... But the moment I approach him, the moment I enter his tomb, the only thing I feel is peace and trust! I can feel his presence. It’s a very different feeling, it’s hard to describe and express!²⁵⁴

The feelings that are hard to express to an outsider are still lived and real for the one involved. In order to live these real and life-changing feelings, the informants take up this long and costly journey to the saint’s tomb since this is the place where the ‘holiness of the tomb and the intention of the visitor meet’. Because the female informants were more willing to talk about their feelings during the visitation, male informants often referred to the difficulty of putting the feelings into words since ‘they should be experienced, not described’. Also, the concept of secrecy (*sır*) especially prevented the *dedes* from describing their spiritual experiences:

It is challenging to describe as it must be experienced! Since this is an inner experience, it is complicated to describe. I could explain it somehow, but belief is not such a thing... In our belief, some things are secret and unspoken. If you talk about these things, you will lose them. That is why a lot of things are not spoken

²⁵³ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

²⁵⁴ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

of. Some things are unspoken because we believe that if you talk about certain things, it's like marketing or selling. Inner things are not spoken of much and are kept because you lose them as soon as you speak. They are gone from you. So the secrets are not spoken! Otherwise, the secret is broken and destroyed. God gives secrets to those who can keep them and does not give them to those who do not! If you talk about it, then it is like using it for advantage, for making a profit, and it won't stay with you. It will be taken from you.²⁵⁵

Maintaining the concept of secrecy makes it difficult for outsiders and researchers like me to gain deeper knowledge about spiritual peculiarities in their details. Nevertheless, it indicates the informants' seriousness about the importance and meaning of such personal encounters and religious experiences. These experiences are real and not to be played with. They should not be used to gain popularity or other benefits. I may only suggest that I, as an outsider researcher, was told of something and not told of many things according to the informants' choices. When I reached the border of secrecy, I respected that and did not make an effort to overcome it by using different interviewing techniques. Instead, they wish to keep this secret knowledge gained by the divine personal encounters, indicating the reality, meaning and importance of these religious experiences for the people involved. In some cases, I was told openly that some things might not be spoken of. I understood from a sort of 'diplomacy of answers' when the border of secrecy had been reached.

Lived feelings and answers acquired for prayers and wishes confirm the holy tomb's holiness and power, which helps keep the faith alive²⁵⁶. Despite visitors' various improper and unpleasant behavior and authorities' omissions, the respondents felt their spiritual needs were answered and expectations fulfilled. Even the fact that hotels were overbooked and many had to spend the night in school halls or tents during the festivals was positively reflected as an opportunity to be Hacı Bektaş Veli's selected guests.²⁵⁷ The visit's inner satisfaction did not depend so much on external situations as much as on positive feelings that were expected to be felt. Fulfilled expectations, whether through inner experiences or through changes for the better in real life, i.e., miracles, led informants to assess their visitations as satisfactory. Spiritual satisfaction is closely related to the fulfilled expectations or the reward (*karşılık*) that was gained through the visitation. There are testimonials about praying for and achieving suitable spouses, healings and special protection. Testimonials about children born to couples unable to conceive a child were most frequently highlighted as lived miracles. For example, a female informant 'all' of whose 'prayers were heard and granted' testified how she was accompanied in prayer by a woman who gave birth to triplets after the visitation:

²⁵⁵ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

²⁵⁶ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁵⁷ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

My mother's friend for twenty years had been married for nine years and had no children. They tried everything. Maybe they went to the wrong hospitals, we don't know, but they tried everything. We went to Hacı Bektaş together, and we prayed everywhere we went. I prayed for her at every tree. I opened my hands and said, 'God, please grant children to her!' We prayed in many places, and she cried a lot. She wanted to have a child. She had no children for about ten years, went to many hospitals, and lost a lot financially. We came back, and not a year passed. Eight months later, we learned that she was pregnant with triplets. Yes, she had her children. She was crying with happiness when she called me and said that this was a miracle and regretted not going there years ago.²⁵⁸

Seeing miracles taking place after 'lots of praying at every tree' connects miraculous events, particularly the miracle of the triplets, directly to the visiting saint and his saintly intervention. The miracle of the triplets, which several informants mentioned, reaffirms the belief that there is God beyond human capacity. It also confirms that a person must want and reach out to see, hear and fulfill their needs. The wish and need may not be seen or heard without reaching out and submitting oneself. On this occasion, it was seen how the cause and effect were directly related, and the new happy mother was confident that the miracle would have happened before if she had only come and devoted herself. This feeling of regret caused by a late (but not too late) visitation encourages others to take the visitation as a possible solution to their obstacles in life.

Just as people came to the saint to receive guidance and confirmation about their upcoming activities in the pages of the saintly stories, today's visitors seek the approval and guidance of the Bektaş whilst planning their endeavors. Some interviewees mentioned gaining guidance and wisdom for decision-making in their personal lives as a distinct objective. Discerning meaningful marks and signs as confirmation or guidance for the future were detected among interviewees. Whilst such signs as mulberries falling on the bodies of visitors or flying ribbons are understood as a more general sign of the fulfillment of prayer, dreaming meaningful dreams while sleeping by the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli was connected with his direct intervention in the visitor's life. To have a meaningful dream whilst in Hacıbektaş was mentioned as an awaited experience that was actualised in a small number of cases. A *talip* who had been on the visitation several times once went with a specific purpose of getting guidance on a particular issue, and it was granted:

The last time I went, I was torn between an issue. Because I went with some expectations for guidance, I had a dream about Hacı Bektaş, which confirmed me. I prayed and saw Hacı Bektaş Veli in a dream. He said my decision was right... and this spiritual experience attracted me even more. After the dream, I wanted to go again and again because of the impact of the experience. I brought something to the place and got the dream in exchange (*karşılık*). This may not be as convincing and believable as the others, but it is very important because I have lived

²⁵⁸ Interview F23-08,16.03.2019.

it. Even if the world does not see it, it is important to me because you leave the place with peace of mind and renewed feelings. I have become delighted every time I go.²⁵⁹

Receiving one or more rewards (*karşılık*), which were granted to the visitor during the visitation, leads the visitor to assess the visitation as satisfactory. Meaningful dreams are also seen as rewards or the real results of the visitation, together with life-changing miracles, protection and positive feelings or lived experiences. Experiencing positive or renewed feelings caused by dreams or other encounters confirms for the visitor the meaningfulness of their coming and efforts during the visitation.

Since visitation is a part of life, it is also part of the lifelong journey towards ‘becoming a better human’ and ‘knowing oneself’, which is a condition of knowing God in Alevism. Encounters with God through Hacı Bektaş Veli, a reflection of Imam Ali and God, cause people to evaluate their lives, behavior and feelings. We have seen how visitors remained calm and polite compared to their normal behavior in similar distasteful situations. They discovered their hidden qualities and how these may be applied maturely in intense situations. Instead of reacting suddenly, they decided to be gentle and smile at their fellow visitors. In this light, an account of a dream and its effect on the dreamer is outstanding. An *ocakzade* with a terrifying dream about wild creatures amidst deep and dark places interpreted it as a test of knowing himself:

I had a dream about great darkness and glaring wild animals. I was terrified when I woke up. Then I thought I should not be terrified as I am a descendant of Ali, after all. I got dressed and went up to a hill to see the sunrise. It was a very special experience, and my fear was gone.²⁶⁰

This dream reminded the dreamer about who he is as a descendant of Imam Ali, that he should not be afraid but stand against all sorts of powers of darkness. Going up to see the sunrise is a significant action in this situation as the sun is associated with God and Ali among the Alevis of eastern Anatolia (de Jong 1989: 13). It follows that forgetfulness and ignorance about the true nature of oneself may cause fear and confusion that, in turn, may be conquered by ‘knowing oneself’.

