‘I AM PIR SULTAN ABDAL’

A HERMENEUTICAL STUDY OF THE SELF-NAMING TRADITION (MAHLAS) IN TURKISH ALEVI LYRIC SONG (DEYİŞ)

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Paul Koerbin
ABSTRACT

The lyric songs of Turkish oral tradition broadly understood by the term *deyiş* provide one of the richest perspectives on the historical construction, communal perceptions and creative impetus of Turkish Alevi culture. One of the most evident defining characteristics of the *deyiş* is the convention in which the poetic persona to which the lyric is attributed, known as the mahlas, is incorporated in the final verse. While this convention is ubiquitous in this lyric form it has received little scholarly attention particularly in regards to its role in expressive culture. This study approaches Alevi expressive culture by means of focusing on the interpretive force of the mahlas.

The theoretical basis for this study is the tripartite model proposed for ethnomusicological study by Timothy Rice in 1987, by which musical experience may be understood as being historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied. In applying this model my study pursues an interpretive approach both in terms of identifying interpretive practice and in suggesting interpretive perspectives. This approach follows Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical perspective as an encounter that seeks not to understand the inner experience of people of another culture, but rather to understand the world that is suggested by music sounds, performance and contexts. The structure of this study follows this hermeneutical epistemology in terms of pre-understanding (encounters in text), explications (the analysis of the form and structure of the text and music) and experiences (interpretive encounters with expressive culture that suggest new understandings). Methods employed for this study include a broad reading and
familiarity with Alevi related and initiated publications and scholarship (in Turkish and English); observation of Alevi (and more broadly Turkish) public expressive culture through audio and visual recordings and attending festivals and other events; and participation in Alevi expressive culture and critical reflection through learning the bağlama (Turkish lute) and performing Alevi deyiş informally and in public.

This study begins by considering ‘pre-understandings’ through the way the persona of the most influential of the Alevi poets, Pir Sultan Abdal, is presented in the pursuit of a historical identity as the lyrics or oral tradition attributed to him have become the basis of canonical textual collections. This chapter suggests the limitation of this approach to understanding while revealing the centrality of the mahlas as the object of study. The second part of the study focuses on explicating the deyiş lyric form and the mahlas as a defining characteristic of that form. These explications suggest the mahlas is more than merely a convention used to identify the author of the lyric but is, rather, a subtle and adaptable traditional textual integer that, while inherently meaningful, is not fixed in its meaning or purpose; and with its immanent associations provides interpretive and creative potential. The third part of the study considers the interpretive and creative potential of the Alevi deyiş and the immanent qualities of the mahlas in performance. Firstly, a context to Alevi public expressive culture is provided by examining a series of commercial recordings produced in the 1980s by Arif Sağ, a formative period when Alevis began to be more open and assertive in the articulation of Alevi culture. This is followed by an examination of the interpretive potential of performance through the description and analysis of a performance by Tolga Sağ at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival in the village of Banaz in central Turkey. The study further considers the application of the
interpretive potential provided by the immanent and associative qualities of the mahlas through a critical reflective analysis of my performances of Alevi deyiş. Finally, this study includes the largest collection of lyrics by the major Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal yet to appear in English translations. These translations are included to demonstrate and reveal the hermeneutical challenge presented by this material as well as providing broader scholarly access to a substantial representative sample of the lyrics associated with this major Alevi figure.

This study concludes that the mahlas is a richly meaningful textual integer that conveys, with communicative economy, immanent aspects of authority, lineage, communal identity and inclusion. As such, rather than being a simple convention to identify authorship, it is an adaptive yet critical element in the creative and interpretive expression of Alevi culture. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of a rich oral lyric tradition and creative expressive culture that has received relatively little scholarly attention, especially in the English language scholarship, and to reveal the mahlas in the context of oral and expressive culture as a subject deserving of further scholarly study.
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Finally I wish to thank my wife Diane for the love, boundless tolerance and support of her too often distracted husband; and my daughter Sabine who has grown up with this project and learned to ask the all too pertinent question “when will the book be finished?”

DEDICATION

For my parents, Una and Lloyd Koerbin, who waited so long and for whom this means so much.
A NOTE ON TRANSLATION AND ORTHOGRAPHY

All translations from the Turkish are my own unless otherwise indicated.

