Changing fates and the issue of Alevi identity in Bulgaria

The problem of identity has always figured in the historical fate of every ethnic and religious group. Today, at the end of the cosmopolitan 20th century, identity is not a characteristic feature of the psychology of advanced Western societies in countries with a high level of economic prosperity.

If national administrations were balanced in both theory and practice, the problem of identity would not come to the fore. However, in most of the world balance is lacking, bringing identity up as an extremely painful issue. There has never been an ideal pattern for administration even in the multinational empires of Middle Ages and Modern History. In this connection, the identity of one community or another engendered political or military clashes. The problem of identity of a particular community is extremely topical in periods of historical cataclysm or of changing social, interethnic, and international relationships. In addition, in many cases identity turns into a catalyst and indicator of complex deeper processes. This is borne out by the present situation in the Balkans.

The question of identity may be considered on the individual and group levels. In stable ethnic communities these levels overlap, but this does not always obtain, especially within minority groups subject to pressure. However, even stable communities display deviations from group identity, without much opposition to such deviations. However, such cases are not the result of a conscious desire by individuals to differentiate themselves or to denounce their identities; they are rather a response to situations in which individuals are placed. In a number of cases we may view this position as a method of penetrating another milieu, or as a matter of survival, or of self-realisation. It would not be far-fetched to view this position as an aspect of integration. Education, work, home, and the family and social environment play important roles in this connection.

Ottoman, Islamic and ethnological researchers know that the Bulgarian lands provided fertile grounds for unorthodox Islam. This became widespread, leaving a

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living tradition today. Despite strong pressures against it at various periods, the culture of heterodox Islam succeeded in retaining and preserving its originality. For a number of reasons (age among others), I think we have missed the unique opportunity to observe, register and analyse at first hand a culture which involves very interesting and diverse elements. This opportunity existed in Bulgaria until the 1920s and 30s. Of course, the heterodox Islamic tradition remained alive and active in subsequent periods, but it experienced the influence of social changes both in Bulgaria and in Turkey, the successor of the former Ottoman Empire.

Today, as a result of thorough globalisation, the victory of national over religious consciousness, and migration driven by economic crises, we have the last chance (in the Author's opinion) to study this tradition while it is still living.

The reasons why the heterodox Muslim community, designated in Bulgarian studies as 'the Aliani' survived are definitely rooted in its closed nature and its isolation from groups around it. At the same time, symbolic components, the language, and the commonality of socio-formative cultural factors, have provided sufficient co-ordination for the behaviour and activity of the people from the Alevi community. This has ensured the passing of information between generations, guaranteeing continuity. The traditional culture of every nation, and of smaller ethnic and ethnic-religious groups in particular, provides the basis of their self-consciousness as a whole.

Today, we witness two trends in traditional culture at the individual and social levels. The first consists of abandoning traditional culture, with the conscious or unconscious desire to throw off the burdens of centuries. In this way, heirs to a particular culture demonstrate a disposition to rid themselves of prejudices, becoming citizens of the world. They set off to a future in which all that is 'ethnic,' 'traditional,' or 'ethnic-cultural,' will belong to reference books.

The other trend in traditional cultures entails attempts to search for the roots of personalities and the group. The need to answer questions like 'Who am I?' or 'Where do I come from?' shows a desire to join the culture of ancestors.

Not one traditional culture anywhere can escape involvement in the worldwide process of urbanisation with all its positive and negative implications. Unfortunately, by losing touch with the culture of our ancestors, we fall at odds with nature, with the community, and even with ourselves.

All the above applies to the traditional culture of the Bulgarian Alevi. In fact, their presence in the Bulgarian lands is not historically conspicuous. Until recently, life in this community ran with a customary monotony, as if all was frozen, any dynamism and change in traditions and stereotypes being rare. More dynamic processes began developing in the 1970s. Since then the traditional cultural system and way of life began to change visibly.

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In this particular case we are looking at a small ethnic-religious group and have the unique opportunity to trace the development of the community coming into contact with an alien religious and ethnic environment. We can view this as a facet of the large issue of contact and conflict between different cultural patterns.

All small groups are bearers of specific culture patterns with their own characteristic features. In this sense I accept as well grounded Oswald Spengler's thesis that world history consists of the dramas of a great number of cultures drawing primitive strength from Mother-Earth. Each of them is soundly tied to Earth throughout its lifespan, imprints its likeness onto its 'material:' people. Each has its own ideas, will, feelings, and passions. Each has its own life and death. According to Spengler there are cultures, nations, languages, truths, gods, and lands that flourish and grow old. And each culture has its own opportunities for expression which emerge, ripen, and wither; but which never come back.

Since the history of civilization is the history of separate cultures, the interest in each of them is justified and necessary as long as it has purely cognitive and elevated purposes. Each culture is a rung on the chain of time and contains its own features along with ideas and practices that have existed before it.

One culture which has experienced its flourishing is that of the Alevi (Kızılbaş). Time will show if it will become history, or overcome the hurdles it faces.

The reasonable questions of 'Who are we?', 'Whither are we headed?', 'Is it worth turning back to the past?', and 'What lies ahead?' served as a catalyst for my studies on the Alevi in general. However, I also had purely personal, emotional, and moral motives. I myself belong to this community. I have been and still am emotionally involved in its history and its current fate. Being the product of a period during which there was some pressure against manifestations of certain religious and ethnic consciousnesses, I admit that prior to starting my studies, I knew nothing or next to nothing of my own ethnic-religious group. The religious traditions which the eldest generation observed in secret were taboo for children like me, and even for my parents. They themselves and people their age had almost no idea of the religious, political and ethnic past of their ancestors. Atheist propaganda had served its purpose. Most of the elder generation also knew almost nothing. It was as if the monotony of time had destroyed the historical memory of these people. It is only their religious tradition and personal names that give some indications in this direction. Evidence from written history (chronicles) coming from within their environment cannot be gleaned: such written sources did not exist. The people themselves as a whole had only vague ideas of their own identity, the only sign of it being language, religion and ritual.

3 I do not support this term, but here I shall use it because it has gained currency and is widely used by Bulgarian specialists.
Bulgarian historical and ethnological science has devoted some efforts to studies on the culture of heterodox Islam, identified today as Alevi. In so doing, it has inevitably run up against the problem of this community’s ethnogenesis. The issue has also been raised in foreign research. Since similar communities exist elsewhere in the Balkans and in Asia, the problem of their origin acquires greater urgency.

Studies of unorthodox Islam attracted the attention of Bulgarian authors immediately after 1878. They came across the Alevi (Kızılabış) in Bulgaria accidentally in some cases, while in others they sought them out on purpose. Many pages are devoted to the ritual system of the Alevi. In the last thirty years the quantity of purposeful studies increased. One of the reasons for this growth in the 1980s was purely political: the so-called ‘Revival Process.’ The political commitment of research at that time coloured most of its theses and conclusions.

Almost all authors writing on the subject have posed the question of the genesis of the Kızılabış, offering many solutions. The Author feels it important to list the hypotheses set forth in Bulgarian literature;

The first author to take an interest in the issue was ethnographer Dimitar Marinov. His attention was aroused by the peculiarities of this interesting tribe in our midst that differs both from Turks and Bulgarians. It is clear that Marinov had no knowledge on these matters, and his works display inconsistencies in the hypotheses offered. It seems he was not completely certain in the explanations he proffered. In Popular Belief and Religious Custom, he writes: “Here I shall only mention my firm belief that the Kızılabış must have been Christian Bogomils who were later forced to adopt Islam. As to their nationality, I would not hesitate to call them Bulgarian.” In his other article, Marinov reasons that “evidence from Turkish historians that the Kızılabış are a Turkish tribe and differs from the Turks only in being followers of Ali,” should be treated with caution. The author notes that their language is Turkish, but that the same language is also spoken by the Gagauz. According to him, assumptions on the origin of the Gagauz could be extended to cover the Kızılabış; both could be considered successors of Pechenegs and Kumans. Promoting this view, he notes that “religion should not disturb us in the least.” To back his assertion, Marinov cites the epistolary exchanges between Knez Boris I and Pope Nicholas (the Mystic) and states “that Muslim missionaries must have sneaked into Bulgaria prior to her adoption of Christianity. Further in this spirit, Marinov maintains that there were “Mohammedans” in Bulgaria, and books with religious content. We cannot substantiate this hypothesis with documentary sources.

6 Ibid., p. 95.
Two hypotheses about the ethnogenesis of the Alevi are set forth in the studies of Marinov:

1. The Bogomil hypothesis, which associates them ethnically with the Bulgarian component, and religiously with the Christian Bogomil heresy.

2. The Pecheneg(Kuman) hypothesis. The Pechenegs are known to be of Turkic origins. They came from the Central Asian steppes and invaded Byzantium during the first half of the 11th century. In 1048-50, a large mass of Pechenegs settled in the border Byzantine province of Danubian Bulgaria. The Pechenegs are also mentioned in Mahmud al-Kasgari’s 11th century Divanu Lugat-it Türk (A Combined Dictionary of Turkic). Their main encampment was in North-Eastern Bulgaria, although they also settled around Sofia, in Macedonia, and along the Osam river, around the springs of the Rosica and the Vidima. Science ranks Pechenegs with the Turkic or Altaic branch of the large Turanian language group.

As to the origin of the other component, the Kumans, there are various theories and assumptions on which I shall not dwell. It is generally accepted that they were also Turkic, and that their language was similar to Pecheneg. There is much evidence that Kuman also belonged to the Turanian group. It is known that starting from the 1060s, the Kumans acquired an important rôle in the territories of the former First Bulgar Empire.

At the turn of the outgoing Century, Bulgarian historical science adopted the opinion that the Gagauz descend from the Kumans, while the so-called ‘Gadjali’ (Muslim Turks living in the Dervorman) descend from the Pechenegs. Moshkov maintains that these Pechenegs, among whom Islam was widespread even when they inhabited the lands north of the Danube, preserved their faith until Ottoman times.

Petar Mutafchiev rejects the assumption that survivals of Old-Bulgars can be found among today’s Turks, considering it more likely that such survivals could be sought among Turkic or related tribes invading these lands in the 11th/12th century.

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Basing himself on Tadeusz Kowalski's linguistic studies, Mutafchiev launches the opinion that today's Turkish-speakers in North-Eastern Bulgaria descend from ethnic changes in that period.

Based on parallels between the Gagauz and Deliorman Turkish dialects, Kowalski established close kinships in a number of peculiarities characterising Northern Turkish dialects. This made him include them as a special linguistic subgroup: Danubian Turkic. This contained North Turkic elements missing in Anatolian Turkish. As a result of these assumptions and hypotheses, prevalent Bulgarian historiographic opinion holds that populations including the Alevi, come from the North beyond the Danube.

The Northern descent of the Turkish Muslims (and the Alevi in particular) also has another aspect. It is expressed in the Old-Bulgarian theory of their origin. After the Turanian theory on the origin of the Old Bulgars was established in Bulgarian history, the brothers Karel and Herman Shkorpil expressed the opinion that today's Deliorman Muslims (the Gadjali), and the Christian Gagauz in Eastern Bulgaria are survivals of the old pre-Slavic Bulgars.

This position is also held by G. Zanetov who, adopting the conjecture of the Shkorpil brothers that the Deliorman Turks are descendants of Asparuh's Bulgars, writes: "The Kızılbaş Turks from the counties of Balabunar, Silistra and Varna should be referred to the same Bulgars." However, Petar Mutafchiev holds that the hypothesis of the Old-Bulgar origin of these Turkish-speakers is insufficiently backed-up. Its basis is solely the common geographic locale of the two groups. According to Mutafchiev, it is hard to believe that Old Bulgars settling among Slavs could have retained their identity over such an extended period.