²⁵⁹ Interview F27-02, 08.03.2019.

²⁶⁰ Interview O73-05, 14.03.2019.

Concluding remarks

As seen, the visitation to the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is full of expectations, deep feelings and meaningful experiences. The higher the expectations, the greater the criticism of any noncompliance with them. There are expectations of how the town as a whole should be developed and taken care of by the local municipality and the state authorities. At the same time, the *dergâh*, as a historical place and witness of saintly deeds, should be organised according to the needs and understandings of the faithful followers of the saint, i.e., Alevi. Still, the informants are pleased about the freedom of women who are not forced to cover their heads while entering the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli.²⁶¹ Unlike the tomb of Mevlânâ, where all female tourists must cover their heads,²⁶² head covering is not obligatory at the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. In addition to criticism of the government, self-criticism also occurs. Questioning oneself in the light of hagiographic stories and the holiness of his tomb, which leads to more profound respect and submission to the saint, reflects Alevi striving through inner growth towards spiritual perfection. Nevertheless, trusting in Bektaş's all-encompassing love and kindness, as depicted in the famous image of the lion and gazelle, one enters his mausoleum hoping to find answers to all sorts of spiritual and physical needs. Since it is impossible to hide anything from God and His saints, one assumes an attitude of 'come as you are' and being accepted to the extent that 'your intention is right'.

Approaching the saint's tomb as one of his selected guests arouses feelings, situating the visitor with past and future generations as a witness to his power and miracles. Being part of the continuous saintly story creates a meaning that negates any possible difficulties that may be experienced during the visit. Difficulties with accommodation, endless queues and crowds during the festivals do not seem as unpleasant as they would typically be. Being accommodated in a dusty and smelly sports hall with about 150 other visitors, which would be unthinkable for a person with allergies in any other situation, was handled without any negative consequences or regret.²⁶³ Wondrous incidents about accommodation were also noted by a first-time visitor, who could find her lodging only because of 'someone's invisible guiding hand', which steered her through dark and rainy unpaved streets in the right direction.²⁶⁴ Another visitor did not mind sleeping on the ground in a tent since it brought her closer to the saint, giving her the feeling of being his specially selected quest.²⁶⁵

In addition to these incidents, interpreted as saintly protective and guiding interventions, I have shown the importance of feeling equal. The Alevi principle

²⁶¹ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁶² Notes of a visit, 20.09.2021, museum of Mevlânâ in Konya.

²⁶³ Interview F52-17, 27.03.2019.

²⁶⁴ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

²⁶⁵ Interview F63-03, 11.03.2019.

of not discriminating based on language, religion, gender or skin colour is also reflected in the striving for equality, tolerance and solidarity during the visitation. All the visitors – foreign tourists whose religious backgrounds are unknown, Sunni Muslims, Alevis, men, women, rich and poor – are seen as equal seekers and visitors. All are welcome as God accepts all through Hacı Bektaş Veli. It is believed that the saint did not promote himself to a higher standard of living but shared the conditions of the time with his fellow men. *Dede Hüseyin* pointed out that Hacı Bektaş Veli valued equality among his companions so much that he did not place his seating position (*post*) above others but rather in a more modest position on the ground (*turap*).²⁶⁶ This should be understood as an example of equality not only during the visitations but in general and everyday life. An example of modesty was also reflected by a female informant, who noted that she was pleased to find the saint's tomb 'not too decorated', which would have taken too much attention away from its content and purpose.²⁶⁷

Devotion to the Bektaş through votive offerings (*adak*), intentions (*niyet*), commitments (*teslim olmak*), prayers (*dua*) and other rituals confirms the continuing importance and relevance of his cult among contemporary Alevis. His *dergâh* and tomb are seen as a place of refuge (*sığınmak*) from the temptations, troubles and trials of this world. Taking shelter (*sığınmak*) in the saint, whether by visiting his tomb or calling upon his name for help elsewhere, is part of being an Alevi. Miraculous interventions are noticed as a rule after every visitation. As his protection and guidance are not bound and limited only to visitation, praying in the name of Bektaş is common, even daily, in different places such as homes and *cemevis*. However, the visitation that 'makes a difference' in a visitor's life is seen as a sign of a special blessing.

Although the most important aspects of the visitation are purely spiritual, such as worshipping at the sacred places and seeing and experiencing them among religious Alevis, there are expectations of seeing miraculous power manifest through miracles of healing, guidance, protection, bearing children, and help with finances. Such testimonials confirm the site's miraculous power and encourage people to take the time to 'go and see' by themselves. These lived experiences and miraculous changes also led the informants to describe the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli as spiritually attractive and magnetic. Those who have been there only once want to return, and those who have not yet been there wish for their visitation to come true. Parents want to come with their children since they believe that the saint's presence may benefit them and, if needed, change their fate, thus helping to strengthen their Alevi identity.

The tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli is a center of gravity for Alevis in Buca, but its potential is even greater than that. In the eyes of the interviewees, the promise of the holy site lies in the universal principles of love, respect and tolerance that can change the destiny of humanity. If only his ideas were accepted and practiced, the world would be different. And if not the whole world, then at least the *dergâh*

²⁶⁶ Interview D62-10, 16.03.2019.

²⁶⁷ Interview F23-08, 16.03.2019.

of the saint and his disciples should allow his ideas to materialize. *Dede A* has a very idealistic view of the role of the *dergâh* as a haven for all who need protection, food and comfort in the restless world. He is also ready to commit to the service of the *dergâh* like the dervishes who joined the brotherhood during Hacı Bektaş Veli's lifetime:

I would visit every day if I could! If I had the opportunity, I would serve there. If today's conditions were suitable for this, I would serve there without distinction between wolves, birds, animals, or insects because this is in our belief – service to the people, service to God. Being there every day, serving there every day would make me very happy. In other words, I would like it to be like this in this world with so many consumption-based lifestyles. I wish that the people of this region could come there and eat, that the fields were cultivated, agricultural fields were open to everyone and animals were raised in the same old way. I want those efforts to reach Anatolia and many places where there is war today. I want hungry children to be fed, I want women to be fed, I want it to be a place for war refugees, a place for shelter. I would like it to be where war would never reach because it is the basis of his philosophy. After all, it is about peace and brotherhood, that is, returning to the life of the past – the cauldron boils again, everyone can eat there, and while doing this, a life of sharing without hurting each other, without breaking each other. We would be a part of it by serving there, which would be valuable.²⁶⁸

Such an idealistic view of the *dergâh* as a center of enlightenment was reflected in many interviews. Seeing the *dergâh* as a *dergâh* and not a museum creates conflicting feelings about the current situation when it is under the jurisdiction of the state. Interviewees often articulated the idea of all people, regardless of their religious, ethnic or gender backgrounds, being welcome by all means to join the common spiritual journey that would lead to them becoming better persons. Concerns that knowledge of Bektaş's teachings and principles might diminish over time have led to more significant efforts involving the next generation through various activities in the *cemevi* and visitations. On the other hand, the fact that the knowledge of the saint and his power is still alive and inspiring among the Alevi confirms his divine appointment which, in turn, gives confidence in the continued importance of his power and ideas.

