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‘Dersim and Dalahu: Some Reflections on Kurdish Alevism and the Ahl-i Haqq religion’

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## Dersim and Dalahu: Some Reflections on Kurdish Alevism and the Ahl-i Haqq religion

Martin van BRUINESSEN\*

The Ahl-i Haqq of the Kermanshah region in Iran and of Iraqi Kurdistan (where they are known as Kâkâ'î) are aware of the existence of Alevism and Bektashis in Turkey and are convinced that their religious traditions are closely related. Legends about Haji Bektash have been incorporated into Ahl-i Haqq religious lore; he is generally declared to be an incarnation of one of the highest spiritual beings in the Ahl-i Haqq pantheon. Whereas the Ahl-i Haqq of Kermanshah only refer to Haji Bektash, Kaka'i sources, moreover, mention various other Bektashi saints too as human manifestations of spirits that were earlier embodied in Ahl-i Haqq saints.<sup>1</sup> Religious intellectuals of the region have shown an interest in comparing Ahl-i Haqq and Alevi texts in search of a common core of Truth.<sup>2</sup>

Among the Kurdish Alevism, at least in intellectual circles, there is also an awareness of the Ahl-i Haqq and a fascination with certain similarities between the myths and rituals of both religious communities. In the past decades, many Alevi intellectuals have begun to question the dominant claim that Alevism has its roots in Central Asian Turkish religion ('shamanism') and have pointed at elements that connect it with Iranian religions such as Zoroastrianism, and more specifically with Yezidi and Ahl-i Haqq traditions.<sup>3</sup> Kurdish nationalist authors at times replaced the claim of predominantly Turkish origins of Alevism with a similarly dogmatic insistence on the Iranian background for the Alevism of Eastern Turkey;<sup>4</sup> others made a more sophisticated argument that included

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<sup>1</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, 'When Haji Bektash still bore the name of Sultan Sahak. Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district', in: Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (ed.), *Bektachiyya: études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, Istanbul: Éditions Isis, 1995, pp. 117-38; idem, 'Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib and various avatars of a running wall', *Turcica XXI-XXIII* (1991), 55-69.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Muhammad `Alî Sultânî, *Darûnmâyahâ-yi mushtarak dar Saranjâm, Velâyatnâme, Buyûrûq*, Tehran: Sahâ, 1390/2001.

<sup>3</sup> Journals such as *Berhem* (published in Sweden in 1988-93), *Ware* (Germany, 1992-2003) and *Munzur* (Ankara, since 2000) have stimulated an interest in documenting the oral traditions of the Kurdish Alevism, and several of the contributing authors were explicitly interested in the similarities of the recorded narratives with those of Iranian origin. The publishing house Kalan in Ankara has since 1999 published numerous books on Dersim, many of them based on interviews with old men and women known as repositories of oral tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Cemşid Bender, *Kürt uygarlığında Alevilik*, Istanbul: Kaynak yayınları, 1991; Ethem Xemgin, *Aleviliğin kökenindeki Mazda inancı ve Zerdüşî öğretisi*, Istanbul: Berfin Yayınları, 1995.

Iranian religious ideas besides numerous other influences that went into the making of contemporary Alevism.<sup>5</sup>

When these authors claim a connection of Kurdish Alevism with the Ahl-i Haqq, they appear to do so exclusively on the basis of their reading of academic studies of the latter, not on any social memory of earlier connections. The work of Minorsky and Ivanow does in fact highlight many aspects of the Ahl-i Haqq tradition that must be recognizable to Alevi. Both authors explicitly point at common features shared by Ahl-i Haqq and Alevism, as do later scholars such as Kreyenbroek and myself.<sup>6</sup>

The apparent absence of a social memory of earlier connections between the two communities is in fact surprising, for only a century ago there appear to have been direct contacts. The American missionary Stephen van Rensselaer Trowbridge, who was based at Ayntab (Antep, Gaziantep) from 1906 to 1911 and was in contact with Alevi there, reports that these Alevi recognized a family of Ahl-i Haqq sayyids as their chief religious authorities. In fact he appears to claim that Alevi communities all over Anatolia and Syria accepted these sayyids as their spiritual leaders:

'The Geographical Centre of [the Alevi] religion is in the town of Kirind, Kermanshah province, Persia. Four of Ali's male descendants now reside in Kirind. They are by name, Seyyid Berake, Seyyid Rustem, Seyyid Essed Ullah, Seyyid Farraj Ullah. Seyyid is correctly said only of Ali's descendants. These men send representatives throughout Asia Minor and northern Syria for preaching and for the moral training of their followers.'<sup>7</sup>

Trowbridge has to be taken seriously as a source; his article is one of the best early reports on Alevi belief and practice. Sayyid Birâka and his grandson Sayyid Rustam were the most powerful and influential Ahl-i Haqq leaders in their day. Their descendant, Sayyid Nasreddîn, is the much-respected religious leader of the Ahl-i Haqq of Dâlâhû, the Gûrân

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Bilal Aksoy, 'Tunceli bölgesinde dinsel değerlendirme', in: Nejat Birdoğan (ed.), *Anadolu Aleviliği'nde yol ayrımı*, İstanbul: Mozaik Yayınları, 1995, pp. 335-51.

<sup>6</sup> Minorsky's article 'Ahl-i Hakk' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* has been easily accessible; his other work, like that of Ivanow, became known indirectly through the quotations in later work, including Philip Kreyenbroek, 'Religion and religions in Kurdistan', in: Philip Kreyenbroek and Christine Allison (eds), *Kurdish culture and identity*, London: Zed Books, 1996, pp. 85-110, and my own *Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik: Etnik ve dinsel kimlik mücadeleleri*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2000. A book that has been especially influential in this respect is Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A concise handbook*, Washington, Philadelphia and London: Crane Russak, 1992, which was translated into Turkish in 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen van Rensselaer Trowbridge, 'The Alevi, or Deifiers of Ali', *Harvard Theological Review* 2, no.3 (1909), 340-53. The quoted passage is at pp. 342-3.

region to the West of Kermanshah. (I have not been able to identify the sayyids Asadullâh and Farajullâh.)

In this paper in honour of Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, I shall begin with a few brief observations on similarities and differences between Dersim and Dalahu and then focus especially on the role of certain *ocak* (lineages of hereditary religious specialists) among the Alevis of Dersim and the Ahl-i Haqq of Dalahu. The case of the Khâmûshî *khândân* or *ôjâgh* (*ocak*), to which Sayyid Birâka and his family belong, will prove to be especially interesting.