We may see that the theories of the origin of the Alevi drawn so far are in particular an indicator of the stratification of different ethnic and religious layers in the epoch of the Early and Proper Middle Ages in the relatively small area of North-Eastern Bulgaria.

Bulgarian historiography has supporters of both the thesis of the Bogomil origin of the Alevi and of their North Turkish descent (both in its Pecheneg/Kuman, and Old Bulgar versions). These hypotheses acquired especial popularity in the 1980s. Their universal acceptance was in response to political pressure. Openly or covertly, they became one of the scientific pillars for the justification of the 'Revival Process'.

The Old Bulgar theory is also subdivided into two. According to the first subdivision, the Kizilbaş (and also other Turks) are remnants of Old Bulgars who kept their pagan ritual and were not Christianized; or if Christianized, only superficially so. We can only suppose the existence of such remnants; however, the strong opposition of the boyars against Christianisation did lend viability to pagan religions and Old Bulgar traditions. Sources indicate that Boris I released commoners who participated in the revolt. According to another version the Kizilbaş are remnants of Old Bulgar Turkmens who adopted Christianity but preserved their language and rituals, keeping aloof from the Slavs.

The supporters of the hypotheses mentioned, leaning on similar ethnographic (ritual) characteristics rather than on documents include Vasil Marinov, Lubomir Miletich, Gadjanov, Todorov, Boev, Venedikova, and Dimitrov. It is fair to point out that not all these authors are completely in agreement with the theory. Some (Dimitrov being the consistent of them) merely build on this premise to conduct fuller analyses of the complex ethnic and religious mosaic in North-Eastern Bulgaria.

In his study on Old Bulgars in North-Eastern Bulgaria, Prof Miletich poses the question of the ethnogenesis of the Deliorman Turks. During his expeditions, he heard people say: “they are age-old inhabitants, they did not come from Asia Minor like the Turks from the Tuzluk.” However, when speaking about the villages of Alvanlar (Yablanovo), Küçükler (Malko Selo) and Veletler (Mogilec), he mentions that they are populated by “Turkish sectarians, old settlers from Asia Minor: the so-called Alevi or Kizilbaş.” It is clear that Miletich makes a genetic distinction between the groups speaking Turkish in different parts of Northern Bulgaria. The specific features of the Alevi do not escape his notice, providing him with the reason to state that “in the Turkic language group, a distinction should be made between pure Turkish, Gagauz, and Alevi (Kizilbaş).” In the villages mentioned by Miletich live Alevi from the Bektaşi branch. There is contradiction in the attitude of Miletich: he assumes that they may be Bulgars without rejecting the possibility that they might be settlers from Asia Minor.

Gadjanov takes a serious interest in the problems of different Islamic courses in Bulgaria and the Balkans. In his study on the ethnography of Gerlovo, he points out: “many Bulgarian rites as well as pagan/Christian traditional beliefs and superstitions are current along the entire Gerlovo valley.” Gadjanov speaks about Gerlovo Muslims in general, not considering specific features of rituals and belief in orthodox and heterodox Islamic villages. He only points out features which in his

18 Ibidem, p. 126.
19 Ibidem, p. 146.
opinion resemble Bulgar and Christian custom. However, experts will note that the customs and rites mentioned are predominantly Alevi. Due to superficial similarities between them and Bulgarian Christian custom, he labels them as the latter. He concludes that "all traditional belief and custom speaks in favour of the presence of a Bulgarian element in the region." Gadjanov supports Miletić's thesis: "the indigenous Bulgarian population in Gerlovo was converted to Mohamedanism or Turkicised." However, he specifies that this cannot apply to all locals; they being neither pure Turks, nor Bulgars converted to Islam.

In another article Gadjanov dwells rather extensively on Muslim sects (including the Kızılbahş). Here he poses the issue of their religion and custom in another and more realistic context. He tries to probe the heart of the problem, associating sects with the partitioning of Islam which occurred as early as a century after the Hijra. Here Gadjanov offers another hypothesis of their origin: the settlement of captive Kızılbahş people in European Turkey dates back to the time of Selim I's wars against 'the heretic Persians.' It is obvious that Gadjanov is better acquainted with literature on Islam and Ottoman Turkey than other authors mentioned above. In addition to the religious qualification, in his study Gadjanov also offers an ethnic qualification of the Kızılbahş, calling them, whether they like it or not, 'Persians.'

The Author feels it appropriate to point out that the Shi'a religious orientation of the Safavid state which covered today's Azerbaijan, North-West Iran, and Eastern Turkey, and its subsequent 'Iranization' had an influence on qualifying Muslim pro-Shi'a sectarians as 'Persians.' Thus in literature (initially incidentally rather by design) there arose 'the Persian theory' of the ethnic affiliation of the Kızılbahş. Thus, in reviewing the literary works of Yovkov, Dimitar Minev writes that the village of Dolen Izvor (Çiftlik Musubey) was inhabited by Kızılbahş Persians, and by Bulgarians.

While studying in detail the network of settlements in Gerlovo and the Deliorman, Vasil Marinov also comes across the presence of the Alevi. He touches upon the problem of their culture and their traditions in several of works. Marinov mentions the opinion of different authors about their origin representing his position too. It is not entirely clear and free of doubts and contradictions. Marinov cites the opinion of Hajek that after the Ottoman conquest many Bulgars belonging to different sects adopted Islam voluntarily. The opinion of Babinger is also in harmony with the assertion that the Deliorman was a centre and source of various

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21 Ibidem, p. 111.
sects which passed easily into Muslim sectarianism. Marinov considers the "Alvi, Kizilbas and Shi'a" as today's survivors of old sects.

This theory corresponds with the Bogomil thesis of the origin of the community. This author also regards the festivals observed by this population as Christian or influenced by Christianity: "For example, they observe all Christian festivals, especially linden and Gerg'ovden, by making offerings and lighting candles; they go to the so-called 'tekkes' or small old churches instead of mosques." He heard a story that in Gerlovo "the wives of most of the old Alvi were Bulgarian, taken by the Turks against their will. It was they who insisted on observing Christian festivals." This assertion upheld by some scholars was presented to the public as grounds for the Revival Process of 1984-89. The practice of Muslim notables in taking Christian wives had genuinely existed; however, it would be difficult for us to prove that nearly all the Alvi took Bulgarian women as wives. Taking into account the closed and homogeneous character of the Kizilbas community, the specific features of its function and the requirement for monogamy, I think that this is ruled out. At least I know that until recently it was impossible, considering the still strong traditionalism and conservatism of the Alvi. We are not in a position to make comments on how this problem stood at the time when the Kizilbas settled here. There were certainly individual cases of such marriages of which there are hazy memories in some villages. However, they were isolated and cannot serve as an indicator of a general process.

Marinov backs his thesis with the apparel of Kizilbas women, which is also mentioned by Bobchev and Gadjanov. The Kizilbas woman's dress worn daily until the end of the 19th century (and thereafter only as secret ritual attire), is one of the elements of the material culture of this population and features completeness, perfection and precision. One of the components of this dress is the so-called 'futa' (fita), not 'fusta' as Marinov writes. Gadjanov, Marinov, and Todorov write that this has nothing in common with Turkish female attire, seeing in it Christian or Old Bulgar remnants. However, I believe that it is much more plausible to consider the futa (a wide belt) as an indicator of Sufi attire. It has been characteristic of the Sufis in Basra. It should not be overlooked also that from a very early age the population of Basra and Kufa was a consistent defender of Ali's and his offspring's rights over the supreme authority in the Muslim umma.

26 Marinov, V.: Delorman, p. 54.
27 Ibidem, pp. 79-80.
30 The hypothesis of the Proto-Bulgarian character of the women's attire is defended by E. Teodorov.
If we can trust the evidence provided by European travellers, there certainly were cases, though rare, of mixed Christian/Muslim marriages. The French diplomat count d'Autrive who travelled through Eastern Bulgaria in 1785 gives us data on this, despite its being exaggerated. Passing through the villages of Singali (today's Divdădovo near Shoumen), Kialı (not identified), Erubialar (today's Stanovets, county of Shoumen), Kushuflar (today's Takach, county of Shoumen), inhabited by Muslims and Christians, he found out with surprise that they live together without despising each other, become related, drink bad wine together and break the rules of Ramadan and Lent. The clergymen of both religions, imams and priests, had the same forgiving attitude to intermarrying. Based on this alone, it is not possible to determine whether the Muslim population in these villages was orthodox or not. In more recent times there has been no Alevi population in these villages, which does not necessarily mean it had not existed until the 19th century.

Being aware of the psychology of both the Turkish and Alevi population, the Author does not think that what is described by count d'Autrive was practiced widely. It is another matter if the population of these villages had been converted to Islam recently. This question should be investigated more extensively. The impressions of the French diplomat show the existence of isolated cases.

All the authors considered so far have done fieldwork and heard sagas about origin related by the Kızılbaş themseleves. One of the versions among older Kızılbaş (Alevi) is that they arrived from Horasan (an area in North-Eastern Iran). Marinov calls into question “the mass settlement of Alevi Turks from the area of Horasan, Persia, to the Deliorman.” According to him, most of the Kızılbaş are descendants of Old Bulgars who became Alevi to escape Turkish torment. However, in Marinov's works display some lack of clarity and contradiction. He supports both views, asserting that the Kızılbaş are colonists from Persia (Horasan) or Asia Minor, and elsewhere that they are Bulgarians converted to Islam.

“When the inhabitants of the Deliorman confirm what I had been told by the Kızılbaş in Gerlovo, i.e., that they had come from Horasan and that is exactly what Vamberi and Bobchev maintain, we should consider it certain that the Kızılbaş in Bulgaria are settlers - colonists, mainly from Horasan in North-West Persia.” However, when describing villages with Alevi population in the Deliorman and Gerlovo, he observes that they are inhabited by Kızılbaş Bulgars.

Field studies of closed confessional communities on which there is insufficient source material, are of major importance. However, researchers should proceed in an unbiased manner, unburdened by preconceived ideas of ethnic origin or cultural and religious credo. It seems to the Author that this should serve as a criterion of scientific and ethical rigour.

33 Marinov, V. Deliorman, p. 80.
34 Ibidem, p. 124, 140, 168.
In a later study, A Contribution to the Study of Life and Culture of the Turkish population in North-Eastern Bulgaria, Marinov sets out the field material collected by him on the origin and function of the Kızılbaş (Alevi) religious organization, he writes: "In terms of their national consciousness, the Alevi are Turks and speak a Turkish dialect. (In terms of their faith they are a Mohamedan sect)." This registers things as they stood in the 1950s, without the comments on similarities with Bulgarian Christians or Turks, which feature in his previous works.

Many local historians and curators treat the Alevi subject condescendingly or with intentional bias. In the first half of the Century, Yavashov and anonymous authors in local newspapers were typical of this, while more recently such authors include Boris Iliev, Stoyan Stoyanov, Rumen Lipchev, Ivan Kolev, and Ivan Yakimov. The authors mentioned do not dwell upon the problem of Alevi ethno-genesis, being inclined to accept the theses that they are remnants of Old Bulgars, heterodox Christians or even more ancient populations. Only Yakimov is an exception in this respect.

Yavashov tries to establish in Bulgarian science the idea that the Alevi monastery of Demir Baba is in fact the famous sepulchre of Khan Omurtag, known from the inscription in the church of the Forty Martyrs in Turnovo. This hypothesis is defended ardently by some authors and local historians such as Severnai, E. Todorov, and H. Stoykov. However, it should be noted that the works of these authors are literature, and their objectives are to boost patriotism rather than help research.