²⁶⁸ Interview D42-09, 16.03.2019.

Conclusion of the fourth part

Here, I focused on Hacibektaş's significance for Alevis as a centre of religious attraction which lies in the Bektashi lodge together with the sacred tombs of the order and, most of all, the tomb of Hacı Bektaş Veli. The *dedes* have developed arguments for seeing Hacibektaş as 'our Mecca' with landmarks corresponding to sacred sites in Arabia, such as the Zem Zem fountain and the hill of Arafat. Whilst the attitude towards Hacibektaş has shifted from being a 'second Mecca' in the wider context of alternative routes to the holy places of Mecca and Medina, or 'proxy pilgrimages', to 'our Mecca', no evidence of wishing to visit Mecca and Medina in Arabia was detected. It may be argued that the *türbes* in general, particularly the *türbe* of Hacı Bektaş Veli, serve in the context of Alevi pilgrimage as the route to the Sacred, not only as an alternative to Mecca. Such visitations are seen as an integral part of Alevism, as an expression of belonging and a confession of faith. For this reason, non-Alevi manifestations such as mosques are not expected or even tolerable in Alevi places. The mosques and related rituals are recognized as the Sunni tradition for Sunnis, and so not in accordance with the Alevi path. The disregard and abandonment of the mosque in the *dergâh* is a striking example of this view.

As it has throughout history, the central Bektashi lodge still depends on the will and purposes of the state. Reopening as a museum in 1964 is perceived as a controversial situation for the Alevis. On the one hand, it is better to have the lodge open rather than closed to the public; on the other, it is not perceived as a museum but, first of all, as a holy place full of sacred history. Consequently, all the interviewees referred to the site as a lodge (*dergâh*) or a sacred place (*kutsal yer*), not a museum. Even non-religious Alevis preferred 'lodge' instead of 'museum'. The lodge complex is seen as a visual guide for the spiritual journey to perfection and unity with God. Entering its various gates and yards, one reaches closer to the saint's tomb – the place for submission (*teslim olma*) and sacred encounters. In this light, everything in the lodge – rooms, utensils, visual depictions – tell the saint's story and thus support a meaningful approach towards his tomb.

The reopening of the lodge as a museum ushered in the annual commemoration festivals of Hacı Bektaş Veli, which have become common multipurpose events of Alevis. It is very hard to determine the nature of the festivals as there are many different dimensions and goals involved – cultural, political, religious, and educational. However, when analyzing interviewees' aims for a visit to Hacibektaş during these festivals, the religious dimension of participation seems to prevail. One may travel to Hacibektaş and not participate in a concert or the opening ceremony, but one is not likely to miss the sacred places. It was even noted that the festival program and the great crowds actually hindered the visitation and concentration on religious goals. At the same time, the festivals are important as Alevi events, where Alevi culture and concerns are articulated. The perception of the festival as a rooted Alevi tradition during specific dates was

confirmed by the failed attempt from 2017 to 2018 to change the dates from August to October.

As a pilgrimage site, the lodge, together with the *türbe*, act as an active and driving agent of visitation. The *türbe*'s active character is perceived as always there, whether visited or not. In this light, the visitation is perceived as if entering into an audience room for being seen and heard by Bektaş. However, this agency attributed to the *türbe* by visitors may also change under certain conditions. In this light, I agree with Coleman and Eade (2004) who point out the construction of sacred places by individuals every time they visit. Whilst the agency of individual visitors is not noticed as constructive in the context of sacredness, the interviewees noted their destructive agency or that of certain co-visitors. Since the power and sacredness of the *türbe* are believed to be there automatically, the actions of the visitors are not perceived as adding to its sacredness but help to experience and benefit from it. Whilst showing respect and veneration is seen as expected and normal behavior about the *türbe*, not doing it may be perceived as destructive, not to mention making a commotion, shouting, trading and smoking in the vicinity of the sacred places, which were experienced as harming their holiness. Since damaged or broken holiness is believed to lose its initial power or cause an effect opposite to what one wants, such situations were highly criticized. Even the broken roads and dark streets of the town were seen as an insult to the Bektaş. In order to avoid such harm, even taking vows in the name of the saint (*adak*) and collecting soil or pebbles (*teberik*) from the vicinity of the sacred places were placed under careful calculation. Having sacred objects at home, if not handled properly, may cause harm as well as blessings. An unfulfilled promise might annul results previously obtained. These beliefs, attitudes and related behavior confirm the relevance and significance of Hacı Bektaş Veli in the religious lives of Alevis.

There are various different aims and motivations for visiting *türbe*. These various religiously motivated aims may be summarized in the following keywords – prostration (*yüz sürmek*), surrender (*teslim olmak*), supplication (*niyaz*), taking refuge in God (*sığınmak*), prayer (*dua*), spiritual purification (*arınmak*), fulfilling vows (*adak*) and intentions (*niyet*), examination (in Delikli Taş), sense of unity with God (*Hak*) and community, participation in *cem*, confirmation of faith, guidance for the future, having meaningful dreams, protection against evil, healing, help in troubles, different wishes (*dilek, temenni*), having a child, spiritual discovery and learning. Whilst the different wishes and prayers, both personal and for loved ones, seem to take precedence at the site through rituals, being present at it is understood as the greatest blessing connected to the visitation and considered a precondition for any other possible blessings connected to it. Since the people of Anatolia at the time of Hacı Bektaş were granted blessed portions through a personal encounter with him, personal visitation and physical presence in the vicinity of his sacred tomb is seen as the precondition for wishes and needs being met.

The sacred, spiritually loaded landscape of Anatolia and especially of Hacıbektaş inspires religious seeking. Visitation to the sacred tomb is full of expect-

tations, meaningful encounters and positive emotions, but also disappointments. Most of the interviewees saw the visitation as the granting of a special blessing or privilege. Since it is possible being happens to only a certain number of people, it is regarded as a mark of being noted by God. The visitation's most important is being present as a precondition to whatever may follow – touching, viewing, breathing, prostration, submission, praying for needs and receiving miracles. Bodily sensations about the sacred places produce a feeling of confidence about their reality and inspire religious expressiveness.

During the visitation, beliefs and imaginations about Hacı Bektaş Veli are lived out and confirmed through personal and common rituals. Researching the aims, expectations and outcomes concerning the holy sites in Hacıbektaş through the eyes of Alevi living in Buca, I noted a strong correlation between expectations towards the saint and beliefs and imaginations about him. Since Hacı Bektaş Veli is imagined as a miracle-working *velî* who did not die but only changed his appearance, he is still present for guiding, providing and mediating God's will. Since he is believed to be a direct descendant and even an appearance of Imam Ali, divine encounters are expected and experienced in the vicinity of his tomb. Just as the contemporaries of Hacı Bektaş Veli reached him in expectations of judgments and appointments, so too today visitors approach it and related places, such as Delikli Taş, to be seen, examined, guided and helped.