### *Similarities*

My familiarity with the Ahl-i Haqq of Dalahu began during two stays, of about ten days each, in 1976. During the second of these stays, Sayyid Nasreddîn invited me to stay in his house and gave the resident *kalâm-khwân*, the experts of the sacred texts (*kalâm*), permission to freely answer all my questions concerning religious matters. It was here that I first heard Ahl-i Haqq narratives about Haji Bektash and discovered that educated Ahl-i Haqq believed that the Anatolian Alevis held the same or very similar religious ideas as they did themselves. I also noticed that my informants easily incorporated matters that they read in books about other religions into their own cosmology and found confirmation of their own religious ideas in the existence of similar ones elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

My first encounter with the religious universe of Dersim was through reading travel reports,<sup>9</sup> a few short visits in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the first academic studies on the subject,<sup>10</sup> and meetings with intellectuals of Dersimi background. I was almost immediately struck by a number of remarkable similarities such as identical myths (although the protagonists have different names in both regions),<sup>11</sup> belief in human incarnation of God and other spiritual entities in human beings, forms of nature worship based on the belief that spiritual beings can be incarnated

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<sup>8</sup> Bruinessen, 'When Haji Bektash'; Martin van Bruinessen, 'Veneration of Satan among the Ahl-e Haqq of the Gûrân region', *Fritillaria Kurdica, Bulletin of Kurdish Studies* (Krakow) No. 3-4 (2014), 6-41 (available online at: [http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en\\_fritillaria-kurdica-bulletin-of-kurdish-studies.-no.-3-4,78](http://www.kurdishstudies.pl/?en_fritillaria-kurdica-bulletin-of-kurdish-studies.-no.-3-4,78)).

<sup>9</sup> Especially L. Molyneux-Seel, 'Journey into Dersim', *Geographical Journal* 44(1) (1914), 49-68; Melville Chater, 'The Kizilbash clans of Kurdistan', *National Geographic Magazine* 54 (1928), 485-504; Andranig, *Tersim*, Tiflis, 1900 (recently translated into Turkish: Antranik, *Dersim seyahat-namesi*, Istanbul: Aras, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> S. Öztürk, 'Tunceli'de Alevilik', mezuniyet tezi, I.Ü. Ed.Fak.Sosyoloji bölümü, Istanbul, 1972; Peter Bumke, 'Kizilbas-Kurden in Dersim (Tunceli, Türkei). Marginalität und Häresie', *Anthropos* 74 (1979), 530-48.

<sup>11</sup> For one example of a myth occurring not only in these two communities but among heterodox groups from South Asia to the Balkans, see Bruinessen, 'Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib.'

in human beings as well as trees, springs, mountains and rocks and other objects, and rejection of the idea that Satan represents the evil principle.<sup>12</sup>

The periodical ritual meetings are known by the same name in both communities (*ayin-i cem* and *jam*, respectively; written without *`ayn* in the Arabic alphabet and allegedly derived from the name of the legendary Persian king Jamshîd than the Arabic word for gathering). In both communities, the recitation of sacred poetry, accompanied by a small long-necked lute (*tambur*, *temur*, *tomir*) is an important element of the *cem/jam*.<sup>13</sup> The *tambur* is itself a sacred instrument and it is kissed before and after playing. The consecration and consumption of food (*lokma*, *ni-yaz*) is another important element of the ritual meeting in both communities. Both in Dersim and among the Ahl-i Haqq the origin of the *cem/jam* is explained by narratives of a primordial meeting of forty dervishes (*kırklar*, *chil tan*).<sup>14</sup>

The meetings can only be held in the presence of, and have to be led by, a hereditary religious specialist (*dede* or *sayyid*) belonging to a known and named lineage (*ocak*, *khândân*) claiming descent from the Prophet. Every adult person has to be connected with a sayyid who is his *pîr* and with a second person, from another sacred lineage, who acts as his 'guide' (*rayber*, *rehber* or *delîl*). In Dersim, one should, at least in theory, be connected to yet a third spiritual preceptor whose status is even above that of the *pîr*, called *murşid*. Since the members of the holy lineages should also have their *rayper*, *pîr* and *murşid*, this has led to a complex stratification among these lineages, in which some act as *pîr* to one other lineage and as disciples (*talip*, *tolîw*) to another.<sup>15</sup>

Both communities also believe in divine incarnation in human beings, `Ali being the major incarnation recognized by both. The Ahl-i Haqq have, however, a considerably more developed belief system concerning divine incarnation than the Alevis. God and seven high spiritual beings

<sup>12</sup> Bruinessen, 'Veneration of Satan.'

<sup>13</sup> On the Ahl-i Haqq *tambur*, see Partow Hooshmandrad, 'Performing the belief: Sacred musical practice of the Kurdish Ahl-i Haqq of Guran', Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2004; Navid Fozi, 'The hallowed summoning of tradition: body techniques in construction of the sacred *tanbur* of Western Iran', *Anthropological Quarterly* 80(1) (2007), 173-205. In Turkish literature, the instrument used in the *cem* is commonly referred to as *bağlama*, but Dersimi musicians are increasingly using the term *temmur* or *tomir*, claiming that this is the original name (cf. Munzur Çem, *Dêrsim merkezli Kürt Aleviliği*, Istanbul: Vate, 2009, p. 35).

<sup>14</sup> Variants of the narrative, in which the Prophet Muhammad seeks in vain to be admitted to the gathering until he shows humility, are reported by V. Ivanow from Iran (though not from the Guran region) in *The truth-worshippers of Kurdistan*, Leiden: Brill, 1953. The same narrative was recorded by Metin Kahraman in an interview with the aged Sayyid Suleyman Şahin of the Baba Mansur *ocak*.

<sup>15</sup> Erdal Gezik, 'Rayberler, pırlar ve mürşidler (Alevi ocak örgütlenmesine dair saptamalar ve sorular)', in: Erdal Gezik and Mesut Özcan (eds), *Alevi ocakları ve örgütlenmeleri*. 1. kitap, Ankara: Kalan, 2013, pp. 11-77.