Complex research by the Museum of Razgrad from 1972 proves that the türbe in question cannot be the tomb of Khan Omurtag. Having made a serious analysis, archeologists Stoyan Stoyanov and Ara Margos make the conclusion that the buildings of the monastery have nothing to do with the sepulchre or with construction by Khan Omurtag during the ninth century. To search for the tomb of Omurtag (which is referred to in the Turnovo inscription) in the monastery of Demir Baba is futile. All attempts to lump it in with preserved samples of Old Bulgarian buildings are groundless. Archaeomagnetic studies show that samples from the monastery date from the 16th century. Analysis of this material makes it possible to conclude that the building of the türbe dates back to the middle of that century.

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The author's conclusion, based on her work on the life of Demir Baba shows that the building of the tekke started in 1552. Local historians in Southern Bulgaria come across Alevi people near Krumovgrad. Observing their customs, they conclude: "they are Muslims whose life, traditions and religious rites have almost nothing in common with these of Muslim Turks ... little doubt attaches to the conclusion which forces itself upon one: that the Alevi had lived in these parts long time before the Turkish conquest, and that they are but Bulgarians converted to Islam."

We observe that in works which are not strictly scientific but more popular, the Kızılbaş are always represented as descendants of either Old Bulgars or Islamicised Christians.

Another author, Boris Iliev, is absolutely convinced that on the place of the Kızılbaş tekke of Demir Baba at Sveshtari near Razgrad, there had been a Thracian sanctuary of the divine horseman Heros. He proceeds from the fact that in the region of Isperrih are found some of the most significant monuments of Thracian culture, and that near the tekke itself (in the Kamen Rid locale) were unearthed remnants of a Thracian stronghold. Archaeology in general supposes that this area housed the capital of the Thracian kings of Geti.

Iliev's other argument is that in some Alevi customs he sees remnants of ancient Thracian games and Bacchanalias in honour of Dionysis. He thinks it logical for the Thracian sanctuary of the god Heros to have been converted into a church or a monastery to St. George, and later into an Alevi sepulchre. In Kızılbaş customs associated with Gerg'ovden he sees some likeness with the Bulgarian horo ring-dance, while in the Be_ikli rite performed on H1d1rellez (May 6th) he perceives ancient Thracian mysteries in honour of Dionisus and Semella. He latter notes that the legend of giants building this tekke (as well as another one nearby), is preserved vividly among "the Kızılbaş who, for most part are local Bulgarians converted to Islam but preserving many ancient customs (partially their ancient Bulgarian attire), and calling themselves 'ones who escaped carnage' (kılıç kaçkıno)."

In a similar work, Iliev again takes up the position that the Kızılbaş are converts to Islam, however without rejecting the possibility that sectarians were settled into North-Eastern Bulgaria as colonists. Being familiar with studies on this to some extent, he writes that the Alevi faith was brought by settlers in the reign of Süleyman the Legislator (1520-1566). However, the author maintains that owing to

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39 From a still unpublished study of the present author on the Vita of Demir Baba.
42 Ibidem.
the great democracy and religious tolerance of the Alevi, indigenous people compelled to change religion chose the Alevi faith.

On the other hand, he puts into circulation yet another legend which he asserts originates among the Kızılbaş themselves - that they are kılıç kaçıkmı and have inherited the customs, rituals and verbal traditions of the local population.

The Author personally doubts if all the Alevi assert they are kılıç kaçıkmı. Living in their very midst, she has never heard such assertions. It seems to her that this is a case of 'a secondary myth' which spread among them after similar publications appeared. If there had been cases of conversion from Christianity to sectarian Islam, they were not the result of mass and forcible policy. There were cases of conversion, but the motives underlying them were economic and social. By the end of the 16th century, in the tekke of Demir Baba lived four Bulgarian families of farmhands.

A Turkish historian has published correspondence concerning the vakıf of the tekke of Sari Saltuk near Kaliakra from the register of the Islamic year of 1022 (21.2.1613 - 10.2.1614). In this register, two Christians are listed as water-carriers and cooper: Georgi, son of Dimitar, and Taranika Vaso. One derviş is listed under the surname of Abdullah. It is accepted in Ottoman studies that 'Abdullah' indicates recent conversion to Islam. This evidence provides grounds for Strashimir Dimitrov to maintain that the tekke had continued to absorb local Christians.

It is well known fact that heterodox Muslim sanctuaries played a significant rôle in proselytising Islam voluntarily.

Most impartial (from the scientific point of view) of the early works on the Alevi is an article by Bobchev which provides a good basis for further detailed studies on this matter. Being acquainted with, and influenced by, preceding works, he is also tempted by the idea of "perceiving purely Bulgarian customs among them, or else Christian ones, or ones containing some traces of Christianity."

Having spoken with the Kızılbaş themselves, and become familiar with some foreign research, he sums up his conclusion: "If there is something which distin-
guishes Deliorman people from the Kızılbaş, it is doctrinal difference.

Despite the restrictions and taboos imposed by this community's religion, it remains to Bobchev's credit that he succeeded in penetrating a number of peculiarities of their culture. His theory on their origin is that "the Kızılbaş are Turks in terms of language, and to a large extent of ethnic manner and custom, like other Deliorman people; it is only their religious concept and beliefs that renders them hostile to other Turkish Muslims, with whom they live ... Evidence collected and thoroughly corroborated by the Author shows the Kızılbaş as a Shī'a (or Alevi) sect, among whom some mystic and mysterious custom, ritual and legend has been introduced."

Bobchev accepts as probable Vamberi's opinion that the Kızılbaş are Iranian Turkmen: war captives from the Azerbaijan and Transcaucasiens whom the Sultans sent as colonists to different parts of the Balkans after earlier warring with Persia. He concludes that prior studies had not provided sufficient evidence of Old Bulgar links.

The hypotheses and theories of Alevi origin outlined above make it clear that Alevi ethnic and religious identity is indeed an issue. This much also became clear to Konstantin Irechek while he travelled through the Principality. The Czech historian encountered communities he identified as 'Mohamedan schismatics called Kızılbaş.' His short remarks shed light upon some aspects of the world view of these 'Mohamedan schismatics' who, according to local people 'drink wine, do not make their wives hide their faces, and consider bloodshed a sin:' "Of their origins and religion, I found out only that they regard themselves as being somewhat superior to the rest of Turks, and care little for the strict injunctions of the Qur'an." Irechek refers to Mordtman and Vamberju's opinions on their origin. According to Mordtman, the Kızılbaş are not Shī'a but rather, "free thinkers who recognise Islam only ostensibly; they have mosques but do not go to them, do not conceal their wives, and do not keep away from wine."

These characteristics, which make an impression on everyone coming into contact with these 'free thinkers' have an explanation which has been considered in other works. The observation by Felix von Luschan on the Tahtaci in Asia Minor

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50 Ibidem, p. 9.
53 Ibidem.
55 Translated into English from the Bulgarian translation in the original. Translator.
contains some hints of their ethnic and religious affiliation. He points out that "the Kızılbaş wore red turbans to differ from the rest of Turks who wear white turbans, and that they are a Shi'a or Alevi sect." In Turkey the tribe of the Tahtacis preserved its semi-nomadic way of life till as late as modern times, and identifies itself as Kızılbaş. Besides, some groups of Tahtacis in Turkey are also known as Naldöken Tahtacıları. It is also well known that the ocaks of the Naldöken Yürüks were integrated in the Yürük organization which had a significant role in the demographic and ethnic processes in Bulgarian lands. Yuruk inventories of 1543 reveal that there were twelve ocaks altogether of Naldöken Yürüks in the Dobrudja nahiyeris. We come across the name "Naldöken also in the Vilayet-name of Demir Baba, a written monument of the heterodox Muslim tradition in Bulgarian lands. People called "Naldöken" were present at the wedding of Hacı Dede, Demir Baba's father." Other specifics of the religious and ritual practice of the Kızılbaş in North-Eastern Bulgaria also lead to a plausible relation with the Tahtaci groups in Turkey.

Thus Bulgarian liberal arts studies to the mid-20th century, when documentation and literature on matters related to Islam were still insufficient and there were no specialised field studies, resulted in several hypotheses on the origin of the Kızılbaş. The authors constructed these hypotheses on the grounds of what they knew and saw, taking into account at the same time the scarcity of information. They may be summarised thus:

1. The Kızılbaş are remnants of Turkic tribes, the Pecheneks and the Kumans, who settled in the Bulgarian lands in the 11th century
2. The Kızılbaş are associated with remnants of Turkic-speaking Old Bulgar communities which 'passed readily to sectarian Islam'
3. The Kızılbaş stem from Bogomil Christian heretics who adopted sectarian Islam after finding many points of commonality in it
4. The Kızılbaş are descendants of Christian populations forced to adopt Islam
5. The Kızılbaş are Persian Turkmens sent by the Ottoman sultans to settle here after wars with Persia
6. Some authors rank the Kızılbaş as Persian, calling them 'Persian/Kızılbaş'. Identifying their religion with Iran, they make no distinction between them and the Persians as a nation. This error is typical of Western chroniclers, travellers and diplomats who characterise the Kızılbaş kingdom of the Safavids as Persian and labelling all sectarians who support it 'Persians'.

Between the 1950s and 1980s, interest in Alevi culture increased. The study of

59 Vilayetname-i Timur Baba Sultan, f. 18 (The manuscript is with the author of this study.)
their material culture, custom and ritual also achieved successes. In this sense we can mention the work of Marinov (cited above), of Ivan Koev, Vasileva, Ademova, and Sivriev. Of especial value here was the symposium on The Bulgarian Alevi which presented the customs of two Alevi villages (Biserci and Mudrevo near Razgrad). Its value is all the higher because authors who were Alevi by birth came from the above villages, presenting material whose authenticity was beyond doubt.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of authors dwelt on the religious rituals of the Alevi, sticking to the tradition of searching for Christian or pagan influence. This aspect of the studies deepened, being favoured in the second half of the 80s, during the 'Revival Process.' In this connection Todorov, Boev, Vasilev, Iliev, Lipchev, and Ivan Kolev touch upon Kızılbaş origins. Todorov sees in them "a group, whose main characteristic is related to faith and not nation." He writes that they belong to a Muslim sect which reveres Ali rather than Muhammad. This gross blunder is oft-repeated in literature, and has moreover acquired general street popularity. The assertion that the Alevi do not respect Muhammad is absolutely wrong. Being well aware of the Alevi's religious doctrine, the Author is compelled to state that they respect Muhammad and his deeds, and in no way deny his mission as a prophet. The above opinion distorts Alevi religious identity, making it appear hostile to the founder of Islam, and to Islam altogether. This is far from the truth. Alevi ideology places Ali and his lineage above the supreme power of the umma. It does not reject

61 Koev, I.: Obleklo i zhilishta na staroto bulgarsko naselenie v Razgradsko. - Izvestiya na Seminarata po slavjanska filologiya, 8 (1942): 77-130 (Koev, I.: Attire and abodes of the old Bulgarian population in the Razgrad district. - Annals of the Seminar for Slavic Filology, 8 (1942): 77-130)

Muhammad; it only believes that his only legitimate heir is Ali. Essentially, this is an amalgam between moderate and extreme shi'a views. Fast Kızılbaş views apply to the personality of Ali, and to the incarnation of God into man. The Kızılbaş themselves in their religious songs constantly emphasize their relation with Muhammad and Ali. They sing: "We are among those who say: "Haq - Muhammad - Ali." The refrain of "Ya, Allah, ya, Muhammad, ya, Ali" is ever-present in their prayers.