The experiences of meaningful encounters during the visitation and answered prayers, perceived as miracles, only confirm his power and relevance. Spiritual fulfillment and satisfaction forming the bases of a successful visitation inspire further efforts in the spiritual journey known as the Alevi path. On the other hand, without spiritual or inner satisfaction, the visitation does not fulfill its purposes. Positive feelings of unity, happiness, joy, love, confidence, tolerance, fullness and excitement confirm the miraculous atmosphere of Bektaş's tomb for participants. Having meaningful dreams and incidents during the visitation is interpreted as a direct intervention of the saint into people's lives. Miracles related to healing, guidance for certain questions, protection, personal happiness and child-bearing give assurance assure and evidence of the sacred tomb in a tangible way.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation consists of four parts and is about an Alevi migrant community in Buca (Izmir) and individual community members' imaginaries, interpretations and practices regarding Hacı Bektaş Veli. Hacı Bektaş, one of the charismatic medieval mystics whose life story and sayings have been preserved in oral history among Alevi, has also been promoted as a humanist philosopher since the foundation of the Turkish Republic. As we saw, his modern humanist character has been adopted into broader Alevi discourse in Buca and does not contradict his spiritual qualities. Instead, the humanist ideas in his teachings are seen as universal values that are identified with God's broader will and purposes for humankind. Promoted as a Turkish humanist philosopher in the republican discourse might be why the Kurdish Alevi see him as a Turkish personage, not affiliating him with Arabic, Iranian, or Kurdish backgrounds. While numerous venerated saints exist in Alevism, the Buca community's Turkish and Kurdish Alevi regard Hacı Bektaş Veli as Alevism's most important saint.

I chose Hacı Bektaş Veli as an example for giving an insight into the viability of the cult of saints among Alevi living in one of Turkey's most secular urban centres in contemporary settings. By focusing on Alevi as a religious minority group, I aimed to draw attention to Islamic diversity in Turkey and emphasize various ways of being Muslim besides 'orthodox' Sunni and Shi'a Islam.

The dissertation is based on ethnographical fieldwork conducted during 2018–2019 in Hacıbektaş, Izmir, Erzincan and Tunceli in Turkey. A few online interviews were also conducted in May 2020. Methods such as observation, participant observation and interviews were implemented as data-gathering methods, and qualitative content analyses were used for data analysis. The approach of vernacular religion, first introduced by Norman Primiano in 1995, was applied to research religion and how Alevi individuals live it in Buca, Izmir. This inductive approach enabled me to make the individual imaginaries, beliefs and practices regarding the saint the starting point. This approach was chosen in contrast to the common opinion about Alevi as representatives of a 'folk religion' or 'heterodox' Islam in Turkey.

At the end of the 1980s, the so-called Alevi revival that ushered in a new era of self-awareness among Alevi broke out. Under this wave of change, Alevi in Buca also started to organise associations and build a *cemevi* under a cultural centre's auspices, allowing them to express and articulate their Aleviness (Alelvilik) publicly. The cornerstone of the Buca *cemevi* was laid in 1990, and the first parts of the five-floored building were opened for activities in 1991. Although the primary building process was finished in five years, there is still work on the interior. The Buca *cemevi* was constructed by the community association with its resources, and the money for the work was raised through different campaigns from the local Alevi community. The *cemevi* was built, and its spot of land was purchased by donations. It is still a rare example of a *cemevi* in Izmir that is owned by an Alevi community organisation.

The opening of the *cemevi* for the Alevi public in Buca created an arena for common ritual gatherings previously held in larger private homes. Religious gatherings such as funerals, weekly learning sessions (*sohbet*) and *ayin-i cem* started to be regularly organised. These gatherings, especially the *cem* gathering, were the main aim of building the centre, later known as *cemevi*, the house of *cem*. Since the Turkish government has not yet recognized Alevis as a religious group, *cemevis* are not recognized as places of worship. In addition to religious gatherings, the religious character of the building is communicated by its visibility – the entrance floor of the *cemevi* welcomes the members and visitors with vast portraits of important persons for Alevis: Imam Ali, Imam Hüseyin, the Twelve Imams, Hacı Bektaş Veli and Atatürk.

The current form of the organisation is the Buca branch of the Alevi Culture Associations, led by an elected board and a headman. There are several offices reachable upon the entrance – the office of the chairman, secretariat, offices for the youth, women, and funeral branches. To become a member of the association, one must be an Alevi and have a recommendation from a current member. The organisation aims to revive, promote and articulate Alevi values and identity among local Alevis. Various cultural, educational and practical events such as workshops, courses, seminars and concerts are organised in addition to religious gatherings to achieve these aims. All events are free for members and non-members alike. Special attention is paid to unity, equality and tolerance as Alevi values. Equality between genders and unity between Alevis of different ethnic and geographical backgrounds is especially emphasized. The headmen of the association act as spokespersons on various issues concerning the interests of Alevis and the legal status of the *cemevis*.

There have been long discussions on who Alevis are and what Alevism is, both among Alevis and non-Alevis. My fieldwork in Buca showed that this particular community originated from all over Turkey, primarily from migrants and their children from eastern provinces such as Erzincan, Erzurum and Bingöl and who see themselves as part of Islam, albeit with noticeable self-differentiation from Sunni as well as Shi'a Islamic communities. This differentiation is mainly based on the veneration of the Prophet's family and his descendants, seeing them as the only legitimate spiritual leaders. Some of the representatives of the family and holy lineages (*ocak*) – Imam Ali, Hüseyin, Hacı Bektaş Veli – are perceived and understood as manifestations of the divine, which is one of the most striking doctrinal contradictions with other branches of Islam. Another distinction lies in the Alevi ritual known as *ayin-i cem*, which may be led only by the representatives of the holy lineages. Self-othering from Islam's 'orthodox' branches is most striking in their attitude towards mosques. There are several reasons why prayer in a mosque is unacceptable for an Alevi. A dede does not lead it; women do not participate, and spiritual consent mong people are not sought out. The headmen of the association are usually elected from the *ocakzades*, who are also active as guiding and teaching *dedes*, showing their abundance in the community as well as confidence and trust in the traditional religious caste system.

Whilst *cemevis* are a new phenomenon as Alevi gathering houses, some other places and objects have been part of Alevi religious life for generations. Most importantly, sacred tombs may be found locally across the country. Furthermore, there are meaningful caves, stones, springs and trees, which are objects of veneration, whether connected to the sacred tombs or independent of them. Insofar as the natural and rural lifestyle is generally seen as the perfect way of living Aleviness, the urban environment is perceived as corrupt, egocentric and frivolous compared to the village life. The absence of sacred places in Buca is seen as a significant shortcoming. Being cut off from the natural environment, sacred natural sites and tombs of local saints for extended periods is perceived as an obstacle on the Alevi path and as spiritual loss.

The *cemevi* is distinguished in the street by large posters depicting important persons to the Alevis – Imam Ali, Hacı Bektaş Veli, Atatürk and Pir Sultan Abdal. Among them, Hacı Bektaş Veli is the most mentioned and quoted figure in daily conversations, smaller teaching and general *cem* gatherings. He is one of the most important examples and spiritual masters besides Imam Ali and the Twelve Imams. Mastering his sayings and life story by implementing them in religious guidance and everyday life, at the right time and in the right way is a mark of spiritual maturity and authority. Legitimizing and explaining opinions and circumstances through the teachings of Hacı Bektaş Veli is common among the *dedes* and expected by the *talips*.