(*haft tan*) are believed to have revealed themselves in human form in various historical periods. Sacred history is cyclical; important events repeat themselves in each cycle, and the consecutive human incarnations of the same spirit are considered as essentially identical. The Iranian concept of seven spiritual beings manifesting themselves in the world together, which the Ahl-i Haqq and Yezidis have in common with Zoroastrianism and other Iranian religions, is not known among the Dersim Alevis. Other divine incarnations besides `Ali (e.g., Shâh Ismâ`il), as well as the presence of other spiritual forces that were once incarnate in human form are recognized by the Alevis of Dersim (e.g. Duzgin Bava and Avdil Mursa,<sup>16</sup> who command entire armies of benign and dangerous spirits), but sacred history is not conceived as a series of cycles of such incarnations.<sup>17</sup>

The Ahl-i Haqq also believe in the reincarnation of ordinary human souls (called *dûnadûn*, 'exchanging one gown for another'). There are indications that Dersimis in the past also believed in reincarnation – the late 19th-century Armenian traveller Andranig recorded even stories of reincarnation in animal form – but currently there is little memory of such beliefs, and at least one young Dersimi researcher in fact insists strongly on the absence of belief in reincarnation.<sup>18</sup>

#### *The Sacred Lineages of the Ahl-i Haqq*

There is only a limited number of sayyid families (*khândân* or *ôjâgh*), all of which trace their ancestry to early Ahl-i Haqq saints, who were themselves the embodiments of spiritual beings belonging to one of the main heptads in the Ahl-i Haqq pantheon. The most extensive list gives the names of eleven such *khândân*, six of which descend from persons in

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<sup>16</sup> On Duzgin Bava and Avdil Mursa (Düzgün Baba and Abdal Musa) as opposed spiritual forces, see: Erdal Gezik and Hüseyin Çakmak, *Raa Haqi - Riya Haqi: Dersim Aleviliği inanç terimleri sözlüğü*, Ankara: Kalan, 2010, pp. 23-4, 70-3; Munzir Comer, 'Dersim inancında Duzgin', *Ware* 11 (1997), 84-104.

<sup>17</sup> The Kurdsh nationalist author Mehrdad Izady proclaims in his influential *The Kurds: A concise handbook* the existence of an ancient Kurdish 'cult of angels' underlying Ahl-i Haqq, Yezidism and Alevism. Izady, who hails from Kermanshah and is clearly more familiar with the former two than with Alevism, ascribes the same belief system to the Alevis although there is no evidence for it. For a more informed discussion of the three religious communities and earlier Iranian religions, see Kreyenbroek, 'Religion and religions.'

<sup>18</sup> Antranig, *Dersim*; Kemal Astore, 'Glaubensvorstellungen und religiöses Leben der Zaza-Alewiten', in: Ismail Engin and Franz Erhard (eds), *Aleviler / Alewiten*. Bd. 2: *Inanç ve gelenekler / Glaube und Traditionen*, Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2001, pp. 149-62. Another student of Dersim's oral traditions, on the other hand, informs me he has repeatedly heard accounts according to which the human soul has to pass through 1001 incarnations to reach perfection (Erdal Gezik, personal communication).

the entourage of Sultân Sahâk, whereas the others descend from later incarnations.<sup>19</sup>

Sultân Sahâk and the *haft tan* were already mentioned as the highest of the spiritual entities. Sultân Sahâk was an incarnation of the Deity; as in all incarnations, he was accompanied by four archangels (named Bin-yâmîn, Dâwûd, Pîr Mûsî and Mustafâ in this incarnation, but identical with Jibrâ'îl, Mîkâ'îl, Isrâfil and `Azrâ' îl), a female spirit (Ramzbâr) and the spirit known as Bâbâ Yâdigâr, whose shrine in Dalahu is the most important place of pilgrimage for the Guran. In some accounts, Sultân Sahâk is himself one of the Seven; in others, the Seven are the Sultân's Companions, and the heptad is completed by a 'twin' of Yâdigâr, Shâh Ibrâhîm.<sup>20</sup> Both Yâdigâr and Ibrâhîm are the progenitors of major *khândân*; in the case of Yâdigâr, who remained childless, the *khândân* descends from his most trusted servant. The status of Shâh Ibrâhîm as one of the *haft tan* is contested among the Guran; there is, however, consensus that he is also connected with another heptad, the *haftawâne*.

The *haftawâne* are a more worldly counterpart to the purely spiritual *haft tan*. The latter do not, for instance, engage in ordinary physical procreation whereas the former do. There are numerous narratives of virgin birth in the case of the *haft tan*. Bâbâ Yâdigâr, for instance, was conceived when a girl servant of Sultân Sahâk found and swallowed a pomegranate seed that was spilt in a ritual offering. She gave birth from her mouth. It is significant that the Yâdigârî *khândân* descends not from Bâbâ Yâdigâr himself but from a close associate. The *haftawâne* are also called 'sons' of Sultân Sahâk, but my informants insisted that this should not be understood in the physical sense; Sultân Sahâk, like the other divine incarnations, did not have any biological descendants. There is broad agreement on the names of the *haftawâne* in the period of Sultân; two of them, Sayyid Muhammad and Sayyid Abu'l-Wafâ, are especially relevant for the Guran because they engendered the other two important *khândân*, the Shâh Ibrâhîmî and Khâmûshî lineages. The eponymous Shâh Ibrâhîm was a son (or, in other accounts, a grandson) of Seyyid Muhammad and Sayyid Khâmûsh was a son (or a grandson) of Sayyid Abu'l-Wafâ. One other name among those of the *haftawâne* tickles the imagination, espe-

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19. Nur Ali-Shah Elahi, *L'esotérisme kurde*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1966., pp. 65-75. C.J. Edmonds, writing on the Kâkâ'î, gives a slightly different list of ten *khândân*, five of which descend from the *haftawâne*, while the other five descend from other saints somehow associated with these earlier *khândân*: C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs. Politics, travel and research in north-eastern Iraq, 1919-1925*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, p. 186. The Âteshbeğî *khândân* and the Shâh Hiyâsî *khândân*, prominent in other parts of Iran, are associated with and named after later incarnations of the deity and later phases of the dissemination of the Ahl-i Haqq religion in Azeri and Persian ethnic environments.

<sup>20</sup> For a succinct statement on the belief system of the Ahl-i Haqq, see my entry 'Ahl-i Haqq' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third edition.

cially in combination with the last-named two: Sayyid Shihâbeddîn did not beget a *khândân* and I have not heard or seen any legends about him. But there may be reasons why his name is included in this heptad.

The Ahl-i Haqq recognize yet another heptad, the *haft khalife*, and it is from them that the *dalîl* descend. As said, every adult should have a *pîr* as well as a *dalîl*. Just like the *pîr* should belong to a sayyid *khândân*, the *dalîl* should belong to a family of *khalife*, descending from the original seven who were appointed by Sultân Sahâk. According to my Guran informants, each lineage of *khalife* is associated with a particular sayyid *khândân* and is called by the same name. The *dalîl* is, as it were, the intermediary between the initiate (*murîd*) and his *pîr*, who in turn is the channel of communication between his community and the *pâdishâh* or divine manifestation. It is claimed that everyone is free to choose his or her own *pîr* and *dalîl*, but in practice the affiliation of commoner families (*murîd*) with specific *khândân* tends to remain unchanged over the generations. In spite of their titles of *pîr* and *dalîl*, which suggest religious instruction and guidance, most of the sayyids I met among the Guran appeared not to be very knowledgeable about their religion. Whatever religious instruction took place was given by parents and the *kalâmkhwân*. However, the *kalâmkhwân* are also affiliated with specific *khândân*, and I found that among the Guran there were some significant differences in belief between the Yâdigârî and Khâmûshî on the one hand, and the Shâh Ib-râhîmî on the other.