These expressions illustrate one of the founding tenets of their religious doctrine: Teslis. Teslis is one of these ideas which form the essence of Alevi faith in general, inclusive of Bektashi elements. The Kızılbaş themselves consider it as belief in Allah, Muhammad, and Ali, and interpret it thus: "Allah is true; He is the only one; Muhammad is His messenger and prophet, while Ali is the leader who is to inherit Muhammad in his religious way. After Muhammad, he should be imam." This peculiar Muslim Trinity (Teslis): Allah, Muhammad, and Ali, exists in indivisible unity. By essence the triad is not an obstacle: it solely personifies unity. In Bektashi belief, the organs of the human body personify certain imperatives of religious doctrine. These imperatives rest upon the belief in Allah/Muhammad/Ali. If an Alevi/Bektashi asked what is in his ear, he would reply: "Bank-i Muhammad." These words personify the prophetic mission of Muhammad, a call to belief in a single God, and unity on a religious basis. They emphasise a firm belief in the messenger's role of Muhammad. To the question of what his mouth symbolises, an Alevi/Bektashi would reply: "Iman-ı sehadet." This reply embodies the requirement for one to affirm one's faith, which comprises expressing in words the formula for one's faith in the single God Allah, and in the statement that Muhammad is His Messenger. To another question of what his nose signifies, the proper reply would be "Buy-ı cennet" (or "rayı-ı cennet"). According to this expression, the person who has adopted the belief in Allah, Muhammad and Ali, and committed himself to a leader (pir), would go to Heaven. According to the doctrine, a leader (önder) in paradise is Ali. He is 'saki-i keşer:' the dispenser of water from the paradise well. However, paradise can be reached only through spiritual perfection and self knowledge. We can see that Muhammad is present in Alevi religious doctrine as the 'beginning' (evveli Muhammad), as the founder of the religious way. Ali is the last point, the end (ahiri Ali), he is the mark of perfection to which a believer should strive. A couple of lines of the Kızılbaş poet Pir Sultan Abdi illustrate this in a wonderful way:

Pir Sultanım eydircı Muhammed Ali
Erenler kurdu erkânı yolu
Evveli Muhammed ahiri Ali
Biz Muhammed Ali diyenlerdeniz!

(I lead, and I rule, says Muhammad Ali
Enlightened men set the tenets showing the way
At the onset: Muhammad; at the end lies Ali
Thus we praise and hold fast with Muhammad-Ali.)
As to the influx of Kızılabası to North-Eastern Bulgaria, Todorov assumes: "most probably, they were a small group of settlers, since there is no evidence testifying to mass immigration from Persia." According to him, "the existence of a number of Old Bulgar festival customs and rituals with the Alevi, which they have preserved even more fully ... proves the infusion of an Old Bulgar element in the Kızılabası, perhaps because the Old Bulgar remnants had preferred to be Turkicised by Persian Türkmen." Regarding the cult of the holy man Demir Baba (revered by the Alevi), he concludes that there are a great many Old Bulgar layers in it, summing up that Bulgarian folk heritage is preserved in Turkish in the Ludogorie.

Despite the author's subjective intentions, this thesis is difficult to prove, moreover solely on the basis of field ethnographic and folklore material. If we broaden the range of studies and go sufficiently far back in history, we shall see that there is genuine proximity. Both the Old Bulgars and the Kızılabası were Turkic, whose primary homeland was Asia. Their ancient pagan cultures had almost identical characteristics. Each played a role in the historical development of the territories around the Caspian, but fate set their historical development on different paths.

Living north of Caucasian, the former headed West and adopted Christianity in the 9th Century, while the latter preserved their pagan culture and religion until much later. Becoming followers of Shi'a Islam, they introduced into it many elements of their paganism and Turkic tradition, creating thus a modified Islam that differed significantly from the mainstream. However, their belief (though elementary and naive) was sincere and deeply held. They considered themselves as 'the truest' Muslims who followed the path of the Prophet and his first assistant Ali in the most proper way. In this sense they ascribed to themselves a religious exclusivity which influenced their psychology and behaviour.

Widespread among the Kızılabası in North-Eastern Bulgaria is a verse with predominantly Arab and Persian vocabulary, which illustrates their religious identity. The Author learned this text from her ancestors, the Arab-Persian version being also popular among them in Turkish translation. Here it is:

1. **Bize en evvel Allah'ın sırınna vakıf olmuş insanlar derler**
   Bize Allahın sevdığı habibinin bendesi derler

2. **Hakikat sırınının ilmi bizdedir**
   Mana noktasında crank kamil insanlarız

3. **Bize acıp sırlar gösteren Ali’nin kulları derler**
   Eğer gözü açıklardan isen Ali’yi nazaz et

4. **Bize el ata sırınna vakıf insanlar derler**
   Bizim en yüksek namımız el fahru fahridir

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63 Idem. Relics of Proto-Bulgarian, p. 28.
64 Idem. The Origin of Some, p. 56.
*Ludogorie is the Bulgarian place-name for the area known in Turkish as the Deliorman. Both names mean The Mad Forest. Translator.*
5. Onun için bize la kerem evliya naci guruhu derler
Onun için bize Kızılbaş derler

1. Our name means those who first perceived divine mystery.
Our name means servants of the dearly beloved friend of Allah. [Ali]

2. Ours is the insight into the secrets of God. [the mystery of truth]
And as to sensibility, we are a most sagacious and learned men.

If thou are among those whose eyes are open, regard Ali.

4. Our name means those who perceive the greatest mystery.
Muhammad is the noblest of names for us [another interpretation may also be available]

5. Our dignified calling means sages who attained redemption.
That is why we are the Red Headed Ones.

We can see that Teodorov, like a number of authors before him, assumed that
the Alevi in North-Eastern Bulgaria had absorbed a significant portion of Old
Bulgar ethnicity. At the same time, the author contradicts himself when he relates
the settlement of a Turkic group from Iran (the Alevi) who had come here much
earlier than the Ottoman conquest, without supporting it with historical facts. This
group merged with Turkic-speaking Old Bulgars and adopted their customs and
traditions. He notes customs, legends and attire common to Old Bulgars and the
Alevi. However, he fails to explain why the Kapanci, Grebenci and Harzoi (who
belong to the former according to him), speak Bulgarian and profess Orthodox
Christianity, while the Alevi are Turkish-speakers and profess heterodox Islam.

The Author feels that such isolated consideration of the customs of the Alevi is
wrong and provides grounds for incorrect conclusions. To be able to draw conclu­
sions about cultural influence and interaction, we have to be perfectly acquainted
with the cult and ritual practice of the different communities, the peculiarities of
their religious doctrines, their ways of life, cuisine, attire, and psychology. It is par­
ticularly necessary to trace down the history of their emergence.

That different cultural systems have coexisted for centuries in the territories
under consideration is an indisputable fact which makes possible the transition
from one ethnic and religious identity to another. However, processes should be
considered in their integrity, rather than in an isolated fashion.

The other authors mentioned also consider the question of the origin of the Kızılbaş. Vaysilov rightly corrects the opinion of Marinov that the Kızılbaş settled in the Ludogorie not in the late 18th/early 19th century, but much earlier. He refers to the evidence of Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi. Travelling from Rusçuk to Silistra, he gives a short description of the land and people: "These parts are called the Deliorman and are flourishing nahiyas. They comprise private estates of pasas. A story about local folk has them blowing out candles and practising other evil, but this is pure slander. The fact is that locals represent an omnium gatherum of poor farmhands of untutored manner." This evidence by Çelebi proves that by the mid-17th century, the nahiyas of today’s Deliorman (district of Silistra) were populated by Kızılbaş. We can judge from the expression “blowing out candles and practising other evil” that it is indeed the Kızılbaş who are described. The orthodox Muslims were hostile to the Kızılbaş, ascribing to them the secret rite of "don Karşımırsı" (getting their underwear mixed): a veiled accusation of propensity to orgies. The spreading of this slander contributed to the hostility and malevolence between the two groups of Muslims.

Vaysilov tries to challenge “the opinion abroad among the public that the Kızılbaş belong to the Turkish people.” Basing himself on the concept generally accepted until recently, viz. that “the Ottomans and their Sultan were orthodox Muslims, and the penetration of heretics among their subjects was ruled out as a genuine possibility,” he questions the Turkish nationality of the Kızılbaş. The policy of the Ottoman Sultans towards Sufi-mystical orders and sectarian Islam is a topical issue in Ottoman studies, and it has called into question Vaysilov’s assertion. The author confuses religious affiliation with ethnicity. National consciousness developed among Ottoman Turks only by the end of the 19th century, while Turkish national consciousness displaced religious awareness only after the Kemalist revolution in Turkey. However, the split in islam dates back much earlier, underlying exactly the conflict between Kızılbaş and Sunni-Turks. The increasing trend to manifestations of national identity by Turks, especially after 1922, pushed religious contradictions into the background (though they have not disappeared even today and impact relations between the two groups).

Like other scholars, Vaysilov has adopted the view that a number of Ludogorie communities were a mixture of Ottoman soldiers settled here, and local Bulgars. As a result, the Deliorman and Dobrudja tribes appeared. He writes: “Intermixed with
Turkish-speaking populations in the villages, the Kızılderililer adopted their language,” while the organisation of the sect is entirely different from Islam. 68

The majority of authors mentioned establish certain facts, but they analyse them one-sidedly, placing them in a predetermined frame of reference. They base themselves mainly on perfunctory field studies and selected facts, failing to comprehend the essence of Alevi ideology. There are certain subtleties to analysing this ideology, but very frequently some discord between religious consciousness and nationality is noted with these authors. It is well known that world religions are universal phenomena in principle: they transcend the narrow borders of community, and later of nation. If some groups within an ethnos profess different religions, antagonism always arises. Religious consciousness has always exerted influence on national consciousness, as proven by the Reformation in Europe, and to some extent by the history of Islam. The Kızılderililer (Alevi) are an eloquent example of this. They differed from the rest of Muslims (in this particular case the Sunni Turks) in terms of religion (or more precisely in their comprehension and interpretation of Islam).

The Author has repeatedly noticed that in interpreting Kızılderililer origins, the unity of religious consciousness is used as a criterion for imposing a national identification which does not tally with the truth. Another phenomenon is more frequently encountered: difference in religious consciousness with part of the linguistic community to which they belong serves as a mark for classification into another ethnicity.

Both approaches are totally wrong. They have given rise to mistrust between the community considered and otherwise similar ethnic and religious groups. Such approaches have isolated the group psychologically, yet this has contributed to its preservation. A consequence of similar attitudes is also the striving to avoid the intermediate statute of the group, the tendency for it to prove belonging to a larger community.

We can sum up that one of the approaches applied in Bulgarian historiography in analysing the origin and the culture of the Alevi, is to consider culture as the result of various local and external ideological and religious factors; as a mix of religious concepts. They are considered the product of ethnogenetic processes comprising various ethnic components.

Between 1984 and 1989, a strong accent was put on the similarity between the customs, rituals and world view of the Kızılderililer and Christians. Proof was found for the thesis that the Kızılderililer interpretation of a series of Christian festivals indicated that strong Christian and pre-Christian elements were preserved under the coating of an Islamic sect. Mihaila Staynova, one of the first authors to have worked with Ottoman source material concerning Islam in the Bulgarian lands, also contends that Muslim sectarian propaganda was successful in areas inhabited prior to the Ottoman conquest by people with "relaxed" Christian or heretic beliefs (such as

Bogomils and Pavlikëns). Though implicitly, Staynova does not rule out the possibility that the conquered religion was submerged into the conquering one, leading to a parallel submerging of ethnicity.

Katerina Venedikova is a categorical supporter of the Old Bulgar thesis on Kızılbaş origin.