The saint appears in the imagination of the community members as a leader appointed by God, a descendant of the Prophet, an intimate of God (*velî*) and a Perfect Man. He is also referred to as *pir* of *pirs* (*pirler piri*), Fountainhead (*Serçeşme*), mature man (*eren*), *dede*, *seyyid*, leader and sovereign (*Hünkâr*). He is attributed with a miracle-working power granted to him as a God-appointed leader. This power is still believed to be present for those who believe in it through their prayers and during visitations to his grave. It is generally believed that God sent him to particular people at a certain time to guide, teach, help and comfort them. However, one of his most important tasks was to spread Islam – the correct and incorrupt version of Islam, originating from the Prophet's family. This same original, correct and incorrupt version of Islam is believed to be followed by Alevis until today.

Since knowledge about Hacı Bektaş Veli is considered spiritual knowledge, the *talips*, especially women, often expressed their incompetence and advised me to obtain correct knowledge from the *dedes*. Even when the *talips* are acquainted with the issues, they prefer not to talk about spiritual matters to avoid finding themselves in the position of spiritual guidance. This position is permitted only to the representatives of the holy lineages, as per Alevi belief. A good example of this is the portrait of Hacı Bektaş Veli with the lion, the gazelle, and its meaning. Whilst the *dedes* interpreted this well-known image of the saint mostly from the esoteric point of view, the *talips* circumscribed their accounts with literal and symbolic meanings. However, the *dedes* also had a limit in sharing some of their knowledge with me as a non-Alevi outsider who, in their view, has only started to move towards the Alevi path. Another obstacle was the implementation of *sır*

or the concept of secrecy by the *dedes*, according to which some knowledge and experiences are not to be shared with anyone.

Hagiographic stories (*Velâyetnâme*), which include accounts of the life and deeds of Hacı Bektaş Veli as a spiritual leader and miracle-working *veli* are mostly perceived as true accounts transmitted from generation to generation until today. These stories make sense to contemporary Alevi by explaining and illustrating the Alevi worldview. Since Hacı Bektaş Veli is a perfect man, all he did and said is also seen as perfect. This spiritual perfection is attainable by anyone following his teachings of spiritual growth, known as ‘four gates and forty stations’. This guide and his sayings, such as ‘control your tongue, hand and waist,’ are considered marks of spiritual quality but are hard to follow.

These imaginaries and beliefs about Hacı Bektaş Veli are expressed and lived out during the visitations to his tomb in the town of Hacıbektaş, in Cappadocia. This small town gained much importance among pious travellers, local and national politicians and culture enthusiasts after 1964 when the central Bektashi lodge accommodating the saint’s tomb was opened as a state museum. In the same year, annual commemoration ceremonies of Hacı Bektaş Veli were initiated. Since then, various other museums, commemorative sites and statues have been opened, and festivals initiated, elevating the small town to become the centre of political, cultural and religious attraction.

For Alevi in Buca, the town of Hacıbektaş is, most of all important, for its sacred sites connected to the saint – his tomb and the surrounding landmarks associated with his life, such as Delikli Taş, Beştaşlar and the Mulberry tree. For its spiritual significance, it is never referred to as a museum; instead, it is given an even higher position and occasionally referred to as ‘our Mecca’ by the *dedes*. It may be argued that it is seen not as an alternative to pilgrimage destinations in Mecca and Medina but rather as *the* destination, i.e., the most important pilgrimage for Alevi. Since it is perceived as ‘our place’ and ‘our Mecca, non-Alevi manifestations such as mosques are neither expected nor tolerable at Alevi sites. Mosques and related rituals are recognized as the Sunni tradition for Sunnis and hence not in accord with the Alevi path. Disregarding the mosque in the *dergâh* built after the dissolution of the Bektashi order in 1826 constitutes one of the salient examples of this view.

As the most important destination for Alevi visitations, Alevi aspire to visit it, making plans according to circumstances. Very often, the visitation is designed and carried out by *cemevi* organised trips that happen, as a rule, during the festivals. Still, not everyone can afford them due to a lack of time and finances. Those who have been to Hacıbektaş after a long wait perceive it as a special blessing granted by God. There are various aims and motivations for visiting the saint’s tomb. While universal motivations include being healed, having a child and being happy and protected, the main desire is becoming connected with the tomb itself. Motivations such as being there, seeing it, touching it, and breathing its air were named as the main goals for the visitation. Also, the inverse activity of being seen, heard and touched by the tomb received mention. This makes the tomb an active agent attributed to senses and volition. The same phenomenon occurs in

the sacred sites in its vicinity, especially in Delikli Taş, where the visitors enter a corporeal trial through a stone. It is ascribed to recognising and distinguishing between good and bad consciences by releasing or holding those who crawl through its hole. The same consciousness and agency are also attributed to the earth and pebbles (*teberik*) collected from sacred places and kept at homes. However, despite the strong belief in their power, not everyone dares to collect them. Also, not everyone decides to enter the cave of Delikli Taş and vow in the saint's name. The reason is not unbelief but, on the contrary, a firm belief in his power. In order to avoid misbehaving and breaking vows, resulting in possible negative consequences, certain actions are not undertaken.

We may conclude that the 13th Century Anatolian saint Hacı Bektaş Veli occupies the centre of the Alevi belief system, bearing its core values and aims. His veneration as the prominent saint has enabled Alevis to unite and come together under similar goals, such as self-determination and equal rights as a religious group. Whilst in the villages there are local sacred shrines and natural objects that are revered daily, in the cities, the cult of Hacı Bektaş Veli has become a central figure and a unifying factor. Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis express similar attitudes and veneration of Bektaş. In this light, a change can be detected as, according to the fieldwork of David Shankland in the middle of 1990 in rural areas, the cult of Hacı Bektaş Veli was not as notable among the Kurdish Alevis as today in the cities.

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KOKKUVÕTE

Käesolev doktoriväitekiri „Alevi kogukond kaasaegses Izmiris: ettekujutused, uskumused ja praktikad seoses Hacı Bektaş Veli'ga“ koosneb sissejuhatavast osast ning kolmest sisulisest osast, mis kannavad pealkirju: „Buca *cemevi* ja selle kogukond“, „Hacı Bektaş Veli: kujutlused pühakust kaasaegses Izmiris“ ja „Hacı-bektaş: püha linn ja palverännak“. Uurimuse keskmes on ühelt poolt kaasaegne alevi kogukond Bucas (Izmir, Türgi), teisalt selle kogukonnaliikmete ettekujutused, uskumused ja praktikad 13. sajandi Anatoolia pühaku Hacı Bektaş Veli suhtes. Valisin Hacı Bektaş Veli näitena osundamaks pühakute kultuse rollile ja tähtsusele aleviitide seas, kes elavad ühes kõige sekulaarsemas Türgi piirkonnas. Fokuseerides aleviitidele kui riiklikult tunnustamata religioossele vähemusele tõmban tähelepanu Türgis eksisteerivale Islami sisemisele mitmekesisusele ja erinevatele viisidele, kuidas elada ja väljendada islami usku lisaks „ortodokssele“ sunniitlikule ja šiitlikule islamile.