This thesis involves reference to a considerable number Turkish sources and Turkish terminologies which provides certain challenges for consistent renderings. I have generally followed Turkish terminologies and forms rather than translating them, the term mahlas, the subject of this thesis, which I have not rendered as ‘pen-name’, being the most obvious example. I have generally added the English plural ‘-s’ to Turkish terms rather than retain the Turkish plural ‘-lar/-ler’. So for aşk I use the plural aşk-s not aşk-ler. Occasionally this approach would produce a monstrous and unpronounceable mouthful in English and in such cases I have retained the Turkish plural, as in deyişler rather than deyiş-s. For the same reason I have preferred Alevilik rather than Alevi-ism. In regards to names I have used Turkish forms except when they are very common in English, so in place of the Turkish Hüseyin and Muhammed I have used Husayn and Muhammad.

In quoting Turkish sources I have used the orthography of the original rather than attempt any standardisation. This is perhaps most evident in the variable use of the circumflex in some Turkish words that have Persian or Arabic origins. So, for example, aşk will also appear as âşık and the name Hatayi as Hatâyî. Ostensible inconsistencies may be most apparent in a number of the texts used for the translations. Since many of these are from early twentieth century sources transcribed from Ottoman script by the editors modern Turkish orthography is variable and vowel harmony may not always be present since Ottoman, unlike modern Turkish, generally did not apply labial harmony (that is, in respect to close high vowels i, u, i and ü). Again, I have used the texts as presented in the sources consulted and have not attempted any standardisation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ....................................................................................................................... iii
Acknowledements ....................................................................................................... vi
A note on translation and orthography ................................................................... vii

1. **Introduction** ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Statement about the research project ............................................................ 1
   1.2 Need for research ......................................................................................... 5
   1.3 Theoretical considerations and model .......................................................... 6
   1.4 The structure of the thesis ............................................................................ 9
   1.5 Materials and methodology ........................................................................ 11
   1.6 Survey of relevant literature ....................................................................... 18
      1.6.1 Pir Sultan Abdal ................................................................................. 19
      1.6.2 Deyiş ................................................................................................... 25
      1.6.3 Mahlas ................................................................................................ 25
      1.6.4 Alevi music ........................................................................................ 27

2. **Encounters: Pir Sultan Abdal, Kul Himmet and the mahlas persona in**
   **history, legend and text** .................................................................................... 31
   2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 31
   2.2 Alevilik (Alevi-ism) .................................................................................... 33
      2.2.1 Foundational beliefs ........................................................................... 40
      2.2.2 Authority: ocakzade and dedelik ........................................................ 42
      2.2.3 Transmission: Alevi aşık-s .................................................................. 46
   2.3 Pir Sultan Abdal ........................................................................................... 53
      2.3.1 Introduction: the distraction of identity .............................................. 53
      2.3.2 The (re)construction of historical identity .......................................... 55
      2.3.3 The legend of Pir Sultan Abdal .......................................................... 66
      2.3.4 Hızır Paşa ........................................................................................... 71
      2.3.5 The typology of the Pir Sultan Abdal mahlas – what’s in a name? ... 75
      2.3.6 Themes and subjects .......................................................................... 82
   2.4 The case of Kul Himmet and ‘üstüdım’ ...................................................... 89
      2.4.1 Kul Himmet Üstadım ......................................................................... 92
      2.4.2 Fleshing out the persona: Aşık Ibrahim and Hacık Kız ..................... 96
   2.5 Summary: the deyiş and the mahlas from encounters to explications ....... 106