The sayyid families are generally respected, but certainly not all of them are influential. Some sayyids, however, have emerged as powerful political as well as religious leaders, commanding the unquestioning obedience of their followers, who believed them inhabited by a divine presence. One family of sayyids in particular, residing in the village of Tutshami near Kerend, rose to great prominence in the 19th century and came to be recognized as the highest religious authorities not only by the Guran but by Ahl-i Haqq and related communities as far as Northern Iran and (as we have seen above) Southeastern Anatolia. Although the family's political influence has much declined, Tutshami remains to this day a major religious centre for the Guran – or at least for certain sections of them. The present head of the family, Sayyid Nasreddîn, was called by several of my informants the *pîr-i Gûrân*, or simply *âghâ*, 'the lord.'

#### *The Sayyids of Tutshami*

I heard stories about the sayyids of Tutshami from the first day that I spent among the Guran. The name of the village came up in many of my conversations at the shrine of Bâbâ Yâdigâr, with the resident sayyids and dervishes and with many pilgrims. All of them admitted ignorance when I questioned them on the finer points of doctrine and even ritual. They did carry

out their rituals, of course, but never took great pains to conform to the standard of correct practice that they assumed to exist. It was sufficient for them to know that there was a place where theoretically they could go and find authoritative answers to all questions. If I were interested in such things, I was told repeatedly, I should go to Tutshami, for that is where all the answers were. Some called the village *pâytakht-i tâyfe*, 'the capital of the [Ahl-i Haqq] community'. In the residence of the illustrious family, the *mâl-a âghâ* ('house of the lord') I was sure to find the most knowledgeable *kalâmkhwân*.

Sayyid Nasreddîn has no political power such as his ancestors once wielded, but he still exerts a moral authority over the Guran enabling him to mediate in conflicts. This authority is not based on his religious knowledge (which he is not expected to have; that is the province of the *kalâmkhwân*) but only on his family's charisma. He is widely believed by his followers to be blessed with the presence of one of the *haft tan* – some say Yâdigâr, others Binyâmîn – although he attempts himself to discourage such beliefs. Similar claims of indwelling (*hulûl*) by one or more of the *haft tan* were made in the past about his ancestors. The American missionary F.M. Stead, who spent a long time in Kermanshah and Kerend in the early 20th century and had very good contact with the Ahl-i Haqq there, observed that '[t]he principal seyyid of the Guran district is practically worshipped by his followers.' As an example of their veneration he relates that one of the tribal chiefs of the region once said to him, 'May God forgive me for saying so, but Seyyid Rustam is my God.'<sup>21</sup>

Tutshami and the mal-e agha were but meagre reflections of what they must have been a century earlier. A few old *kalâmkhwân* still lived in the house, and every day visitors from all over the Guran district, peasants, nomads and townspeople, would come to pay their respect to Sayyid Nasreddîn and his father Sayfeddîn, visit sacred spots in and around the house, and consecrate *niyâz*, little offerings of pomegranates and sweets, which they would take home afterwards. They would talk much of greater days in the past, the times of Sayyid Birâka, Rustam and Shamseddîn, when Truth (*haqîqat*) was more palpably present on earth and when the last great dervishes composed the last inspired *kalâms*.

Tutshami's period of greatness was largely the work of one remarkable man, Sayyid Haydar, who later became known as Sayyid Birâka (1785-1863). Little is known of his origins, except that he belonged to the Khâmûshî *khândân*. It is almost as if his backgrounds are deliberately suppressed, to make it seem that he rose from complete obscurity to supreme religious leadership of almost the entire Ahl-i Haqq community by the sheer force of his spiritual powers alone. The family names itself Haydari, as if its history only began with Sayyid Haydar; the village of Tutshami, too, is said to be founded by him. Not far outside the village, however, near Sayyid Birâka's simple grave, stand the ruins

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<sup>21</sup> F. M. Stead, 'The Ali-Ilahi sect in Persia', *The Moslem World* 22 (1932), 186-7.

of an old house named after a certain Sayyid Ya`qub, about whom people told me nothing but incoherent stories. He must have been an earlier resident here, and his relation with the Haydari family remains unclear. Sayyid Birâka's starting position may have been less lowly, and his appearance less sudden, than is claimed in retrospect.

Be that as it may, Sayyid Birâka did command tremendous respect in his lifetime. His first successors, his grandson Rustam and his great-grandson Shamseddin, inherited much of this respect as well as his political skills and were moreover quite charismatic persons in their own right. These sayyids' influence was not just restricted to the Guran. The German physician J.E. Polak, who lived in Qazwin in North Iran in the mid-19th century and was in contact with Ahl-i Haqq there, comments on the super-human veneration in which they held a spiritual leader in Kermanshah province.<sup>22</sup> This can hardly have been anyone else but Sayyid Birâka, whom we also saw mentioned, a few decades later, by Trowbridge in `Ayntab.

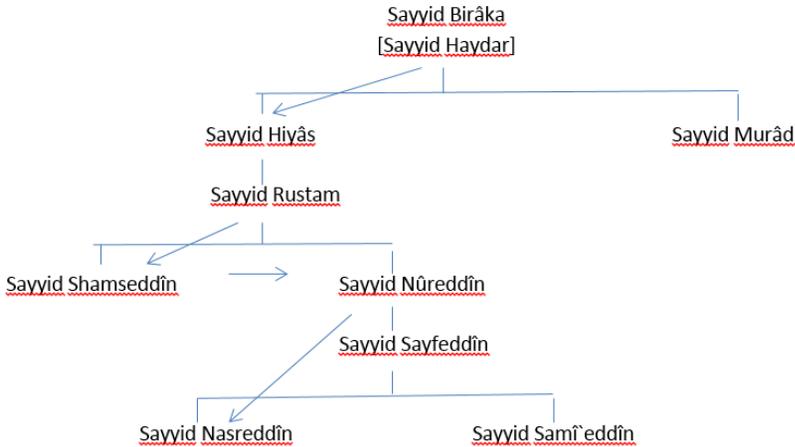
The authority that the sayyids claimed for themselves was not exclusively spiritual. The British consul Rabino relates how, around 1900, Sayyid Rustam incited the chieftains of the Guran tribes to rebellion against the paramount (and governmentally recognized) *khân* of the Guran confederacy, and succeeded in gradually stripping the latter of both political authority and economic power.<sup>23</sup> This was probably only the culmination of a long process started under Sayyid Birâka, in which the sayyids of Tutshami gradually replaced the tribal *khân* as the supreme leaders of the Guran. The *khân* never regained their power; the sayyids were finally to lose much of theirs under Reza Shâh's centralizing regime. Sayyid Rustam's son Shamseddin, the last really powerful sayyid, saw his secular authority gradually ebb away and had to make great efforts to retain his authority as a spiritual leader of the Guran alone. His successors were respected but exerted moral authority over only a certain section of the Guran.