North-Eastern Bulgaria as a whole has a complex historical fate. It was a bridge crossed by many tribes, some of them Turkic, even before the Ottoman conquest. We know almost nothing of their religious identity and their fate after they settled here. This complicates comparative studies between them and those who settled later. However, the overlapping of areas of settlement is still not sufficient reason for definitive conclusions.

An important contribution to the study of Islamic issues related to the subject under consideration is made by Professor Strashimir Dimitrov. In his 1988 History of the Dobrudja, he notes that judging from Ottoman sources available by that time, there was no evidence that North Eastern Bulgaria and the Dobrudja had been colonised by settlers from Asia Minor in the late 14th and 15th centuries. However, he also considers that migrations from Asia Minor to Eastern Bulgaria, especially by people attracted by the opportunity of plundering in campaigns, are not ruled out. Greedy for loot in the military campaigns, nomads and semi-nomads from Anatolia, dervishes, ahlys and knights had moved here. Part of these dervishes, ahs, gazis surely must have been followers of the unofficial Islamic trends - Kalenders, Babais, Bektasis.

Changes in the demographic map of the Dobrudja and other parts of North Eastern Bulgaria were directly related to the presence of Muslim heterodox communities there. One of Prof Dimitrov's latest articles, "New Data on Demographic Relations in the Southern Dobrudja in the First Half of the 16th century", is a novelty in this respect. He is the first Bulgarian scholar to introduce Ottoman source material on the settlement of the group under consideration into North Eastern Bulgaria. In History of the Dobrudja, he publishes conclusions based on data derived from 1573 celebkesan inventories, and the 1569 inventory of mirii settlements in the sancak of Silistra, of persons forcibly removed here from Asia Minor (sürüğünan taifes). Prior to Prof. Dimitrov, Rusi Stoykov, who had examined the 1573 celebesan register, wrote that it contained names such as Pervane, Bahsaish.


Behader, and Serdemend, and also names that included the suffix - sah. In his opinion, these names indicate Azerbaijan-Persia origins for these people. However, it should be stressed that they cannot be both Azerbaijani and Persian. Southern Azerbaijan had genuinely been subject to strong Persian influence. In the beginning of the first Millennium, Azerbaijan was under the rule of the Sasanids for more than three centuries. However, between the 4th and 6th Centuries, more and more Turkic tribes entered the area through the Derbent pass.

For all their might, the Sasanids were unable to stop the influx of these nomads. A great part of these Turkic-speaking nomads from Central Asia settled gradually in Azerbaijan, mixing with the locals. Sasanid culture and the Farsi/Aramaic language began to spread in Azerbaijan. The period of Sasanid rule was characterised by mutual influence and the exchange of cultural values. However, during the 730s Azerbaijan was included into the caliphate of Umayyad, which helped the enforcement of Islam there in these territories.

Local Zoroastrians and Christians (most of them Manicheans) were voluntarily or forcibly converted to Islam. By the middle of the 11th century, Azerbaijan and other neighbouring lands were conquered by the Seljuks, one of the Ouz branch-es of the Turkic nomadic tribes. The Seljuk conquest was accompanied by a mass migration of Turkic nomads in the subjected territories. A vast area around the Caspian, including Azerbaijan, was Turkicized. The Turkic language began to prevail over the subordinated languages. In terms of religion, Shi'a Islam prevailed in Muslim regions around the Caspian, including Azerbaijan, until the Seljuk conquest. However, the Seljuks presented themselves as followers of Sunnism. This religious opposition coloured relations between subjects and rulers.

The strong wave of Turkic settlement in the 12th and 13th centuries displaced indigenous languages, and Azerbaijani (part of the Turkic language group) established itself as a lingua franca across Azerbaijan. However, the influence of Farsi and Persian culture were still strong. Part of the Turkic tribes settled in today's Azerbaijan and North Western Iran adopted a great many Farsi expressions, as well as the religion of Iran: at first the Zoroastrian religion, then the Shi'a Islam. Owing to their long co-existence, many Turkic people became Persianised, but most preserved their language, culture and ethnicity. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Azerbaijan was entirely Turkicised: Azerbaijanis' origins point genetically to Turkic tribes, while Persians' descent offers a clear analogy with modern Iranians. It is often pointed out in literature that the Kizilbas or Muslim sectarians had adopted the religion of Iran. It should be specified that the Imam Shi'a confession dominant

in today's Iran came to ascendancy during the ascent of the Kızılbaş reign of the Safavids. This means that until the 15th century, though spread in some regions of Iran, Shi'a Islam was not prevalent there. In fact, Petrushevskiy holds the opinion that a big share of the population, especially in rural areas, must have been secretly Shi'a, but that Sunnism also had strong position. Shi'a Islam gained a victory in Iran as a result of the victory of the Safavid Sheikhs who were Turkic by origin or Turkised, and were supported by Turkic tribes professing Shi'a Islam. The Persianisation of the Safavid state came later. The conclusion should be drawn that the names encountered in the register are not eloquent testimony to a Persian descent for the people concerned. Persianised Turkic people also bore names similar to them.

In the article quoted, Dimitrov, taking as a basis an icmal [a concise register] dating back to 1526-27, gives the following figures for 'people brought inward' [exiles]: 28 'households of exiles' and 105 households of exiles with wives in the nahiyeh of Varna. The same register contains a note on the registration of a zeamet of exiles in the nahya of Provadiâ, comprising a total of 1784 households. Analysing the numbers of households mentioned in the nahiyeh of Varna, the author notes that the relative share of the exile zeamet was large. The numbers of the groups of people sent into exile (taife-i sūrgūnān) could have had a significant influence on the demographic picture of nahiyas in the Dobrudja. Dimitrov concludes that the scope of banishments was massive for the time, and that they date to the 1520s and '30s.

Information on exiles is also available in the detailed register of vakifs devoted to the Holy City of Madinah as of 19-28 February 1558. This register contains data about reaya of no fixed abode, yürüks and exiles in the nahiyas of Hasköy-i Uzuncova-ova, Zagra-i Eski Hisar, Mahmud Pasa-i Hasköy, Akça Kazarlik, Nikboli, Tırnovi, Hezargrad, Çernovi, and Lofca. Radushev, basing himself on the name system within this group, conjectures that they were Persians.

Most probably for this particular reason the list prepared by him and by Kovachev describes them as 'Persian exiles'. In fact, this is how they feature in the list: 'Sūrgūnān-i Acem.' However, the Author feels that this qualification is geographic rather than ethnic, designating their belonging to the designated area (in this case on Persian territory). It should be pointed out that Shi'a propaganda of the Erdebil Safavid Sheikhs found many followers and supporters in Asia Minor, in addition to Iran and Azerbaijan. The propaganda found more fertile grounds among Turkic-speakers than among Persians. There were tribes of Persian and Kurdish origin who supported the Safavids, for instance the Tala, who were of Persian descent.

In his earlier studies, Dimitrov also maintains that a large share of Hunnic-

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78 Dimitrov, S.: New data on.
speaking Bulgars adopted the Islam brought by the Ottomans because of the porous language barrier. In his opinion, the syncretic forms of sectarian Islam became an appropriate bridge for the transition from Christianity to Islam.

Like other European authors, Dimitrov thinks that Bektaşiism turned into a refuge for many recent Christians. Since part of the Kızılbaş in the Bulgarian lands belong to the Bektaşi branch (and as a rule all Kızılbaş worship Hacı Bektaş Veli), it has been accepted that part of the Bulgarian Christian population had adopted heterodox Islam. This is not an invention of Bulgarian science. The Russian Turkologist V. A. Gordlevskiy expressed his opinion on how Christian populations joined heterodox Islam long ago, while as regards the Balkans this theory is shared by Western authors such as, inter alia, Hasluk and Kissling.

Russian, Turkish and Western scholars have also dwelled on Alevi Islam, in particular touching upon the problem of Kızılbaş ethnogenesis. As mentioned above, Gordlevskiy has concrete studies in this area in Russia. The Author's accent on Indigenous Bulgarian hypotheses is because they impacted Bulgarian Alevi self-consciousness, and were associated with attempts to manipulate this self-consciousness.

An ethnic deconstruction of the world would be impossibly complex, especially regarding people and areas subject to multiple switches of fate. Ethnogenesis is one of the most complex areas in history. The indigenous and migrational approaches feature in any ethnogenetic study. They oppose each other in seeking arguments. However, it is true that brought to their limits and subordinated to abstraction, they cannot always account for the concrete historical nature of phenomena. The complicated character of social phenomena and their immensity and complexity should also be taken into consideration.

In the beginning of the Author's studies, she accepted the view that the Kızılbaş should be considered as bearers of a syncretic culture containing heterogenous elements. She was influenced by research on these and similar problems which she had studied by that time. Although she came from this very community and was in constant touch with it, she was but poorly aware of its authentic religious culture and ritual because of political bans prevailing at the time. However, going deeper into the problem, she revised her viewpoint to a certain degree.

If at the outset she regarded herself mainly as an explorer of the culture, religion and history of this group, in time she underwent a purely personal evolution. The deep awareness that she was an offspring of this community gave her a fascination in its fate. She felt like a fragment bearing all its experience, perceptions, feelings, and notions. She was no longer an impartial observer and analyst; deep in her soul she felt a passion as an exponent of this community. Her position was the

response to the imposition of hypotheses as instrument for exerting pressure on ethnic and religious consciousness. She did not want anyone to tell her what she was; she wanted to decide this by herself. So her scientific interest had a purely personal motive, and emotionally it coincided with her personal interest. She was seized by a desire to discover the chain to which belonged the link she represented. The benefit of her studies up to then was that at least she succeeded in finding out who the Kızılbaş were, what religious doctrine they professed, what their traditions were, what their images of themselves and the world were, and what their moral philosophy was. She was excited by what they thought of themselves, how they saw their past, what they thought of others.

Until the 1970s, despite some hypotheses presented in literature, the Bulgarian state had not explored the strategic purpose of exerting direct influence on Kızılbaş consciousness. However, during the 1970s and especially the early '80s, certain political institutions and factors acted along these lines. The Author shall not conceal the fact that, on orders by top Party officials, Party and Fatherland Front meetings in Kızılbaş communities emphasised the commonality between Christian and Alevi Bulgarians. This was far from unintentional. The idea that they were Bulgars converted to Islam was launched in the community. Even people of Alevi origin who were linked with the authorities in some way (local activists or representatives of the authorities) were harnessed for this propaganda.

Another chord was touched, too. At Party orders, and guided by centuries-long hatreds, ethnic Sunni Turks co-opted by the authorities prior to 1989 emphasised the unfriendliness between the two groups. Thus they indirectly spread the implicit idea of the similarity and even identity of Alevi and Bulgarian Christians. The Author shall not be judgemental of these people now because they were 'acting under orders' rather than inner conviction. It was also the manifestation of a certain conformism aimed at integration into the authorities, the state, and mainstream society. The integration of minority groups into society is absolutely necessary, but it should not be done on the expense of eliminating and banning cultures and religious traditions. Such integration, aimed at wholesale forcible assimilation of ethnic/religious communities is difficult to execute, and conceals perils for state and society (not to mention the fact that in this way inherent human rights are violated). In a sense, such a position can be considered a triumph of the one-sided national idea. The aim there was to build a unitary nation, the policy being guided by the definition of nationhood formulated in the Bulgarian arts between 1944 and 1989. The nation unified citizens on the basis of uniform language, religion, descent, consciousness, and culture. Interpreted thus, the national idea excludes all foreign ethnic groups in the state from the national organism.

