

## The Alevi Turks Of Asia Minor (2)

G. E. White tarafından yazıldı.

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### G. E. WHITE

(05.07.2001)

A visitor is welcome to see the sacred tomb of the Founder of the Order. The grave itself is built up of stones plastered with solemn whiteness, with a head-piece rising to sustain a plaster representation of the white Bek Tashi cap composed of Twelve Imams, and wound about with a green turban, green being the sacred colour of Islam. The grave was thickly covered with richly embroidered cloths. Six candle-sticks were ranged on each side, huge in size and of fine brass. The walls about were hung with characteristic emblems, swords, scimitars, pikes, lances, battle-axes looking as if gruesome stories might be connected with their history, Dervish begging bowls, bead rosaries, and green and red banners, of which one can easily believe the stories that they have been borne in many a fierce fight. The floor was spread with rich rugs and deer-skins, for before deer grew so scarce they were reckoned a most acceptable animal for sacrifice. Antlers also were hung here and there. A score or so of other Dervish graves clustered within the same building, cheerful in the summer sunshine. The yard outside was green, grassy, and quiet, suggestive of an English churchyard. In this sanctuary the worshippers offer their prayers and sacrifices.

If the Chelebi was away from home, Phaisi Baba was there to receive me courteously when I called at his room among the rambling quarters occupied by the Dervishes, of whom he is the chief or sheikh. Handsome in person, venerable under the weight of his seventy-six years, his white hair and beard and his white robes, the outer folds of which were of wool, beautifully set off his figure. He conversed easily and well, spoke freely of the shrine, its Dervishes and

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constituency, and rose politely when I left, though I had not kissed his hand or the hem of his robe on entering. He spoke lightly of the eccentricities and anormities often observed in Dervish ceremonies. The purpose of the Dervish life is the rest, peace, satisfaction, that come on taking the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and withdrawing from the world. It was a surprise to find that out of about four-score Dervishes resident at the tekye, nearly all Albanians. What are these Albanians doing, away over in Central Asia Minor? Yet here they are, with others of Turkish or other nationality. A novice serves for a term of years in some menial occupation, such as cook or gardener, then wanders as a mendicant for another period, and then, if necessary after still further testing, he is admitted fully to the Dervish brotherhood, and may remain at the central tekye, or be detailed for service elsewhere. On completing his probation the candidate is laid on the floor with his head on the treshold, and his right ear is bored with a peg of wood, and a black button is inserted in the opening. This is a sign that the wearer belongs to the Hadji Bek Tash order, and is to be received and trusted among the people accordingly. A visitor is shown the lodgings of the Dervishes, their room for devotions, and the larger mosque for public gatherings, the great kitchen with its copper kettles said to be presented to the foundation by the Tartar Khan, Sultan Orchan, each kettle capable of containing a whole ox, the lodging-rooms for pilgrims, and the other parts of an extensive establishment. If one could be there on the tenth of Mouharrem, when the tribes chiefly go up, he would find a concourse of probably thousands-cooking, distributing, and eating the Ashoura, or red soup characteristic of that day, offering the worship, filfilling their vows, content with themselves and wiht their Alevi religion. Hospitality is furnished to all comers, and thin loaves or cakes of bread are freely served to all who wish them, as they were to us.

Before leaving the place one should not fail to observe the huge artificial mound close by. It is tha largest of the many I have examined in Asia Minor. One hundred feet would be a low estimate for the height, and it is as much as five hundred feet across the top. The crumbling sides are packed full of pottery fragments, and I quickly picked up some of just the same of just the same style of material, manufacture, decoration, everything, with fragments from Kul Tepe near Cesarea. Now Kul Tepe, as Prof. Sayce showed in the CONTEMPORARY REVIEW for April, 1907, is proved by cuneiform tablets found there to have been an active centre in the days of Abraham and Hammurabi, and the inference is inevitable that the Bek Tash shrine goes back in its original foundation to the times when the Hittite civilisation overspread the country. It has links of connection with other undoubted Hittite sites. It has probably always been venerated as a sacred spot since, whatever the form of creed and cult nominally in public control.

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The central Bek Tash tekye is said to have more than one hundred affiliated and subordinate tekyes connected with it, and from those which are known to the writer he would suppose this number to be within bounds. The bond among them seems to be sentimental rather than administrative, but it is deep and active. Each local tekye has its revenues and parishes. Its sheiks and Dervishes are the monks of their communities, not in all points of comparison, but in general character and influence. The tekyes are places of religious "resort" for their people in the crises of life, and on festival days are visited by crowds. They form a series of ganglia for the transmission of information and intelligence among their people, and an idea that takes root in one, whether religious, or political, or social, is quickly, quietly, and effectively disseminated.

If the Bek Tash tekyes may be said to shelter a class of Alevi monks, the dedes may be called priests of the same faith. These men habitually reside apart from public institutions, each in his own home. Each Alevi vilage or community has its own dede or dedes, from whom they receive visits from time to time. The person of the ded, when he is on an official tour, is treated with the utmost reverence. He holds meetings, the most sacred of which are by night and are conducted with great secrecy. Guards are posted about the house to prevent intrusion. The elder men and women gather within, the affairs of the community are discussed; quarrels, if there be any, are settled; preaching or exhortation is listened to, prayers are offered in which sacred objects, even the lamps that light the room are brought forward and blessed; then the company rise, take hold of hands, men and women together, and go through some sort of religious dance. These proceedings are viewed as scandalous by sober-minded citizens outside, especially as charges of excesses are freely made; but these reports may be the fabrications of enemies. One feature of these services, however, is undoubtedly a sacramental meal, at which those who are admitted partake of bread and wine together, and this is very generally believed to be a perverted celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Before admission to the tables sins must be confessed and penance appointed, quarrels are composed, and reconciliation is effected. The dede rules his congregations with a rod of iron, and a recalcitrant member may be disciplined even to the extent of excommunication. In this last case he becomes an outcast, and none of his co-religionists will do business or eat with him.