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<sup>22</sup> J. E. Polak, *Persien. Das Land und seine Bewohner. Ethnografische Schilderungen*, Bd. I. Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1865, p.349.

<sup>23</sup> H. L. Rabino, 'Kermanchah', *Revue du monde musulman* 38 (1920), p. 24.

## The Haydari family



(arrows indicate succession to leadership)

Sayyid Birâka lived 1785-1863.<sup>24</sup>

Sayyid Rustam, who succeeded him, was still alive and in command in 1920.<sup>25</sup>

Sayyid Shamseddîn and his brother Nûreddîn exercised in 1949 a dual leadership over the Ahl-i Haqq in the region.<sup>26</sup> Later in that same year 1949, Shamseddîn died and Nûreddîn was the sole leader.<sup>27</sup>

Sayyid Sayfeddîn was still alive in 1976 when I visited Tutshami, but his son Nasreddîn was the universally recognized leader, believed to possess the divine spark that the father lacked.

### *Historical origins of the Ahl-i Haqq khândân*

Ahl-i Haqq sacred history is cyclical; incarnations of the same spiritual entity who lived in different historical times are considered as basically identical, and the myths may bring together persons who, from the point of view of the historian, lived in different times and even at differ-

<sup>24</sup> Elahi, *L'ésotérisme kurde*, p. 111 (comment by the editor, Mohammed Mokri).

<sup>25</sup> V. F. Minorsky, 'The Gûrân', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 11 (1943), p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Field, *An anthropological reconnaissance in the Middle East*, 1950, Cambridge, Mass.: Peabody Museum, 1956, p. 43.

<sup>27</sup> Mohammed Mokri, *Le chasseur de Dieu et le mythe du Roi-Aigle (Dawra-y Damyari)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967, p.3.

ent places. This may be illustrated by the list of names of Companions (incarnations of the *haft tan*) in the period of Haji Bektash as found in *Kâkâ'î daftar*: Qayghusiz Abdal, Gul Baba, Shahin Baba, Qaftan, Qizil Dede, Turabi Orman, and either Balim Sultan or (in another *kalâm*) Viran Abdal.<sup>28</sup> It is obvious that these persons, to the extent that they can be identified, were not historical contemporaries and flourished in places far apart. (Shâhîn Bâbâ, after whom a *dergâh* in or near Baghdad was named, is the only geographically close one.<sup>29</sup>) They appear, however, all to be associated with the Bektashi order, and the fact that this list of names exists at all in an Ahl-i Haqq sacred text shows that the *Kâkâ'î*, who lived in Ottoman territory, must have been more familiar with the Bektashiyye than the Guran and have considered it as a related religious formation.

Similarly, the *haft tan* and *haftawâne* of the cycle of Sultân Sahâk need not necessarily to have been real contemporaries, and attempts to assign this cycle to a precise historical period may be futile. The few concrete indications of historical dates are contradictory. Bâbâ Yâdigâr and Shâh Ibrâhîm are both called 'sons' of Sultân Sahâk and may have been his successors as leaders of the early Ahl-i Haqq community. They may have been contemporaries, as the myths on a conflict between them suggests, but this needs not to have been the case, and the conflict may have taken place in some of their other incarnations.

Mohammed Mokri discovered a title deed in which a piece of land was granted to Bâbâ Yâdigâr in 933/1527 by a man who had been imprisoned in Baghdad and was released through the saint's intervention. Bâbâ Yâdigâr had appeared to the *wazîr* of Baghdad in a dream and ordered him to set the prisoner free.<sup>30</sup> Mokri concludes from this that Yâdigâr must therefore have been alive in 1527, which would place the beginning of the Ahl-i Haqq community somewhere in the 15th century. However, the grant may in fact have been made to the saint's shrine (it mentions the site of the shrine as the saint's residence), and he may have appeared in the *wazîr*'s dream long after his bodily death. Shâh Ibrâhîm is associated with Baghdad, not with Hawraman as Sultân Sahâk or Dalahu as Bâbâ Yâdigâr, and my informants believed that he was buried there. There are to my knowledge no documents that give an independent indication of when exactly he lived.

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<sup>28</sup> C.J. Edmonds, 'The beliefs and practices of the Ahl-i Haqq of Iraq', *Iran* 7 (1969), p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> The *dergâh* of Shâhîn Bâbâ was one of the three that were regularly visited by Alevi dede from East Anatolia, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, 'Irak'taki Bektâşi tekkeleri', *Belleten* 71, no. 261 (2007), pp. 690, 712-3. The other two *dergâh* were those attached to the shrine complexes in Kerbela and Najaf.

<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Mokri, 'Étude d'un titre de propriété du début du XVIe siècle provenant du Kurdistan', *Journal Asiatique* 251 (1963), 229-56.

Ahl-i Haqq sources agree that Sultân Sahâk was the son of a certain Sayyid `Îsî, who had together with his brother Sayyid Mûsî come from elsewhere and settled in Barzinja in Shahrizur. The same Sayyid `Îsî is also the common ancestor of the prominent Barzinjî family of sayyids and Sufi shaykhs, which is well-documented.<sup>31</sup> The two brothers are usually said to have arrived from Hamadan and to have been connected with the spiritual lineage of `Alî Hamadânî and Muhammad Nûrbakhsh,<sup>32</sup> but there is at least one source that may hint at another connection. A register of genealogies of sayyid families in the Sulaymaniye region lists Shaykh Mûsî and Shaykh `Îsî Barzinjî as the sons of a certain Bâbâ Rasûl, who in 760/1358 or somewhat later arrived in Barzinja in Shahrizur. The same manuscript mentions 846/1442 as the date of Shaykh `Îsî's death.<sup>33</sup> Edmonds, based on other manuscripts in the Barzinjî family's possession, finds 656/1258 mentioned as the date of Sayyid `Îsî's arrival. The unusual name of Bâbâ Rasûl occurs two more times in the Barzinjî's family tree, most prominently in the person of Bâbâ Rasûl Gewre, 'the Great' (d.1646), whose numerous children are the progenitors of distinct branches of the family currently existing.<sup>34</sup> It is conceivable that the sayyid register place the name of this common ancestor before `Îsî and Mûsî by mistake. However, it is tempting to speculate whether the name suggests a connection of the Barzinjî family with the famous Anatolian Bâbâ Rasûl studied by Ocak,<sup>35</sup> of whom we now know that as a Wafâ'î he also had Iraqi connections.