Until the 1960s, the Kızılbaş in particular, and ethnic Turkish generally, enjoyed a favourable opportunity to express their cultural identity without fear, and without reason to suspect any particular end pursued by the state. In the 1950s and '60s many festivals were held where they presented musical and acting talents. The majority of them felt sincere goodwill feelings towards their country. They did not
doubt their origin, and they were not discriminated against on ethnic and religious grounds. In 1984, the tacit policy of eliminating ethnic differences during the 1970s and '80s grew into a setpiece state and political campaign against Bulgarian Turks. It is this policy of forcible integration that hit communities including the Alevi. I would say that the Revival Process could be viewed as a watershed in their self-consciousness and self-image.

It should be noted that the ethnogenesis of the Kızılbaş/Alevi also was (and remains) topical in Turkey, where there is (as seen recently) a considerable number of them. However, the problem there stands on a different plane – religion. Some authors (of literature) have also introduced an ethnic element associated with Turkish citizens of non-Turkish origin who profess heterodox Islam. Since we are considering the situation after 1878 for Bulgaria and after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire for Turkey, we shall point out some peculiarities in the relationship between the Alevi (Kızılbaş) and the Bulgarian, respectively Turkish, state.

Changed Balkan realities after 1878 impacted the consciousness of the sectarian population. Until then, though opposing the Ottoman authorities, they spoke the dominant language, thus enjoying both a protective barrier, and an opportunity for expression. Besides, though heterodox, they were still Muslims. In the eyes of the infidel Christians, they were identified with the state, religion and people that had put an end to their independent existence. Two alternatives were available to them: emigration to Ottoman Turkey, or staying in their native parts. A number of uncertainties underlay the latter. They were already isolated from the newly-established Bulgarian state because of language barriers, differences in religion, culture, and national psychology. Emigrations of Alevi people into Turkey must have been considerable, though it is difficult to estimate their number on the basis of Bulgarian statistics. However, this population in Bulgaria still numbered some 90,000 in 1991, while prior to 1989 it was much greater.

As religion is sidelined and nationality comes to the fore, interreligious relations become interethnic. Census data do not include the people's religious confession. Unorthodox Muslims describe themselves as Turkish and Muslim. Here is how relationships may be grouped:

1. With the state in which they live, and the prevailing nationality (Bulgaria and Bulgars);
2. With the minority group to which they belong ethnically, but differ from in terms of religion;
3. Stemming from the minorities policy of the state in which they live;
4. Within their own community.

The following pattern emerges:

- State - minority - miniminority (minority within the minority)
- Minority
- State

There is still another group of relationships:
1. With the state of which they had been subjects until recently and whose language they speak (Turkish);
2. With orthodox Muslims (Sunni Turks in Turkey);
3. With groups in Turkey identical to them (Kızılbaş, Bektasi, Alevi in general)

It is well known that some Alevi villages during this period were mixed. However, Sunni Turks, Kızılbaş, and Bulgars lived apart in separate neighbourhoods. It is notable that they succeeded in maintaining good relations. It is a fact that there was greater tolerance between sectarian Bulgars and sectarian Muslims, than that prevailing between Bulgarians and sectarian Turks. Sectarians are loyal subjects to the state they live in. In most cases their behaviour is conformist. However, this does not mean that they deem themselves to enjoy full rights, or that they feel a stake in that state. In a sense, they voluntarily distanced themselves from the state by preserving peaceful relations with it.

The world order imposed after 1945 put Turkey and Bulgaria into two blocs which were hostile in terms of policy, economics and military aims. Though on paper Bulgaria’s constitution granted freedom of faith and consciousness, atheist propaganda left its imprint. The profession of any religion was de facto proscribed and persecuted. A new system of moral values was imposed which tried to obliterate centuries-long religious traditions.

Though this policy may seem to have impacted the superficial layer of Alevi culture, it also left an imprint on its function. The result was that the generation born after 1944 has been alienated from the traditions of its ancestors. The youngest have no knowledge of tradition at all.

Relations between Turkey and Bulgaria after 1944 were not a model of good neighbourliness. Two items deserve highlighting:

1. Emigration to Turkey, renewed at intervals, also included the Kızılbaş. Religion was pushed to the background; the nexus with Turkey was language and the secret hope of greater prosperity. Despite everything, one would not be labelled a foreigner there.

2. Emigration involved Sunni Turks much more than sectarian Muslims. This was because it was hard for the latter to overcome an enmity frequently reaching hostility. Their ties with the land were strong. Apart from that, from the 1950s they received better educational and career opportunities if they scaled the language barrier. Becoming doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and agronomists, some of them became part of the Turkish-speaking elite within Bulgaria. It is notable that the striving to self-improvement was strongest among this part of the Turkish minority.

As already mentioned, during the 1970s and ’80s, Muslim sectarians found themselves in buffer position due to the thesis of their putative Bulgarian origins. This was accepted by the Alevi in different ways, but mainly with tacit disapproval. However, they remained loyal citizens. The isolated cases of reaction against the state were not approved, but were punished as an example to others. It is more diff-
difficult for an Alevi to oppose something whose rightness he doubts, because he is 'an alien.' The Alevi did not resort to sharp reactions even during the 'Revival Process,' though they opposed it inwardly. At the time I spoke with old people who said, "if the devlet wills it, it will happen regardless of whether you oppose it. You are only asking for trouble." We can see that the survival motive was stronger than the motive for resistance. They did not sympathise with the state, but empathised with it. It is another question whether these motives were sound or not. Stronger negative reactions on their part were provoked by the efforts of some authors who tried to represent them as a splinter descended from Christianity and Bulgarianness, ignoring their cultural, religious and ethnic identity. Presenting this theory, all authors emphasised the kızıl kaçını aspect, relating it to the Alevi themselves. The other assertion on which they based their theory, and which according to them was also intrinsically Alevi, was that they had come from the North before the Ottomans.

While we do encounter these assertions in the aforementioned works, it is very difficult to prove whether they are genuinely Alevi. It may well be that they are a myth entrenched in our literature. On the other hand, it is quite possible that such assertions were made. Not infrequently scholars used people close to the authorities as informants. The latter - depending on their interests or the situation - agreed with some official positions. Clearly this cannot be considered authentic information. As already mentioned, it is difficult to prove the truth or falsity of such assertions, arguments being available for both. The 'Revival Process' set aside the differences between Kızılbaş and Sunni Turks and catalysed ethnic consciousness. The Kızılbaş sought to shake-off its in-between status, striving to prove at all costs that it belonged to a larger, recognised community.

I spoke with Alevi people during this period and later, during the 'Big Excursion' and subsequent migration waves. By then the Alevi were against the stressing of differences between them and Sunni Turks, seeing in it direct pressure to change their ethnicity. In my contacts with the few remaining Kızılbaş families during my field studies in Krumovgrad and Momchilgrad in spring 1992, I found deep wounds from recent developments. They resisted any attempts to dig into their souls, consciousness, past and traditions.

Freedom after 1989 had its influence: many rituals and traditions were restored in the 1990s. In 1997 and 1999 I was on field studies near Razgrad and Silistra. I was impressed by the fact that middle-aged and elder Alevi spoke more freely about themselves, their rituals and religion. There was no longer a fear in them, but rather nostalgia for the passing of a whole world. They regretted that youth was interested in other things, had different attitudes, were obsessed by pragmatism, and failed to observe the custom and tradition of their ancestors.

* 'The Big Excursion': the flight of some 300,000 Bulgarian Turks to Turkey in spring 1989. The scale of emigration being such that it could not be overlooked officially, Communist leader Todor Jivkov claimed the émigrés were Bulgarian citizens going on holiday to Turkey.
Despite initial euphoria at the announcement of religious, ethnic and cultural liberties, the great and thorough economic crisis hit the maintenance of these traditions, especially in mixed areas. The performance of rites, customs and rituals was resumed in the years following 1990. Without questioning their Turkish ethnicity, the Alevi began again to emphasise the specific features and nature of their community and culture. This was facilitated by the analogous situation of the Kızılbaş/Alevi in Turkey. Much research has been published on this over the last twenty years. Alevi cultural organisations have appeared, discussions have flared in the media and on television. The principle baş vermek, sir vermeme (better your head than your secrets) is left in the past. The economic crisis in Bulgaria, however, is still the most important factor for the survival of this culture. Most young Alevis migrate to Turkey or Western Europe in the hope of prosperity. Many of those who stay in Bulgaria go to the cities in search of work. Custom and tradition are maintained by those who remain in the country, but is a weak shadow of the past. Tradition takes second place to daily efforts to make a living. The moral values that supported this community and its culture until recently are collapsing. Globalisation, the free market, opportunities for realisation on a larger scale, access to Turkish TV channels: all this has its effect. On one hand it fragments the community, and breaks the narrow frames of ethnic/religious consciousness and behaviour. In addressing the world, most Kızılbaş no longer look through the prism of traditional culture, but as a people belonging to our time. Life as shaped to age-old standards, and a way of thinking and behaviour ensuing from these standards, are broken. At the same time, among the elder generation and that of the 1930s and 40s, one can perceive a desire for relearning the past and returning to traditions.

Here the Author would like to present her position which ought to serve as a basis for considering the Alevi in general, and in the Bulgarians lands in particular. The Alevi religious system, as doctrine and practice, was formed in the course of many centuries and is closely connected with the internal development of Islam as a religion. In its essence it is a heterogenous social, religious, and ethnic phenomenon. The indisputable ideological and philosophical basis of this phenomenon is Islam. Its doctrine and practice differ from orthodox Islam and its position on a number of questions is contrary. However, it adheres to the two basic postulates: faith in the oneness and unity of Allah and the messenger mission of Muhammad. Alevism has genuinely absorbed a series of beliefs and ideas alien to Islam, which are characteristic of other religions and cults, as well as philosophic concepts rejected by orthodox Islam. However, we cannot consider its history and philosophy in isolation from Islam. In this sense, the religious identity of the Alevi is undoubtedly Islamic.

Many authors with insight into such communities in Bulgaria and Turkey, do not question the fact that they consider themselves Muslim. These authors regard Alevi Islam as an external layer over pre-Islamic pagan, Christian or other (e.g. Zoroastrian) belief. There is much truth in this. Extreme Shi'a trends have absorbed
many ideas alien to Islam. Heated disputes have flared in science over the prevalence of one or another influence. Considered as a departure from dogma throughout its existence, Alevism has opposed official power by vigorous socio-political action, and by propaganda of its religious dogma and socio-political views.

Both during and after the caliphate, nations ruled by the postulates of orthodox Islam, including the Ottoman Empire, persecuted the Alevi. The Author suspects that the term Alevism (Alevilik), spread across Turkey from the end of the 19th century and denoting communities identical to the one in Bulgaria, is not homogeneous. Contemporary Turkish authors include in it all groups professing unorthodox Islam: Shi'a sects and Sufi-mystical orders. The majority of these were close to (and even part of) the Islamic tradition of gulat, meaning they displayed a tendency to extreme Shi'a Islam. Both orthodox and moderate Shi'a theologians had a negative attitude to extreme Shi'a sects, opposing their formulations and ritual practices. They recommended that believers should root out these delusions which were far from the way of the Prophet and his successor Ali. Although the Alevi (Kizilbas) themselves stress their relationship with the family of the Prophet (i.e. with Shi'a Islam), the Shi'a mainstream regards them as Muslims diverting from the true Shi'a path.

The Shi'a have always been an apple of discord in Turko-Iranian relations. In Turkey, they have traditionally been seen as a threat because of their adherence to the official religion of Iran, Imam Shi'a. Because of centuries-long bans on free profession of their religion, the Shi'a learned to hide it. In order to make good in Turkey, they 'forgot' they were Alevi, and softened their differences with other Turks.