Dissertatsioon rajaneb ertnograafilistele välitöödele, mis leidsid aset 2018–2019 Hacıbektaşis, Izmiris, Erzincanis ja Tuncelis Türgis. Uurimismeetoditena kasutasin vaatlust, osalusvaatlust ja poolstruktureeritud intervjuud. Kokku intervjuueerisin 21 aleviiti, kes olid pärit Ida–Türgi provintsidest ja asunud elama Izmirisse. Intervjuueeritavate seas oli ka juba Izmiris sündinud aleviite ehk siis teise põlvkonna ümberasujaid. Intervjuueeritavad leidsin lumepalli meetodil nii meeste kui naiste seast, nii vaimulike juhtide (*dede*) kui ka järgijate (*talip*) seast. Uurimistööle lähenemisel kasutasin vernakulaarse religiooni kontseptsiooni, mille sõnastas 1995. aastal Norman Primiamo. Kontseptsioon lähtub põhimõttest, et igal indiviidil on oma eristuv viis uskuda, kogeda ja elada religiooniga seonduvat. Samuti seisneb selle lähenemise eripära tõigas, et ei eristata kõrgreligioone madalamatest religioonidest ehk siis näiteks antud juhul „ortodokset“ islamit nn rahvausulisest islamist. Aleviidid, keda on peetud Türgis „heterodokseteks“ ja rahvausulisteks muslimiteks, ilmuvad selle lähenemise kaasabil oma eristuva islami voolu – alevismi – esindajatena. Nende religioosid uskumusi, tõekspidamisi ja praktikaid vaadeldakse kui protsesse ja tegevusi, mis on igapäeva religioosuses elus tähtsal kohal ja mis mõjutavad indiviide nende otsustes ja valikutes.

Alates 1980te lõpust, mil algas nn Alevi ärkamine, võime rääkida uuest ajastust, mis tõi aleviitide seas kaasa enneolematu enesemääramise ja -väljendamise laine. Selle ärkamiselaine harjal asusid ka Bucas elavad aleviidid koonduma kultuurilistesse hingutesse, mis võimaldas neil hakata avalikult väljendama oma alevi identiteeti. Ühingu tegevusele aitas kaasa Buca kogenemismaja (*cemevi*) ehitamine, mis avati kogunemistele 1991. aastal. Peamine ehitustegevus lõppes küll viie aasta jooksul, kuid kuni tänaseni ei ole see lõpuni viidud. Ehituseks koguti raha kohaliku alevi kogukonna seas korjanduste kaudu, riigi ja kohaliku omavalitsuse poolt ei saadud mingit toetust. Võrdlusena võib öelda, et samal ajal on mošeede ehitus ja nende jooksvad kulud kaetud riiklikust eelarvest. Vaatamata raskustele sai *cemevi* kasutusse võetud ja on tänaseni üks väheseid näiteid Izmiris

asuvast Alevi kogunemisemajast, mis kuulub koos maaga kohaliku alevi kogukonna omandisse.

Cemevi avanemine lõi võimaluse korraldada suuremahulisi religioosseid kogunemisi, mida oli varem peetud kas kodudes või renditud pindadel. Regulaarselt hakati korraldama aleviitidele ainuomast jumalateenistust *ayin-i cem*, iganädalasi õpetuslikke kogunemisi (*sohbet*) ja matuseid. Kuivõrd Buca *cemevi* on ainuke alevi põhimõtetele vastav matusekorraldamise koht koos morgi ja muude vajalike ruumidega Buca piirkonnas, siis leiab see pea igapäevast kasutust. Mainitud religioossed kogunemised, eriti *ayin-i cem*, mis on andnud ka kogunemismajale nimetuse, olid peamised põhjused, mis hoone ehitati. Kuivõrd aleviidid ei ole Türgis religioosse grupina tunnustatud, ei tunnistata ka *cemevisid* riiklikul tasandil pühakodadena. Siiski on hoone religioosne iseloom läbi mainitud tegevuste nähtav. Samuti väljendatakse hoone funktsiooni alevi pühakojana läbi tohutu suurte postrite, mis kujutavad aleviitidele olulisi religioosseid isikuid – imaam Ali, imaam Hüseyin, 12 imaami, Hacı Bektaş Veli ja Atatürk.

Hetkel tegutseb kohalik alevi kogukond kui Alevi Kultuuriühingute Buca osakond, mille juhtkond ja esimees valitakse kohaliku organisatsiooni liikmete seast. Organisatsiooniliikmeks astumine eeldab ühe varasema liikme soovitus ja tööka, et kadidaat on aleviit. Organisatoorne tegevus on mitmel korral ümberkorraldatud ja -nimetatud tänu riigipoolsetele kitsendustele ja piirangutele. Töö on jagatud erinevate osakondade vahel, milleks on noortetöö, naistetöö, matusekorraldus ja sekretariaat. Organisatsiooni eesmärkide seas on elustada, populariseerida ja sõnastada alevi väärtusi ning identiteeti kohalike aleviitide seas. Sel eesmärgil korraldatakse lisaks religioosetele kogunemistele ka mitmeid kultuurilise, hariduslikke ja praktilisi üritusi nagu näiteks töötoad, seminarid, kontserdid ja kursused. Kõik tegevused on tasuta nii liikmetele kui ka kõigile teistele. Lisaks aleviitidele osalevad näiteks inglise keele kursustel tihti ka sunni moslemitest noored. Suurt tähelepanu pöörakse sellistele väärtustele nagu sugudevaheline võrdsus, tolerantsus erinevuste suhtes ja ühtsus. Kuivõrd *cemevis* kohtuvad erineva tagapõhjaga aleviidid – kurdid, türklased, mehed ja naised, erinevatest piirkondadest, siis need põhimõtted on võetud erilise tähelepanu alla.

Alevi identiteedi teemadel on peetud laiapõhjalisi diskussioone nii aleviitide endi seas kui ka väljaspool. Buca välitöö tõi esile, et sinne kogukond, mis koosneb peamiselt migrantidest ja nende lastest Ida-Türgi sellistest piirkondadest nagu Erzincan, Erzurum ja Bingöl, näevad endid muslimitena. Võrdluseks tuleb mainida, et nt paljudes Euroopa riikides (Saksamaa, Skandinaaviamaad) on aleviidid tunnustatud kui eraldiseisva religiooni esindajad ning ka kogevad end sellistena, eristades end muslimitest. Nähes end muslimitena tehakse siiski selge vahe sisse nii sunni kui ka šiia islami esindajatega. Silmatorkav erinevus viimastega seisneb vaimuliku elu korraldamises ja juhtimises. Eristamine rajaneb eelkõige prohveti perekonna (*ehl-i beyt*) austamises ja sellest põlvnevate vereliinide esindajate legitiimseteks vaimulikeks juhtideks (*dede, ana*) pidamises. Teatud prohveti perekonna liikmeteid – imaam Ali, imaam Hüseyin ja Hacı Bektaş Veli – nähakse nii jumala kehastusena kui ka üksteise taaskehastusena. Oluline erinevus teiste islami vooludega on alevi jumalateenistus *ayin-i cem*, mida tohivad

tänaseni juhtida vaid prohveti perekonna pühadest vereliinidest pärit isikud (*ocakzade*), keda on Buca *cemevis* esindatud rohkesti.

Vastandumine „ortodokse“ islamiga tõuseb teravalt esile seoses mošeedega, mida on riigi poolt ehitatud aleviitide tahte vastaselt ka alevi küladesse ja piirkondadesse. On mitmeid põhjuseid, miks mošee palvused aleviidile ei sobi – seda ei juhata *ocakzade*, naised ei osale koos meestega, vaimulik konsensus ja leppimine ei ole eesmärk omaette. Samal ajal valitakse Bucas organisatsiooni esimeheks tavaliselt *ocakzade* päritoluga isikuid, mis osundab sellele, et neid Bucas rohkesti esindatud ja ka sellele, et kogukonnaliikmed soovivad näha ka oma maise juhina *ocakzade* päritolu isikuid, mis näitab jätkuvat usaldust traditsioonilise päritud vaimuliku seisuse suhtes.