Sadiq Safizâde has compiled 'biographies' of the *haftawâne* and other persons in Ahl-i Haqq sacred history, on the basis of Ahl-i Haqq *daftar* and a variety of other written and oral sources, which he interpreted in a rationalistic way, eliminating all miraculous elements.<sup>36</sup> In his narrative, the *haftawâne* were mystics who came from different parts of Iraq and Iran and gathered around Sultân Sahâk in Pirdiwar as their *pîr* and *murshid*. Safizâde makes them all contemporaries, living in the 13th-14th century, but he does not inform us on what source this dating is based.

I propose an alternative hypothesis: the five *khândân* that are associated with the *haftawâne* and their eponymous ancestors represent originally

<sup>31</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, 'The Qâdiriyya and the lineages of Qâdirî shaykhs among the Kurds', *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1-2 (2000), 131-49; Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, passim.

<sup>32</sup> Mohammad Ra'uf Tavakkulî, *Târîkh-i tasavvuf dar Kurdistân*, Tehran, 1359/1980, pp. 133-4.

<sup>33</sup> Manuscript in the private collection of V. Minorsky, studied by M. Mokri, see Mokri, 'Étude d'un titre de propriété', p. 241.

<sup>34</sup> Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs*, pp. 68-72. Bruinessen, 'The Qadiriyya.'

<sup>35</sup> Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *La révolte de Baba Resul ou la formation de l'hétérodoxie musulmane en Anatolie au XIIIe siècle*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1989. The date of this Bâbâ Rasûl's revolt against the Seljuqs is around 1240, which places him perhaps a century before the Barzinjî brothers.

<sup>36</sup> Sadiq Safizâde, *Dânishnâme-yi nâm-âvarân-i Yârsân. Ahwâl u asâr-i mashâhîr, târîkh, kitâbhâ u istilâhât-i `irfânî*, Tehran: Intishârât-i Hayramand, 1376/1997.

different communities of spiritual teachers and followers that were at some point of time (or various points of time) integrated into the Ahl-i Haqq. The eponymous founders of the *khândân* may have been contemporaries, but there is no compelling reason why this should be so. The names of Abu'l-Wafâ' and his successor Khâmûsh are especially tantalizing. Safizâde identifies the former as Abu'l-Wafâ'-i Kurdî, who was sent to Hamadan by Sultân Sahâk and who was buried near the shrine of Bâbâ Tâhir in that city. His grave, however, cannot be found because it was allegedly removed in the course of a restoration of the main shrine.<sup>37</sup> I wonder whether the Khâmûshî *khândân* could not be connected with an earlier Sayyid Abu'l-Wafâ', known as Tâj al-`Ârifin (d. 1107), who was the most famous Kurdish mystic ever, and whose name also comes up in Yezidi sources (he was a teacher of Shaykh `Adi b. Musâfir) as well as the genealogies of several Kurdish Alevi *ocak*. According to his hagiography, this Abu'l-Wafâ' died childless but his major successor was his nephew Khâmîs, a name that could well have become Kurdicized as Khâmûsh. The author of the hagiography (completed in 1371), incidentally, has the same name as another of the *haftawâne*, Shihâbeddîn.<sup>38</sup>

#### *The Alevi Sacred Lineages of Dersim*

The *ocak* system of Dersim is complicated; there is a large number of *ocak*, several of them broken up into sections that have become almost independent, and the relations of authority between them defy any attempt at systematic representation. Most of them are 'independent' *ocak*, in the sense that they have no or only tenuous relations with the central Bektashi lodge in Kırşehir and were in the past connected with the Safavids: they are Kızılbaş rather than Bektâşi. Some of the *ocak*, such as the Bamasur (Baba Mansur), Kureyşan and Ağuçan (Ağuiçen), have a strong local cultural identity and are associated with a rich repertoire of local legends and sacred sites. It was mostly from aged sayyids of these *ocak* that young artists and intellectuals recorded myths and legends and memories of a social and religious world that was completely overturned in the massacres and deportations of 1937-38.

In Dersim and the culturally related communities in a wide arc from Kahramanmaraş to the Southern parts of Erzurum, entire tribes (or at least regional sections of each tribe) used to be affiliated with the same *murşid*, *pir* and *rayber*, each of these usually belonging to a different *ocak*. The members of *pir* and *murşid ocak* must also have their *rayber*, *pir* and

<sup>37</sup> Safizâde, *Nâm-âvârân*, pp. 134-7.

<sup>38</sup> Alya Krupp, *Studien zum Menaqybyname des Abu l-Wafa' Tag al-Arifin: Das historische Leben des Abu l-Wafa' Tag al-Arifin*, München: Dr. Rudolf Trofenik, 1976; Dursun Gümüšoğlu, *Tâcü'l Arifin Es-Seyyid Ebu'l Vefâ menakibnamesi*, Istanbul: Can, 2006; cf. *Ocak, La révolte de Baba Resul*, p. 54.

*murşid*, in many cases apparently from other *ocak* (the information about this is contradictory, however) The Baba Mansur and Ağuçan *ocak* are most often mentioned as *murşid* (for the tribes in East and West Dersim, respectively), but there is little consistency in the relationship between commoner tribes (*talip*, *toliw*) and *ocak*, as traced by various local researchers.<sup>39</sup> Although *murşid*, *pir*, *rayber* and *talip* stand in a relationship of authority to each other, it is certainly not the case that tribes and *ocak* as social units constituted at any time a four-layered stratified system. The terms reflect the past relationship with Shaykh Safi and his successors; well into the 16th century, it was the *rehber* who was in contact with local communities of Kızılbaş, the *pir* was responsible for a large region, as the representative (*khalîfe*) of the Safavid shah, who was the *murshid*.<sup>40</sup> How this was transformed into the later *ocak* system, in which local *ocak* came to function as *murshid* remains unclear.

Most of what we know of the *ocak* system of Dersim (and of Kurdish Alevi communities more generally) consists of reconstructions of how it used to function before 1937, based in interviews with aged informants. There are *cemevleri* in Dersim now, where *cem* are held, but there appears to be no continuity with the *cem* as practised in the past. As the anthropologist Peter Bumke, who carried out research in Dersim in the 1970s, remarked with some exaggeration, his informants appeared to adhere to 'a religion that is not practised.'<sup>41</sup> The *ocak* never ceased to exist, of course, and they continued to be held in respect by the other tribes, but the regular visits by *murşid*, *pir* and *rayber*, which had been the occasions when *cem* were held, were to a large extent disrupted by the deportations. Conditions differed, however, from place to place, and some oral information suggests that here and there *cem* continued to be held.

In the past two decades, a considerable body of information on the *ocak* system as well as on other aspects of the religion has become available.<sup>42</sup> Most significantly, a large number of manuscript documents in the possession of *ocak*, such as genealogies (*shajara*, *şecere*) and confirmations of recog-

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<sup>39</sup> For a good analytical and critical overview, see Erdal Gezik, 'Rayberler, pirlar ve mürşidler (Alevi ocak örgütlenmesine dair saptamalar ve sorular)', in: Erdal Gezik and Mesut Özcan (eds), *Alevi ocakları ve örgütlenmeleri*. 1. kitap, Ankara: Kalan, 2013, pp. 11-77.