3. **Explications: the deyiş lyric form and the mahlas taking tradition** .......... 109
   3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 109
   3.2 Deyiş .......................................................................................................... 109
      3.2.1 Definitions ........................................................................................ 110
      3.2.2 Terminologies .................................................................................. 113
      3.2.3 Deyiş or nefes ................................................................................... 115
      3.2.4 Structural characteristics – syllables and symbol............................. 117
      3.2.5 Specific genre forms and their relationship to deyiş ......................... 120
      3.2.6 Themes and subjects in the deyiş ....................................................... 123
      3.2.7 Deyiş – viewing expressive context in textual variants ................. 127
3.3 Mahlas .................................................................................................................. 137
  3.3.1 Terminology ................................................................................................... 138
  3.3.2 The signature verse convention in other traditions ....................................... 145
  3.3.3 Comparative perspectives briefly considered ............................................. 146
  3.3.4 Types of mahlas naming ............................................................................. 149
  3.3.5 Dertli Divani and the tradition of spiritual authority .................................... 153
  3.3.6 Aşık Zakiri and the master-pupil tradition .................................................. 157
  3.3.7 Dreams .......................................................................................................... 161
  3.3.8 Sefil Selimi and the mahlas as a point of commitment .................................. 163
  3.3.9 Edip Harabi and Melûli – the transcendent life and the mahlas as ......... 167
  3.3.10 Appropriating the mahlas – Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan ........................................ 173
  3.3.11 Finding meaning in the mahlas taking tradition ...................................... 176
  3.3.12 Finding meaning in the structure and form of the mahlas ....................... 178

3.4 Summary: the deyiş and mahlas from explications to experiences ........... 184

4. Experiences: interpreting the Alevi deyiş and the mahlas in expressive... 186
  culture .................................................................................................................. 186
  4.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................... 186
  4.2 Alevi music ..................................................................................................... 187
    4.2.1 Sound characteristics ............................................................................ 189
    4.2.2 The bağlama ....................................................................................... 190
    4.2.3 Cadential phrases ............................................................................... 196
  4.3 Duaz-i imam as a referential and defining musical form ................................ 198
  4.4 Commercial recordings and Alevi expression .............................................. 206
    4.4.1 Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in the 1960s and 1970s ...................................... 207
  4.5 Arif Sağ ‘ölür dirilir’ – strategic death and renewal and the pathway to Muhabbet ................................................................. 211
    4.5.1 ‘Was it I who created my exile?’ – Sağ’s rebirth as a recording artist .. 213
    4.5.2 The Şan Tiyatrasu concert and the commencement of a new era ....... 217
    4.5.3 ‘I have come to be a human being’ .................................................... 219
    4.5.4 Muhabbet series 1-5 (1984-1987)....................................................... 229
  4.6 Tolga Sağ at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival ............................................ 245
    4.6.1 Festival background ............................................................................ 245
    4.6.2 Entextualising the performance as an interpretive act ......................... 254
    4.6.3 Analysis of Tolga Sağ’s festival performance ...................................... 256
  4.7 Critical reflection: a performance approach to the interpretation of Alevi... 273
    4.7.1 Introduction ......................................................................................... 273
    4.7.2 Discussion of performances .............................................................. 275
    4.7.3 The National Folk Festival performance, 25 March 2005 .................... 280
    4.7.4 The performance setting and performance described ......................... 286
    4.7.5 ‘Sonic Circus’ performance, Sydney, 10 November 2002 ................. 295
    4.7.6 ‘Sivas anma’ performance, Parramatta (Sydney), 28 June 2008 .... 300
    4.7.7 ‘Mystic Music and the Memory of Martyrs: an introduction to Alevi 303
      music’ National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2 November 2005......
4.8 Summary: the deyiş and mahlas from experiences to new understandings...
....................................................................................................................................... 310

5. Translations: ‘An extreme case of hermeneutical difficulty’.......................... 312

5.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 312
5.2 Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in English translation....................................................... 315
5.3 Sources of the texts translated and editorial issues ............................................... 316
5.4 On translating the mahlas and other terms ............................................................. 319