Kui *cemevi* on institutsioonina suhteliselt uus fenomen, siis pühakute hauad ja looduslikud pühapaigad on olnud alevi religioosse elu osa sajandite vältel. Anatooliat nähakse kui pühakute maad, kus leidub lugematuid kohalikke, tuntud ja tundmatuid pühakute haudu. Lisaks haudadele austatakse koopaid, rahnusid, allikaid ja puid, kas eraldiseisvate objektidena või mõne pühaku hauaga seoses. Looduslähedast külaelu, mis oli aleviitidele omane enne migratsioonilaine algust 1960tel, nähakse kui täiuslikku viisi alevi uskumuste elamiseks. Linna seevastu kogetakse kui allakäinud, egotsentrilist ja korrumppeerunud paigana, kus aleviidiks olemine esitab suuri väljakutseid. Pühakute haudade ja looduslike pühapaikade puudust kogetakse kui vaimset kaotust, mis linnadesse asumine kaasa toõi.

Olulisim pühak, keda Buca aleviitide seas austatakse, on Hacı Bektaş Veli. Algselt Bektaši vennaskonna rajaja ja šeik, omandas ta ajapikku olulise pühaku staatuse. Tema õpetussõnu ja eeskuju tuuakse esile nii ühistel jumalateenistustel kui ka eravestlustel. Selles aspektis on talle omistatud õpetusel kogukonnas praktilises usus olulisem koht kui koraanil. Tema õpetuse meisterlik kasutamine õigel ajal õiges kohas vaimuliku juhendamise käigus osundab õpetaja vaimsele küpsusele ja võimekusele. Sellest tulenevalt on oma seisukohtade Hacı Bektaş Veli sõnadega legitimeerimine *dedede* poolt ootuspärane ja levinud.

Hacı Bektaş Veli esineb kogukonnaliikmete ettekujutuses kui jumala poolt määratud vaimulik juht, prohveti järeltulija (*seyyid*), jumalasõber (*velî*) ja täiuslik inimene. Teda nimetatakse ka selliste mõistetega nagu pühakute pühak (*pirler piri*, *serçeşme*), küps mees (*eren*), *dede*, juht, valitseja (*Hünkâr*). Talle omistatakse imetegemise võimet, mis on jumala poolt antud. Usutakse, et see imetegemise võime on tänaselgi päeval kättesaadav neile, kes usuvad ja pühaku hauda külastavad. Teda nähakse kui jumala poolt saadetud isikut, et aidata ja juhendada teatud ajal kindlaid inimesi; samas see roll kestab uskumuse kohaselt tänaseni. Kõige olulisem ülesanne, mis pühakul oli täita, seisnes aga islami levitamises Anatoolias. See oli õige, puhas ja prohveti perekonna kaudu edastatud islam, mis on uskumuse kohaselt tänaseni aleviitide seas säilinud.

Kuivõrd pühakusse puutuv teadmine on kogetav kui vaimulik teadmine, siis järgijad (*talip*), eriti mõned naised, soovitasid mul pöörduda täpsema info saamiseks *dedede* poole. Vaatamata teadmiste pagasile eelistatakse vaimulikest asjadest laialdaselt mitte rääkida kui õpetaja, sest see positsioon on lubatud vaid

pühade vereliinide esindajatele. Hea näide sellest on Hacı Bektaş Veli portreega seonduv. Hacı Bektaş Veli on sellel tuntud portreel kujutatud koos lõvi ja gasselliga. Kui *deded* rõhutasid selle tuntud portree müstilist tähendust, siis *talipid* piirdusid sõna-sõnalise ja sümboolse tähenduse edastamisega. Kuid ka *dededel* ilmnas oma vaadete edastamisel, mulle kui mitte-aleviidile, kes alles teeb oma esimesi samme teadmiste omandamisel, takistusi. Lisaks tuleb takistusena mainida ka saladuse (*sır*) hoidmise põhimõtet, mille kohaselt ei ole lubatud kõigest kogetust rääkida, sest see võib kaasa tuua kogemuse või omandatud tarkuse kaotuse.

Üks peamisi allikaid Hacı Bektaş Veli kohta on tema pühakulugu (*Velâyet-nâme*), mis on suuliselt põlvest-põlve edasi antud ja tänapäeval kättesaadav ka paljudes trükitud versioonides. Buca aleviidid suhtuvad lugudesse kui tõestisündinud juhtumitesse, mis tänase päevani selgitavad ja illustreerivad alevi maailmavaadet. Kuivõrd pühakus nähakse täiuslikku inimest, siis kõik tema poolt tehtu ja öeldu omab samuti täiusliku ja tõe väärtust. Seesama täiuslikkus on kättesaadav läbi pühaku õpetuse, mis on tuntud kui „4 väravat ja 40 astet“. Täiuslikkuseni juhatavad ka tema sellised õpetuslaused nagu „kontrolli oma keelt, kätt ja kõhtu“.

Hacı Bektaş Veli'ga seotud ettekujutused ja uskumused leiavad selge väljenduse palverännakul tema hauale, mis asub Hacıbektaş linnas Kapadookia lähistel. See väike linn tõusis 1964. aastal, mil pühaku haud muuseumina taasavati, palverändurite, poliitikute ja kultuuritegelaste tähelepanu keskpunkti. Avamisega samal ajal hakati korraldama iga-aastaseid Hacı Bektaş Veli mälestustseremooniaid, mis on tuntud ka kui Hacı Bektaş Veli festivalid. Sellest ajast alates on linna erinevatesse piirkondadesse rajatud muuseume, monumente ja mälestusmärke, mis on muutnud linna atraktiivseks ka tavaturistile.

Buca aleviitide jaoks on Hacıbektaş oluline eelkõige pühakuga seotud paikade tõttu. Pühaku haud ja sellega seotud maamärgid Auguga Kivi (*Delikli Taş*), Viis Kivi (*Beştaşlar*) ja mooruspuu on tähendusega pühapaigad, mille küllastamine on oodatud ja planeeritud tegevus. Tänu religioossele tähendusele ei viidata pühaku hauale, mis asub ajaloolise Bektaş'i vennaskonna kompleksi aladel, kunagi kui muuseumile. Enamgi veel, tihti viidatakse linnale kui „meie Mekale“. See tähelepanek tõstab esile küsimuse Hacıbektaşist kui asenduspalverännakust või alternatiivsest teekonnast Mekasse ja Mediinasse, mis asuvad kaugel eemal ja mille küllastamine on seetõttu kulukam ja aeganõudvam. Intervjuude põhjal võib siiski väita, et pühaku hauda ei nähta alternatiivina muudele islami pühapaikadele, vaid *peamise* alevi palverännu sihtkohana. Kuivõrd linna nähakse kui „meie kohta“ ja „meie Mekat“, siis kõiksugused „ortodokssed“ ilmingud nagu mošeed ja nendega seotud tegevused, ei ole seal oodatud. Silmatorkav näide selle kohta on looži territooriumile 1826 aastal rajatud mošee, kuhu alevi palverändurid reeglina jalga ei tõsta. Rahvarohketel festivalidel, mil on raske leida liikumiseks ruumi, seisab mošee tühjana.