<sup>40</sup> M. A. Danon, 'Un interrogatoire d' hérétiques musulmans (1619)', *Journal Asiatique* 2e sér., tôme 17 (1921), 281-93.

<sup>41</sup> Peter J. Bumke, 'The Kurdish Alevis - boundaries and perceptions', in: Peter A. Andrews (ed.), *Ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey*, Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 1989, p. 515.

<sup>42</sup> Nejat Birdoğan, *Anadolu ve Balkanlarda Alevi yerleşmesi: ocaklar - dedeler - soyagaçları*, İstanbul: Alev Yayınları, 1992; Ali Yaman, *Alevilik'te dedelik ve ocaklar*, İstanbul: Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği Yayınları, 2004; Hamza Aksüt, *Aleviler: Türkiye - İran - Irak - Suriye - Bulgaristan*, Ankara: Yurt Kitap-Yayın, 2009; Dilşa Deniz, *Yol/Rê: Dersim inanç sembolizmi. Antropoljik bir yaklaşım*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2012.; Erdal Gezik & Mesut Özcan (eds), *Alevi ocakları ve örgütlenmeleri*. 1. kitap, Ankara: Kalan, 2013.

nition as *khalîfa (icazetnâme)*, which had long been kept hidden, have been made available to researchers and been analysed.<sup>43</sup> Besides these scholarly studies, we now also have self-representations of several *ocak*, usually with the reproduction of their *şecere* and other documents.<sup>44</sup>

The documents from *ocak* of East Anatolia that have been studied so far have shown the great importance of the 11th-century Kurdish Sufi Sayyid Abu'l-Wafâ' Tâj al-Ârifîn and the network of the Wafâ'iyya, the Sufi order formed by his followers. Most of the Eastern *ocak* claim descent from Abu'l-Wafâ'. After Gölpınarlı, who first drew attention to the Wafâ'iyya network in 13th-century Anatolia, Ocak was the first to pay adequate attention to this order and notice that its influence was more widespread than had been acknowledged by earlier scholars of Alevism.<sup>45</sup> A large number of such documents from *ocak* in the Maraş-Adıyaman-Malatya region was analysed by Ayfer Karakaya-Stump in her dissertation, and her conclusions are of particular importance for my argument, because they stress the strong connections of the Wafâ'iyya network with spiritual centres in Iraq.<sup>46</sup>

Karakaya-Stump shows that these *ocak* remained oriented towards Iraq until around 1800 and only gradually shifted their orientation towards the central Bektashi lodge in Kırşehir. Repeatedly *ocak* sayyids travelled to Kerbela, Najaf and Baghdad to request certification of their *silsila*, *şecere* and *icazetnâme* from the resident sayyid there. Most of the Wafâ'î dervishes appear to have joined the Kızılbaş movement. Karakaya-Stump suggests that after the Ottoman conquest of East Anatolia the Anatolian *ocak* remained connected with the Safavids via Iraq, where Ottoman control long remained less complete than in Anatolia. The nodes of contact were *dergâh*, the most important of them located in the holy shrines of Kerbela, Najaf and Kazimayn. In the course of time, these *dergâh* came to be affiliated with the Bektashiyya, just like elsewhere this order incorporated and domesticated the heterodox dervish groups. Additional Bektashi *dergâh* were later established in such

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<sup>43</sup> Birdoğan, *Anadolu ve Balkanlarda*; Ocak, 'Türkiye Selçukluları döneminde'; Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, 'Subjects of the Sultan, Disciples of the Shah: Formation and Transformation of the Kizilbash/Alevi Communities in Ottoman Anatolia', Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2008; Caroline Tee, 'Holy lineages, migration and reformulation of Alevi tradition: a study of the Dervis Cemal ocak from Erzincan', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37(3) (2010), 335-92.

<sup>44</sup> Seyyid Hacı Mustafa Aklıbaşında, *Ehlibeyt nesli Seyyid Mahmud Hayrani ve evlâtları*, Duisburg: private, 1993; Kureşanlı Seyyid Kekil, *Peygamberler ile seydidlerin şecereleri ve aşiretlerin tarihi*, Köln: private, n.d.[c. 2000]; Vaktidolu, *Ağuiçenliler ocağı*, İstanbul: Can, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Yunus Emre ve tasavvuf*, İstanbul: İnkilâp, 1992[1961], pp. 46-50; Ocak, *La révolte de Baba Resul*; idem, 'Türkiye Selçukluları döneminde.'

<sup>46</sup> Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, 'Subjects of the Sultan, Disciples of the Shah: Formation and Transformation of the Kizilbash/Alevi Communities in Ottoman Anatolia', Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, New Haven, 2008; see also Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, 'Documents and Buyruk Manuscripts in the private archives of Alevi dede families: an overview', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37(3) (2010), 273-86; idem, 'Irak'taki Bektaşî tekkeleri', *Belleten* 71, no. 261 (2007), 689-720, 792.

places as Kirkuk and Samarra and became part of the network visited by Anatolian *ocak* sayyids.

By 1800, the *ocak* whose documents were studied by Karakaya-Stump appear to have stopped travelling to Iraq and henceforth sought confirmation from the central Bektashi lodge. Other *ocak*, especially from Dersim proper, may have continued to seek confirmation of their genealogies from Kerbela well after that date. I have heard of Dersim sayyids travelling to Kerbela as late as the mid-20th century. Birdoğan describes a *şecere* that was signed by sayyids in Kerbela in 1953. It belongs to one of the less well-known Turkish *ocak*, named Şah İbrahim, and Birdoğan shows a healthy scepticism as to the genealogical claims of this lineage, but there is little reason to doubt that the signatures and stamps on the document are from Kerbela.<sup>47</sup>

### *Some Surprising Coincidences*

The existence of an Alevi *ocak* with the same name as the most widely spread Ahl-i Haqq khândân of Shâh İbrâhîm, which moreover as recently as 1953 sought recognition and legitimation from Iraq, raises the question whether there could be a connection between the two and if so, of what kind. As Aksüt suggests, the title 'Şah' in the *ocak*'s name may be a recent usage, for it used to be referred to as the *Şeyh İbrahim ocağı*.<sup>48</sup> In this case it could be that the Anatolian sayyids, aware of the prominence of the Shâh İbrâhîmî khândân in İraqî Kurdistan and Baghdad, adapted their *ocak*'s name to resemble that of a more famous namesake. It is thinkable that there is a more direct connection between both lineages, but there is no evidence to that effect.