5.5 Pir Sultan Abdal deyişler ......................................................................................... 321
   5.5.1 Açılin kapılar Şah’a gidelim ........................................................................... 321
   5.5.2 Ali Ali deyî ne inîlerîn.............................................................. 322
   5.5.3 Ben dervîşim diye göğsîn açarsın................................................................. 323
   5.5.4 Benim pîrîm Şah-ı Merdân Ali’dir .................................................................. 324
   5.5.5 Bir çift turna geldi Kars ilerinden ................................................................. 325
   5.5.6 Bir güzîlîn âşıkîm ağaçlar ............................................................................. 326
   5.5.7 Bir nefesçîk söyliyelim ..................................................................................... 327
   5.5.8 Bir ulu kervandîk kalktîk Musuldan ............................................................... 328
   5.5.9 Bize de Banaz’da Pir Sultan derler ................................................................. 329
   5.5.10 Bu yıl bu dağların karı erimez .................................................................... 330
   5.5.11 Bülbül olsam varsam gelsem ........................................................................ 331
   5.5.12 Cennet’ten Ali’ye bir niyaz geldi ................................................................... 333
   5.5.13 Çeke çeke ben bu dertten ölürüm ................................................................. 334
   5.5.14 Çekilip Kırklara vardîk ................................................................................... 335
   5.5.15 Çokan berî yolîm varsam gelsem ................................................................. 336
   5.5.16 Diken arasinda bir güll açildı ....................................................................... 337
   5.5.17 Dün gece seyrîmden çostuydu dağılar .......................................................... 338
   5.5.18 Ey benim divane gönülüm .......................................................................... 339
   5.5.19 Ezelden divane etti aşk beni ......................................................................... 340
   5.5.20 Fetva vermiş koca başlı kör müftü ................................................................. 341
   5.5.21 Gel benim sari tanburam .............................................................................. 342
   5.5.22 Gel seninle ahd ü peyman edelim ................................................................. 343
   5.5.23 Gelin canlar bir olalım .................................................................................. 344
   5.5.24 Gelmiş iken bir habercîk sorayım ................................................................. 345
   5.5.25 Gelsin ikrarına beli diyenler ....................................................................... 346
   5.5.26 Gözleyi gözleyi gözüm oldu ........................................................................ 347
   5.5.27 Gurbet elde bir hal geldi başma ................................................................... 348
   5.5.28 Haktan inayet olursa ..................................................................................... 349
   5.5.29 Hazret-i Ali’nin devri yürüye ........................................................................ 350
   5.5.30 Hazret-i Şah’ın avazı .................................................................................... 351
   5.5.31 Ilgît ilgît esen seher yelleri ............................................................................ 352
   5.5.32 İptîda bir sofû Şah’a varınca .......................................................................... 353
   5.5.33 Kahpe felek sana n’ettim n’eyledim ............................................................... 354
   5.5.34 Karsîda görûnen ne güzel yayla ................................................................. 355
   5.5.35 Koca başlı koca kadi .................................................................................... 356
   5.5.36 Koyun beni Hak aşkına yanayım ................................................................. 357
   5.5.37 Kul olayım kalem tutan eline ....................................................................... 358
   5.5.38 Medet ya Muhammet medet ya Ali .............................................................. 359
   5.5.39 Ötme bülbül ötme şen değil başım ................................................................ 360
5.5.40 Safasına cefasına dayandım ........................................................................ 361
5.5.41 Seher vakı kalkan kervan ....................................................................... 362
5.5.42 Serseri girme meydana ............................................................................ 362
5.5.43 Sultan Suyu gibi çağlayıp akma ................................................................ 363
5.5.44 Şu kanlı zalim ettiği işler ........................................................................ 364
5.5.45 Şu karşı yaylada göc katar katar ................................................................ 365
5.5.46 Türbesin ösüne nakş eylediler ................................................................... 366
5.5.47 Uyur idik uyardular .................................................................................. 367
5.5.48 Yine dosttan haber geldi .......................................................................... 368
5.5.49 Yürü bire Hıdır Paşa ............................................................................... 369
5.5.50 Yürüyüş eyledi Urum üstüne .................................................................... 370

5.6 Pir Muhammed .............................................................................................. 371
5.6.1 Pir elinden elifi tac urundum ...................................................................... 371

5.7 Aşık İsmail .................................................................................................... 372
5.7.1 Aradilar Pir Sultan’ın aslını ...................................................................... 372

5.8 Kul Himmet .................................................................................................... 374
5.8.1 Her sabah her sabah ötüşür kuşlar .......................................................... 374
5.8.2 Hükmünü geçiren hep cümle nâsa ................................................................ 376
5.8.3 Bu gün bize Pîr geldi ................................................................................ 377

5.9 Aşık Veysel .................................................................................................. 381
5.9.1 Beni hor görme kardeşim ........................................................................... 381

5.10 Nimri Dede .................................................................................................. 382
5.10.1 İkilik kirinin içimden atıp ......................................................................... 382
5.10.2 İnsan olmaya geldim .................................................................................. 383