Tihti võetakse palverännak ette festivalide ajal koos Buca *cemevi* korraldatud reisibussidega. Palverännakul osalemises nähakse erilist väljavalitust, sest vaid vähesed saavad endale seda lubada. Erinevatest eesmärkidest, miks aleviidid

pühaku hauda külastavad, tõusevad eelkõige esile meeltega seotud tegevused – sarkofaagi nägemine ja katsumine, selle õhu sissehingamine/haistmine ning üldises mõttes haua juures viibimine. Samamoodi on oluline ka vastupidine tegevus – soovitakse olla nähtud ja kuulnud haua poolt. Selline soov peegeldab hauale omistatud võimet näha ja kuulda ning oma tahet korda saata. Haua külastamises nähakse pühaku külastamist. Pühak, kes ei ole uskumuse kohaselt mitte surnud, vaid ainult muutis oma vormi, tegutseb oma ajaloolises piirkonnas jätkuvalt kui vaimulik juht ja imetegija. Imesid, mida pühakult oodatakse võib kokkuvõtvalt nimetada järgnevalt: haigustest tervenemine, perekonnaõnn ja kaitse kurja eest. Kui peamine sihtkoht linnas on pühaku haud, siis selle kõrval külastatakse ka looduslikke pühapaiku, mis on pühakuloost tuttavad. Auguga kivi (*Delikli Taş*), pühaku askeesipaik, on tuntud kui hea südametunnistuse testimise koht, kus külastajad poevad läbi kitsa koopa. Kivile omistatud hea ja kurja eristamise võime väljendub sellest, et halva südametunnistusega inimene jääb koopaauku kinni. Kivi võimetesse usutakse sedavõrd, et paljud külastajad ei julge seda katsumust ette võtta.

Sarnane teadlikkus omistatakse ka väikestele esemetele, nt mullale ja kivi-kestele (*teberik*), mida pühapaikadest koju kaasa korjatakse. Vaatamata nendele omistatud väele ei korja kõik külastajad neid endale kaasa. Põhjuseks on just nimelt tugev usk, mitte uskmatus, nende esemete väesse. Väelised esemed nõuavad teatud hoolitsust ja tähelepanu, mille puudumine võib kaasa tuua vastupidise tulemuse soovitul. Et vältida väe valesti kasutamist, osad külastajad ei kogu *teberikke*, samuti ei anna pühaku nimel töotusi.

Kokkuvõtlikult võib öelda, et 13. sajandi Anatoolia pühaku Hacı Bektaş Veli austamine on tõusnud linnastumise tagajärjel Buca kogukonna näitel alevi ususüsteemi keskmesse, kandes selle peamisi väärtusi ja eesmärke. Tihti nimetatakse ennast *alevi-bektaşi* nimetusega. Hacı Bektaş Veli austamine peamise pühakuna on võimaldanud aleviitidel koonduda ühiste eesmärkide, nagu enesemääramine ja religioosse grupina tunnustamine, saavutamise nimel. Kui küldes ja maapiirkondades austatati igapäevaselt kohalikke pühakuid ja looduslikke pühapaiku, siis Izmiris on Hacı Bektaş Veli kultus kujunenud keskseks ja ühendavaks teguriks. Nii türgi kui ka kurdi aleviidid väljendavad pühaku suhtes sarnaseid vaateid. Oluline on märgata muutust just kurdi aleviitide seas Hacı Bektaş Veli kultusega seoses. David Shanklandi 1990. aasta keskel maapiirkondades tehtud välitööde põhjal ei olnud Hacı Bektaş Veli kultus kurdi aleviitide seas nii tähelepanuväärne kui praegu linnades. Samuti saab Buca näitel järeldada, et humanistlike filosoofide kuvand, mida hakati vabariigi rajamise järgselt keskaegsetele pühakutele jõuliselt omistama, ei tõrjunud kõrvale Hacı Bektaşi religioosset tähendust, vaid pigem adopteeriti tema uus humanistlik iseloom varasemasse religioossetesse maailmapilti seda kinnitades ja mitmekesistades.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Interviewees

Number	Code	Gender	Age	Origin	Mother tongue
1	D49-01	M	49	Erzincan	Zazaki
	D50-22	M	50	Erzincan	Zazaki
2	D42-09	M	42	Bingöl	Zazaki
3	D62-10	M	62	Erzincan	Kurmanji
	D63-23	M	63	Erzincan	Kurmanji
4	D45-12	M	45	Erzincan	Zazaki
5	D24-13	M	24	Bayburt	Zazaki
6	O50-11	M	50	Erzurum	Turkish
7	O73-05	M	73	Elazig	Zazaki
8	M50-14	M	50	Erzincan	Zazaki/Kurmanji
9	M33-15	M	33	Izmir	Turkish
10	M25-18	M	25	Izmir	Turkish
11	M55-19	M	55	Amasya	Zazaki
12	M55-20	M	55	Erzurum	Turkish
13	M63-21	M	63	Erzincan	Zazaki
14	F27-02	F	27	Erzurum	Turkish
15	F63-03	F	63	Muş	Zazaki
16	F41-04	F	41	Erzurum	Turkish
17	F17-06	F	17	Erzincan	Turkish
18	F18-07	F	18	Izmir	Turkish
19	F23-08	F	23	Izmir	Zazaki
20	F37-16	F	37	Erzincan	Turkish
21	F52-17	F	52	Erzurum	Zazaki

Code: F=female, M=male, D=active *dede*, O=*ocakzade*. For example, D24-13 belongs to an active *dede*, who is 24 years old and was interviewed as the 13th in line.

Appendix 2. Interview plan

1. Hacı Bektaş Veli's personage

Who is Hacı Bektaş Veli for You? What could You say about his personality? What are the most important aspects of his personality for You? What can you say about his origins and genealogy? What was his aim in life? Did he have a specific task or mission according to You? To whom would you compare Hacı Bektaş Veli? What objects or symbols are used to represent him? What are their meanings to You?

2. *Velâyetnâme* and miracles

When and how did you first get acquainted with Hacı Bektaş Veli? Where and from who have You first heard about his saintly stories? Did You ever read his *Velâyetnâme*? Which stories of the *Velâyetnâme* are the most important and relevant to You? Are these stories real happenings? Why do you think so? What were the most outstanding miracles performed by Hacı Bektaş Veli? Do you think similar miracles are possible today? How? Do You think his life and teachings are relevant today? For you? Why?

3. Visitation to Hacıbektaş

Have you visited Hacıbektaş? When, with whom did you go? For how long did you stay? Are there any stated dates for this visitation? What does the 16th of August mean to You? What was the main aim of Your visitation? What is the meaning of the Hacı Bektaş Veli complex to You? How would You describe it? What are the most important parts of the *dergâh*? Why? Which places affected You the most? What did you do and experience in these places of the *dergâh*? Did you visit all the parts of the *dergâh*? If not, why? What other specific places outside the *dergâh* did you visit during your visitation? What did you do and experience in these places? Which places were most effective for Your prayer and wishes in Hacıbektaş? Did you leave anything in these places from Yourself? Did you consider making vows? Why? Did you take anything with you from the sacred places? Why? How do you use these items? Did you experience anything unusual during your visitation? How satisfied were You with Your visitation? Would You recommend others to visit HacıBektaş? Why? What are the other important sacred places to you? What is the meaning of those places to You?

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