An especially strong urge in this direction was the policy of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). Post-Kemalist Revolution Turkey was built as a secular state. Two of the principles proclaimed by Atatürk have a major bearing on the issue under consideration. Secularisation separated temporal and religious authority, pushing religion aside from governance. 'Nationalism' had the aim of strengthening Turkish ethnicity, and constructing a united and strong Turkish nation. Within its framework, Atatürk banned religious orders. One of his aims was to raise national over religious consciousness. This policy suited the outlook of many progressive Alevis. With the overcoming of religious suppression, they began to feel part of the Turkish national organism. Their-national self-consciousness increased. For them it was more important to be Turks and speak Turkish, rather than to profess another trend of Islam. This situation, which lasted for years, is an example of inner psychological mimicry. In truth, the Alevi could not express their inner belonging and speak freely of their origins, for fear of public disapproval. They could find fulfilment solely if they did not demonstrate their inner nature. This lasted until the mid-1980s.

In the latter '80s, Alevi manifestations increased within the general context of changes in Turkey and global development of human rights. The Alevi began to maintain their positions as a group. Demands were made for elimination of psy-
chological, religious and socio-political discrimination. The basic demand was to enjoy the same rights while expressing their identity, as they had while concealing it. This proved far from dangerous or difficult. The Turkish media widely discusses matters of Islamic history, the rôle of Sufi orders in Turkish history, the nature and philosophy of Alevism, the fulfilment of Alevi people in national social, economic and cultural life. All discussions and publications are unanimous that the Alevi are not different from other Turks in terms of origin, as opposed to their treatment in Ottoman times. Ethnically they consider themselves Turks, but they insist on respect for their religious and cultural differences. To the accusations of part of the political elite that they are 'fifth-columnists' of Shi'a Iran in Turkey, Alevi authors point out the differences between Iranian Shi'a Islam Turkic (or Turkish) Alevism, flatly repudiating all charges. Of course, one cannot place everybody under a common denominator. Probably there are Alevis sympathetic to the system in Iran. In addition, there are contradictions within the Alevi themselves. While most of them (usually the better educated) are secularly disposed and believe in the modern values of democracy and civil society, there are some who support government to Islamic principles.

There are differences between Iranian Shi'a Islam and Turkish Alevi Islam, and some authors (wishing to guard against accusations) deny any intrinsic link with Shi'a Islam. While writers use the term 'Alevism,' Turkish scholars who are graduates of Western universities, use the term ‘heterodox Islam.’ The common thing between authors of Kızılbaş descent writing on Alevism, Bektaşism, and the Kızılbaş persuasion, is that emphasise the following in their doctrine: love for the Prophet's family (Ehlibeyc), love for Ali, the relationship with the Twelve Imams, the cult to Allah-Muhammad-Ali (Teslis), and cults to various religious leaders of whom most popular is Haci Bektaş Veli.

Bulgarian Alevi who emigrated to Turkey during the periodic migration waves, as well as most local Alevi, are secular in disposition. Without being untrue to their cultural identity, and without undermining their traditional Muslim unorthodox belonging, they strive to a European model of civic behaviour, personal expression, and the relationship between the sexes. Bulgarian Alevi emigrants rank among the most prosperous in terms career and lifestyle in Turkey. The traditional attitude to women, to their rôle and place in the group within the Alevi community is very important in this respect. This attitude is inherited from the Turkic pagan traditions and contradicts the orthodox Islamic views. Shiism shows more respect to women than Sunnism. A starting point in this respect is the reverence for Fatima and the place she is attributed in Shiism.

Yet, the educated part of Turkish Alevi women dislike traditional Islamic attire, and Alevi women from Bulgaria dislike it all the more. Their behaviour is an expression of secularism resulting from complex stages of modernisation. Though Islam did not play almost any rôle in this, it had an influence on the formation of their traditional system of moral values.

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Traditional mistrust in Sunni Turks seems to be overcome among Alevi who have reached the higher echelons of Turkish public institutions. They give little thought to their cultural and religious background, seeing themselves as an integral part of the state. This holds true mostly for Alevi immigrants from the Balkans. Because of the winding path of their fate, they overcome prejudices more easily. Many share in conversation: “When we came to Turkey, all was finished with the Kızılbaşlık.” The centuries-long hostility and malevolence between Sunni and Alevi Turks are still encountered in provincial communities where modern times have not yet left an imprint.

The psychology and attitudes of the Turkish Alevis are fed back into Bulgaria, since the Alevi maintain connections through different channels (except for periods when there were bans on travel between the two countries). A benefit of these connections is that much literature on Alevi matters has reached Bulgaria. Bulgarian Alevis learn new things about themselves, and their forgotten tradition and ritual.

What is the secret of preserving Alevi culture today? Alevi presence in a foreign linguistic and religious environment, and the confessional and cultural distinctions from the prevalent environment, have helped them survive. The takiiya principle, which requires that faith be prudently concealed, has played an extremely important role here.

In connection with theories on Alevi origin in Bulgarian literature, it was stated above that a series of authors speak of legends heard by themselves about their settlement into Bulgaria. In addition to the legends already related, another (shared by informants) was that their ancestors had come from Khurasan. The assertion appears grounded since Khurasan is the cradle of many sectarian trends and the Sufi-mystical school which departed from orthodox Islam. Legends have it that all Turkic mystics, especially those respected in Bektashism, had come from Khurasan. However, it would be incorrect to maintain that they had arrived directly from there. Much earlier (prior to the 10th and 13th Centuries), many Turkic tribes professing unorthodox Islam settled in Asia Minor, in today’s South-Eastern Anatolia, near the Caspian. The same holds true of the majority of Turkic mystics that came from Central Asia. The memory of Khurasan seems to have survived in the popular memory some seven, eight or nine centuries after the event. In this sense, the Khurasan legend is incorrect in terms of time, but not in terms of content.

Another version among the Kızılbaş in some Alevi villages is that they arrived from Yozgat and Konya. In the village of Mudrevo, old Kızılbaş people told me, “we are Turkmens” [biz Türkmeniz]. They are no longer alive today and nothing more can be learned. But there are grounds leading us to the same hypothesis. 

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The Author shall consider the problem of Alevi religious identity elsewhere. Here she shall touch upon brief historical information having direct relation to the theme considered.

If we consider events in their historical continuity, we should go back to spread of Islam among the Turkmens. Despite the assertion imposed in political studies that the Turkmens were supporters of the strict and aggressive Sunni faith, not all of them accepted this form of Islam. Paganism was popular among Turkmens in Central Asia prior to Islam, as were other faiths: Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, and even Christianity. Popular among ordinary folk, especially in the country, were Shi'a Islam along with orthodox Islam. Islamic proselytising was mainly the work of Muslim mystics: dervišes and şeyh ôs. Their mission was successful in the steppes. It is characteristic that the cult to Muslim mystics dovetailed with nomadic tradition. Manicheanism was closely linked with today's Turkestan,* while the teachings of Mazdak were topical in the territories of today's Iran at the end of the 5th Century. Manichean and Mazdak ideas influenced the teachings of Muslim Shi'a sects. Thus, it is possible for some Turkic sectarians to have professed Manicheanism, Mazdakism or Zoroastrianism before Islam. Many Turkmens who had been Pagans brought their traditions into the new religion.

Muslim sectarian movements can be included into the classification of 'popular Islam' because their followers were the common people ranking low in social hierarchies, uneducated, closely connected with traditional culture and mores. This holds true for the so-called Kızılbaşlık. It is a form of popular Islam. A series of Turkish authors point out that this kind of Islam has preserved most Turkic beliefs. The Kızılbaş have kept their original culture under the shell of Islam more than other Turkic peoples. As a result of my prolonged studies I found that 'Turkmens' meant predominantly Turkic tribes that had adopted Shi'i Islam. This can be seen even in early Ottoman chroniclers such as Asakpasazade and Mehmed Nesri. Most Turkic tribes were still nomadic in the 16th Century, and had retained characteristically nomadic ways and economic modes. In contemporary Turkey one could come across such groups until recently. The Çepni and Tahtaci tribes lived a semi-nomadic life. Çepni [pocket] may be found in the dictionary of Mahmud al-Kasgari while the Tahtaci are considered a branch of the ancient tribe of the Ağaçlırs, also mentioned in the above work.

The Turkmens preserved their tribal system for a long time and opposed the spread of fundamentalism. After settling in Khurasan and elsewhere in Iran, some Turkmens mixed with local peoples. Extreme Shi'a beliefs spread among them. At the same time, the mass spread of Sufism in the Muslim world during the 12th and 13th centuries made many of these tribes followers of Sufi-mystical orders influenced by extreme Sufism. However, it is difficult to distinguish between moderate and extreme Sufism and the doctrine of these groups became a crossover of ideas from both trends.

* The area of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tadjikstan, Kirghistan, and Uzbekistan. Translator.
Today’s Azerbaijan, parts of Iran, and Asia Minor became centres of Kızılbaşlık. We have to bear in mind that what we call Kızılbaşlık had been neither uniform nor homogeneous. It was rather a movement representing a mixture of extreme Shi’a and Sufi-mystical ideas. We should not forget that the Shi’ites were an ideological casing of multiple social movements, both urban and rural. A characteristic of the popular movements during the 14th to the 16th century was their development under the cover of Shi’a Islam and Sufism. Poor status justified the ideological opposition against dominant Sunnism. The basic demand of the protesters went back to the principles of original Islam, represented as an ideal. These movements had all elements characteristic of other social uprisings: demands for free food, equal distribution of food and clothing, identical clothes for all. These demands were not invented anew: they also featured in the ideology and practice of early Christianity, and of a number of Christian sects.

The ideological programme considered here had four sources:

1. The social ideas of the Mazdakids (5th - 6th Century) and their successors, the Huramites (8th - 9th Century) who still have followers in Iran;
2. The social utopia of the Qaramites;
3. The Shi’a expectation of the ‘advent’ of the Imam Mahdi, connected with the establishment of a Kingdom of Justice and Equality;
4. The Sufi ascetic condemnation of riches and wealth, including the cult of poverty.

Important (because of its political aftermath) among the many Shi’a movements was that of the Safavid-Kızılbaş. Since Kızılbaş identity is closely associated with the Safavids, we should highlight some aspects of the issue. There are different assumptions regarding the origin of the Safavid Seyhs’ dynasty. Having attained power, the Safavids began arguing that they were of Seyid (i.e., Arab) descent. According to genealogy, Seyh Safi ad-Din was a descendant of the 21st generation of the Seventh Shi’a Imam, Musa al-Qazem. According to researchers of Safavid history, this assertion was a late myth, appearing in the mid-15th century. Iranian author Ahmed Kesravi launches the hypothesis that the Safavids were of Kurdish origin but were gradually Turkicised. Turkish historian Zeki Velidi Togan accepts this assumption absolutely. However, it should be stressed that there is no reliable evidence to back it. Arab and Persian authors of this and earlier periods call all nomad and semi-nomad tribes ‘Kurds.’ Azerbaijani historians claim that the Safavids were of Azeri origins and spoke Azerbaijani.

A number of studies on the Safavids propound the opinion of their Turkic descent. It is known that a Turkic tongue was spoken around the Seyhs, and the poetry of Sah Ismayil backs this. It is known that the Safavids lived in Erdebil, and even if they were of some other origin, they were Turkicised.