The occurrence of the name of Abu'l-Wafâ' in the genealogies of many East Anatolian Alevi *ocak*, as one of the *haftawâne* and the ancestor of the Khâmûshî khândân among the Ahl-i Haqq, and as one of the teachers of `Adî bin Musâfir, around whom the Yezidi religion took its shape, suggests that the milieu of Kurdish followers of Abu'l-Wafâ' had a major formative influence on Kurdish Alevism, Ahl-i Haqq and even Yezidism. Both Abu'l-Wafâ' and `Adî b. Musâfir were themselves shari`a-abiding, orthodox Muslims, but many of their followers definitely were not, and Abu'l-Wafâ's hagiography explicitly notes his tolerance of the Kurds' failure to perform the ca-

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<sup>47</sup> Birdoğan, *Anadolu ve Balkanlarda Alevi yerleşmesi*, pp. 198-203. On the Şah İbrahim *ocak*, which is a section of the Dede Garkin *ocak*, see also Aksüt, *Aleviler*, pp. 87-113; Hamza Aksüt, 'Der Şah İbrahim Ocağı: Die Siedlungsgebiete, der Gründer und die mit ihm verbundenen Gemeinschaften', in: Robert Langer, et al. (eds), *Ocak und Dedelik: Institutionen religiösen Spezialistentums bei den Aleviten*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2013, pp. 69-93.

<sup>48</sup> Aksüt, 'Der Şah İbrahim Ocağı,' p. 70.

nonical obligations and approval of their *samâ`* ritual that was criticized by other Sufis.<sup>49</sup>

Abu'l-Wafâ appears in several *qasîda* by, or attributed to, Shaykh `Adi. In one of them, we find the familiar theme of a dervish riding a lion challenging a saint, who shows his superiority by ordering a rock or wall to move:

... I lived at Lalish in glory and happiness.  
 al-Qadiri came to me and likewise Ibn al-Rifa`i  
 And Abu'l-Wafa, oh young man, came to me riding a lion.  
 And I rode something without life, without body:  
 A massive rock which followed after me.<sup>50</sup>

This theme is found, with different protagonists, among Bektashis, Der-sim Alevis and Ahl-i Haqq, as well as further East in the Indian subcontinent.<sup>51</sup> Its occurrence in connection with `Adî bin Musâfir as well is an additional indication of that the heterodox dervish milieu to which the legend belongs was by no means exclusively Turkic but contained a considerable Kurdish element.

The connection of early Ahl-i Haqq with this Kurdish Wafâ`î milieu remains elusive. The names of the ancestors of the Khâmûshî lineage, Abu'l-Wafâ' and his grandson and successor Khâmûsh, are very reminiscent of those of the 11th century Abu'l-Wafâ' and his nephew and successor Khâmis, but there appears to be a gap of at least two centuries between the lifetimes of the latter two and the emergence of the Ahl-i Haqq. The name of Bâbâ Rasûl, who is mentioned as the 'father' of the sayyids `Îsî and Mûsî who settled in Barzinja sometime between the 13th and the 15th century and became the common ancestors of the Barzinjî sayyids as well as the Ahl-i Haqq *khândân* deriving from Sultân Sahâk, is reminiscent of that of Bâbâ Rasûl, the leader of the large Anatolian rebellion against the Seljuqs. Whatever the real identity of the Anatolian Bâbâ Rasûl, he was a Wafâ`î and his name must have been well-known in Iraqi (Kurdish) Wafâ`î circles.

In the cyclical concept of sacred time that frames all Ahl-i Haqq traditions, linear time and chronology do not matter much. The concept of reincarnation makes meetings possible between persons (especially those embodying higher spiritual entities) who lived centuries apart. I am not claiming that the Abu'l-Wafâ' who actually lived in Kurdistan in the 11th century and the Abu'l-Wafâ' of Ahl-i Haqq tradition, or both Bâbâ Rasûl, are physically identical but I wish to suggest the possibility or even likelihood that

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Karakaya-Stump, 'Subjects of the Sultan,' pp. 41-2.

<sup>50</sup> Qasida III, attributed to Shaykh `Adî but probably of much later date, cited in Philip Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism: its background, observances and textual tradition*, Lewiston, NY: Mellen Research Publications, 1995, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> See Martin van Bruinessen, 'Haji Bektash, Sultan Sahak, Shah Mina Sahib and various avatars of a running wall', *Turcica* XXI-XXIII (1991), 55-69.

some of the communities that merged into the Ahl-i Haqq religion in its formative stages had Wafâ'î connections, looked upon Abu'l-Wafâ' and Bâbâ Rasûl as inspired authorities and associated themselves with them.

From the time it took its shape, the Ahl-i Haqq religion as well as Yezidism were doctrinally different from Kızılbaş Alevism but they developed a similar internal social organization, with an emphasis on endogamy and caste-like sacred lineages. Because especially the Ahl-i Haqq / Kâkâ'î recognized the Kızılbaş and Bektashi as similar to or almost identical to themselves, there appears to have been a certain amount of interaction through the ages. The Kâkâ'î of Shahrizur, as we have seen, have incorporated Haji Bektash and a group of Bektashi saints into their cosmology, whereas the Guran Ahl-i Haqq, who were at a greater distance from the Wafâ'î and later Bektashi *dergâh*, have less familiarity with this tradition. That the communities have long been separate and maintained strict boundaries between them is shown by the fact that in the Mosul region we find communities of these three types (Kâkâ'î, Shabak, Sârlî, Yezidi) living in close proximity without any merging. As the quotation from Trowbridge with which I began this article showed, however, it was possible for a charismatic leader of a sacred lineage in one of the communities to gain recognition in other communities, in spite of the existing doctrinal differences.

### *Conclusion*

The similarity and family resemblance that Alevi and Ahl-i Haqq intellectuals perceive in each other's religion owes at least something to their having encountered representations of these religions by Western scholars (and a selective reading of this body of scholarship). There have, however, been some direct or indirect contacts between both communities over a long time, as Ahl-i Haqq sayyids sent envoys to Anatolian Alevi communities (in the 19th, and perhaps well into the 20th century) and Alevi *ocak* sayyids travelled to Kerbela and *dergâh* in other Iraqi cities in search of authentication of their genealogical claims and confirmation of their authority to act as *pîr*.

It is likely that at least some of the sacred lineages among the Kurdish Alevis and Ahl-i Haqq find their origins in the same Kurdish heterodox milieu associated with the well-known Sayyid Abu'l-Wafâ' Tâj al-Ârifîn, as suggested by some of the names, and it is not impossible that there have been occasional meetings between member of the Alevi and Ahl-i Haqq sacred lineages well after the crystallization of these religious communities as distinct social formations. In spite of considerable doctrinal differences, the prestige of charismatic sayyid families could transcend the boundaries separating the communities.