In his practical religion, the Alevi Turk pins his faith to the intercession of saints, living or dead, and fears principally the baleful influence of evil spirits. The country is full of places of visitation or resort, when there is a sacred grave, and usually a sacred tree or grove, and a sacred spring. The region round about is believed to be under the influence of the evliya, or saint, buried there.

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The Oriental conception of God pictures a sublime sovereign, seated upon a distant throne, and surrounded by his retinue of saintly favourites. If then a humble individual has a petition to prefer, it will stand the best chance of a favourable hearing if it is presented and endorsed by some one of acknowledged merit. So when a man fears a reverse in business, or a woman like Hannah long for a child, when a farmer fears crop failure, or disease among his cattle, or when a whole village goes out to pray for rain, the suppliants visit the grave of a neighbouring saint, or resort to another of greater reputation farther away, and there offer their sacrifices and prayers. One lovely day a company of us paused for lunch at such a spot, because of its trees and fountain. A young man was sitting there with a hen by his side. He explained that the children of his village, a dozen miles away, were dying of scarlet fever. The whole village had turned out in consequence and joined in the purchase of an ox, which they would slay with sacrificial ceremonies, and then cook and eat together. But he had come to make a separate appeal at another sanctuary. Then he took his hen, walked around the grave, poured out the blood, and started away with the hen under his arm for his long walk home. That was a typical Alevi ceremony.

An Alevi lives in mortal terror of evil spirits and evil eye. Epilepsy, lunacy, dumbness, wry features, and other maladies, are to be avoided only by some incantation, the use of blue beads, the wearing of quotations from sacred books, or some other prophylactic or remedy to break the spell. Earth is carried from beside the grave of a saint and sprinkled over a field to prevent the ravages of mice. Or such earth is mixed with water and given to a sick child to drink. The trees beside a sacred grave or mosque or tekye are hung with thousands of rags, placed there by visitors suffering from malaria, who by tying a bit of cloth from their garments to the tree, thus making a material connection between the sufferer and the saint, hope to fasten the disease to the spot and return home free from its influence. Dealing with unclean spirits is not a pleasant occupation, and need not be pursued farther here.

It is remarkable that the Alevi Turks profess friendly feelings for Christians, sometimes saying that less than the thickness of an onion skin separates the two peoples. This feeling may be due to lingering memories of the times before the Turkish invasion, when the ancestors of the Alevi were perhaps a part of the old Christian stock of the country. Some believe that in the hour of agony induced by persecution, Christians turned just far enough towards Mahomedanism to escape further attention, but stopped with the Alevi form of the faith, instead of becoming fully orthodox. Certain it is that Alevi women do not necessarily veil themselves before Christians,

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though they are careful to do so before regular Mahommedans. Christians and Alevis usually eat freely together, but Sunnites sometimes deny eating with Alevis. Not only do our Alevi neighbours have a ceremony resembling the Lord's Supper, but they refrain from eating the flesh of hares, because it is forbidden in the Law of Moses, though permitted to other Mahommedans. They affirm that He who was revealed to Christians as Jesus was revealed to them as Ali. They say preaching in the mosques bids the regular Mahommedans inflict damage on the Alevis when they have the opportunity, and the humble people grieve at such treatment and the feelings that lie at the back of it. When the Alevi lays aside his habitual mask of secrecy, he pours forth a flood of vituperative language against the "devil-worshippers," as he calls his present masters. On the other hand some of them retain the memory of a Christian ancestry, and anticipate the time when they will again show their fraternity for Christians by intermarrying with them. There is a story that when the great Ali was put to death by his enemies, his head by some chance was placed for safe keeping in the hands of a Christian priest. Afterwards the persecutors wanted it to gloat over it or abuse it, but the priest refused to deliver it up. On being pressed, he cut off the head of his eldest son and offered that instead, but it was refused. So he did with his second and other sons, to the number of seven. Then his wife asked her husband to cut off and offer her head. He did so, and this was accepted. The truth or lack of it in this story has no importance. But it is exceedingly suggestive, as showing an Alevi belief that when their hero suffered, at least his head was protected from indignity by a Christian, and that at great cost to himself.

There has been some awakening of national consciousness among the Alevi Turks since the new Ottoman regime came in. The autonomy of Albania is said to be having a profound though quiet effect. Some hold that the Kurds will never rest satisfied till they gain similar privileges. The Alevis are engaged in opening village schools as rapidly as their means permit, and are said to have effected an organisation for commercial and political purposes. Hitherto they have had small part in office or public influence. For the general welfare of the Ottoman Empire, it is much to be desired that this section of the community should obtain its full share of rights, and contribute its full quota of strength in the commonwealth.

Note: G. E. White's other articles can be obtained from Website Editors. For each article 10 \$ and whole three articles is 15 \$ . Contact with the editor's e-mail:

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### Editor

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