The derviş environment where the order was established was initially connected with the popular movements. Even a quick glance at Kızılbaş names in Bulgaria proves this: there are still Kızılbaş/Alevi there who identify themselves as ‘babay.’ Such are the Kızılbaş from the villages of Mudrevo, some of those in
Sevar, Preslavci, Ostrovo, Bradvari, Chernik, and Vodno in North Eastern Bulgaria, and in some villages in Southern Bulgaria. No doubt their ancestors were connected with the political and social movement of the Babay in 1239-40 in Asia Minor which later became predominantly religious. Seyh Safi al-din Ishaq Erdebili (1252-1334) had many disciples among rural communities in, inter alia, Erdebil, Halhal, Piskin, Mugan, Talus, and Maraga. The disciples (mürid) of the Seyh included craftsmen (shawl weavers, jewellers, cloggers, bakers, carriers, saddlers, blacksmiths, and diggers). The Seyh was also supported by many distinguished people (kubara) and tribes in Rum (Asia Minor). The majority of Turkic tribes professing extreme Shi’a beliefs felt kinship with the Safavids. Sah Ismayil even sent his halifets (messengers) among them and had mürids there.

On the other hand, researchers of Alevitism in Turkey encounter another problem. Many authors who have done fieldwork there qualify some Kurdish tribes in Eastern Turkey, as well as in Iraq, Iran, in the Soviet Union, as "Kızılbaş". Such is the Zaza community living predominantly in the region of Dersim (modern Tunceli, Turkey), the territory between Erzincan to the north and the river Murad Su to the south as well as in the westernmost part of Upper Armenia. Apart from these areas Zaza live also in Bingöl, Muş, Bitlis, around Diyarbakir, Siverek and other territories in Asia Minor. In the vernacular and in literature they are called Kurd Zaza and they are always distinguished from the rest of the Kurds. It is considered that Zaza came to settle in these lands from Deylem (a high mountainous area in Gilan, south of the Caspian Sea, on the territory of Iran) during the 10th-12th centuries. We should point out that in the territories of Gilan and Deylem the moderate and the extreme Shi’a beliefs were quite strong and became the justification (motivation) of a series of popular movements. Those aware of the Zaza life note that they are a tribe of shepherds and cattle-breeders professing a form of an extreme Shi’ism. Some authors think that the region of Zaza contains quite few elements of local and Christian beliefs. In a number of publications where they are only mentioned or dwelt upon in more detail they are called "Kızılbaş". However this is not correct since the notion of "Kızılbaş" involves the ethnic element—the Turkic, along with the religious. Besides, the Zaza are also called "rafi”, "zindik". These two names are given to them by the official Caliphate and later, by the Ottoman bureaucracy, and are an indicator of how they have been regarded by the Sunni Orthodoxy. Indeed, the same names have been applied to the Kızılbaş Turks as well. As with other moderate and extreme Shi’a Zaza are also named Alevi, and along with this—Kurd which bears an ethnic meaning.

Tribes in eastern Anatolia speaking the Kormanço dialect are also called Alevi-Kızılbaş. In terms of the confession, we may say the same thing about them as about the Zaza. Despite some linguistic specifics which separate them from the rest

of the Kurds, recently they have begun to consider themselves part of the Kurdish ethnos. Their attitude to Turks, for ethnic as well as religious reasons, is negative. Due to the persecutions they had been subjected to in Ottoman times psychologically they do not consider themselves related to the Turkish state. They have always considered themselves different from the Turks.

Undoubtedly, however, it is indisputable that many Kurds identify themselves as Kızılbaş. This leads to the idea that in the 14th and 15th centuries some Iranian and Kurdish tribes, along with the Turkish became followers of the Safavids. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian Turkologist Gordlevskiy wrote that in Sivas he met the bey of the Kurdish tribe of the Koçgiri who profess the Kızılbaş faith. The Alevi religious doctrine was also professed by the Kormanço Kurds. We think that these tribes might have not been connected politically with the Safevids, but due to the identical religious doctrine may have been called "Kızılbaş". Turkish authors, too, raise the issue of the ethnic background of the Zaza and Kormanço, and their approach very much reminds of that of the above-cited Bulgarian authors about the Alevi.

Trades speaking the Kormanço and Zaza dialects, and living in Eastern Anatolia were also Alevi/Kızılbaş. The Alevi who live mainly in the mountains of Dersim, Gürün, Maraş, and Akdağaç, received the names Lazalbaş, Rafuz, Zandak, and Kürd. Because of Ottoman persecution, they did not feel part of the state, regarding themselves different from the Turks.

According to Turkish researchers, Turkmen tribes passed through Anatolia in the 9th century, settling in the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris. After persecution by Selim I, they settled in precipitous mountains, gradually losing their Turvic nature. Besım Atalay asserts that they remained under the Parsi linguistic influence. For this reason their language, Zaza, was rather mixed. These Kızılbaş people populated a wide area: from Hanas, Varto, Kişi, Çardaklı Boğaz, Refahiye, Kuruçay, and Koçgiri, to Toros, and Hafik; from the mountains of Kangal, Divriği, and Arapkir on the right bank of the Euphrates, to west of Malatya, Elbistan, Bürün, in the lowlands east of Kayseri, in the regions of Akdağmadeni, Yozgat, and Kırşehir. These tribes considered themselves Alevi. That means that they identified themselves in terms of religion only, not ethnicity. Although their languages, Kormanço and Zaza contain much Farsi and are considered Kurdish, Turkish authors maintain they were Turkmenes until the late 16th Century. This is seen from their names, place names, and customs. By the close of the 19th century and in the 20th century, Kormanço and Zaza ethnic consciousness was already Kurdish. In Turkey this is beginning to acquire political dimensions. Some politicians and authors are of the opinion that manifestations of Alevism there are instigated by alien forces: the Kurds and Iran. They view such manifestations as an aspect of the Kurdish problem in Turkey. However, this lies aside of the present topic and the

Author proposes not to dwell on it. Most researchers classify the followers of the Ahl-i Haqq sect among the Kızılbaș-Alevi. The ethniconfessional Kurdish community of the “Ahl-i Haqq” is scattered in Iranian and Iraqi territories, primarily in the border area of Hauraman. Besides some of its adepts live in Shiraz, in the mountains of Damand, in Kazvin and in Azerbaijan. In Iraq the “people of the truth” (of God) inhabit the province of Süleymaniye. Authors from the milieu of the sectarians themselves think that it is wrong to identify them with the Kızılbaș-Alevi in Turkey. Despite the religious similarities and common sympathy these communities differ in a number of beliefs, rituals and in their religious organization. Ahl-i Haqq speak the Kurdish dialect “gorani”, while among the non-believers they are known as “Ali-İlahi”. The latter is related to their belief that Ali is the incarnation of Allah which orthodox theologians consider a heresy and call “hulul”. For this reason this sect is regarded as a branch of the extreme Shiism. Yet the name “Ahl-i Haqq” contains in itself some imprecision as according to them Ali is the first but not the unique incarnation of God.

It should be noted that as regard the basic religious dogmas the doctrine of the sect of the Ahl-i Haqq and that of the Kızılbaș Turks are practically identical. The religious doctrine of the Ahl-i Haqq is a combination of a number of Shi’a postulates and ideas of the extreme pantheist Sufism, a feature that we see also with the Kızılbaș in Bulgaria and Turkey.

These short notes make it clear that the Shi’a trends – the moderate as well as the extreme, and the ideas of the extreme Sufism find adherents among various ethnic groups in Islamic Asia.

By the time the Ottoman sultans forcibly settled the compact masses of Turkish population with such beliefs in the Balkans they had already long had a well-shaped religious doctrine and social ideology. Eventual Balkan influences did not touch upon their essence and content but reflected rather on minor and external elements of the cult.

Gordlevskiy offers yet another idea on Kızılbaș ethnogenesis. Studying the villages around Sivas, Dersim and Tokat, he opines that the Kızılbaș had mixed with Armenian sectarians. The Armenians living with the Kızılbaș were convinced that they Christian fellow Armenians forced to adopt Islam. The same author points out that a number of Armenian customs may be observed among the Kızılbaș in Sivas. We can see that owing to similarities with Christianity, Kızılbaș association with converts is not just a Bulgarian phenomenon. The leaning of the Kızılbaș to Christianity only strengthened the Armenian assumptions regarding their origin. Informants of Gordlevskiy who lived among the Kızılbaș and knew their life and psychology intimately concluded that they were ‘secret Christians.’ However, the researcher himself noted (not without reason) that Armenians have a propensity to interpret plain facts any way they wish.

85 Rashid, R. S. “Lyudi istiniy” (Ahl-i Haqq). - In: Traditioone miroyavzrenie u narodov Peredney Azii, s. 111. (Rashid, R. S.: “The People of Truth” (Ahl-i Haqq) - In: Traditional worldviews of the peoples in the Near East, p. 111).
The picture in Turkey and Bulgaria shows that the Kızılbaş have maintained friendliness with Christians, making Christians (Armenians, Armenian sectarians, Christian or Bogomil Bulgars) take them for converts to Islam.

The formulation of the Russian Orientalist about the origin of the Kızılbaş is: "one thing is certain: the Kızılbaş, descendants of Shi'a Turks, have absorbed elements of Christian (Armenian Gregorian) and older beliefs from Asia Minor." Gordlevskiy summarises his studies, arriving at the conclusion that Islam occupies only the surface of a complex view of life. There are old beliefs preserved in depth, Iranian or local to Asia Minor, in which there are even traces of Aryan ('Iranian') culture.

Asia Minor has been influenced by Persia for a long time. Bearers of such influences were even the Turkmen who flooded into Asia Minor in the 11th Century. They experienced Iranian culture while still in Central Asia, and adopted some religious ideas and customs originating in Persia. However, the extent to which Persian culture impacted Muslim sectarianism should not be overestimated. Essentially, the Turkic tribes were in opposition to Sunni Islam, and preserved their paganism.

Shi'a ideas were overlaid over this paganism. Pre-Christian and Christian beliefs in Asia Minor were also possible influences. This provides the reason for Gordlevskiy's conclusion that the nebulous term 'Kızılbaş' comprises an intricate ethnographic and religious knot. To clarify the exact place of each component, we have to study in detail the ideological and religious history of Central Asia, Iran, Asia Minor, and the Balkans.

The study of the Kızılbaş ought to focus within the following frames of reference:

1. It ought to be placed in close connection with the development of Islam as a religion, with the schism within it, with the development of trends, and the struggles between them;
2. It ought to consider the Kızılbaş within the general context of the spread of Islam among Turkmen, and the study of how Iranian culture influenced a number of Turkic tribes by virtue of their geographic proximity. It should study which Persian traditions influenced the development of Shi'a Islam, and what forms of Shi'a Islam gained ground among the Turkmens;
3. It ought to attempt an explanation as to why the Kızılbaş are close to the extremes of Shi'a Islam, while taking into consideration the fact that in terms of doctrine they belong among the moderate Shi'a: the Imam trend. It ought to discover the ideological sources nourishing this;
4. It ought to assess the position of Sufism in Alevi faith and moral/ethical doctrine;
5. It ought to study doctrinal ideas and traditions common with Christianity and various Christian sects;

6. It ought to study the ethnic and religious history of regions with concentrated Kızılbaş populations;

7. It ought to make a comparative analysis with other ethnic groups with similar religious doctrine bearing in mind the striving of this population to identify their origin in accordance with the ruling nationality.

Only research along these lines would make it possible to give a proper answer to the issue of Alevi ethnic and religious identity in general, and of the Alevi in Bulgaria in particular.

The observations on the contradictory and complicated fate of the Alevi in Bulgaria and of the homogeneous populations in Turkey, Macedonia, Iran, as well as of emigrants to Western Europe, Canada, and the USA, could be broadened. Here the Author presents but a modicum of her studies and impressions. A number of the problems posed could represent separate subjects for discussion and publication.

Deliorman'ın kalbindeki Türbe: Demir Baba
(Fotoğraf: Ayhan Aydin 2001)

Bulgaristan Deliorman Alevi-Bektaşi kadınları yerel giysileri ile.
(Fotoğraf: Ayhan Aydin 2001)