5.11 Muhlis Akarsu ............................................................................................. 384
5.11.1 Açığım yok kapalım yok dünyada ............................................................. 384
5.11.2 Gurbeti ben mi yarattım ......................................................................... 385

5.12 Aşık Mahzuni Şerif .................................................................................... 386
5.12.1 Fırıldak adam ........................................................................................... 386

6. Conclusion: 'I am Pir Sultan Abdal' .................................................................. 387

Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 394
Audio-visual materials cited .................................................................................. 417
Appendix A – Track listing of accompanying CDs ............................................. 421
Appendix B – Slides from National Library of Australia performance ................. 423
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement about the research project

This research project arose from a personal and ostensibly simple dilemma that can be stated as questions that came to occupy my mind when I first encountered the songs of the Turkish Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal and other Turkish Alevi aşık-s: what does it mean that in these traditional lyrics the poet appears to sign his (or her) name; and, as a musician attracted to these songs, how can I, particularly as an outsider, find a meaningful way to perform them?

Why this should be a dilemma is in some respects quite apparent. As an outsider approaching an expressive culture that cannot possibly be fully or even adequately comprehended in early encounters, there are significant issues of language, elements of musical style and learning instruments (among other things) to address and resolve. Beyond these there are of course the deeper issues concerned with coming to know, or having at the very least a functional awareness of, the culture from which this expressive art is constructed and maintained and from which it emerges into public spaces. Indeed is there a valid context in which, as an outsider, I was able to engage with this expressive culture with integrity and functional honesty?

Perhaps not all musics pose these issues in the same way or to the same degree. My experience as a professional performer in the mid to late 1980s performing ‘multi-cultural’ in Australia (later to acquire the label ‘world music’) is such that, at the time, I did not feel the demand to engage with musics beyond their superficial attractiveness. This may be viewed by some as musical ‘tourism’ but it was not my
experience that this activity was contemptuous or deliberately exploitative of those musics, but rather reflected a joyous, and at times naïve, encounter with new and dazzlingly rich cultures. It was out of this context that I first encountered Alevi songs (deyiş); however my reaction, though initially intuitive and focused on the musical sound, was different because this music demanded of me a greater challenge and deeper commitment to its understanding and an engagement that required considerable work and commitment as an outsider. The songs I heard were clearly substantial and dense in their textual content and even puzzled non-Alevi Turks who I asked about them. While my initial attraction was a result of the musical sound, they were not songs that could be adequately encountered as merely instrumental music or music for which the words may be considered incidental to the colourful sounds and infectious rhythms of commercial ‘world music’. Further, Alevi culture, when I first encountered it in the mid-1980s, was in a process of finding its first concerted, or at least confident, public expressions after a long history of concealment and suspicious reticence. Thus my own introduction to these songs coincided with the dynamic, prolific and nuanced process of Alevis expressing, in their own voice, their social and cultural identity.

When issues concerning Alevi identity, particularly in respect to social and political objectives, began to emerge and be publicly expressed in the 1980s, it also attracted the attention of non-Turkish scholars, particularly those working in the fields of anthropology, sociology and ethnomusicology. While this scholarship has informed my own interest and scholarly research, my research project remains focused on the curious textual integer that intrigued and challenged me from my early encounters with Alevi song. I understood these songs to be folk songs: that is, songs constructed
and maintained in an oral culture whose authors, if there were an individual author, had long been appropriated into the anonymous tradition. Thus, while still cultural property, being understood as such they seemed more open to etic engagement, indeed some sort of expressive appropriation, from an outsider. However, one of the first discoveries I made of these songs is that they were apparently ‘signed’ and attributed to authorial identities. It was this that created, for me as a performer, something of an obstructing presence, or certainly a presence that signified an authority and the intimation of more complex deeper contexts of which I should be wary or, at the very least, aware. Indeed, despite my attraction to this music and my motivations as a performer, for some time I actively avoided attempts to learn the songs and certainly entertained no intention to perform them. I was unsure how to approach them, though I was attracted to them and grew more so in my self-conscious estrangement from them. It therefore seemed to me that this ‘signing’ convention in the songs was of signal importance to their character and may perform a pivotal role and have functional or interpretive significance in the performance of the songs. I believe that my interest was assured by the apparent ubiquity of the naming convention in these **deyiş**, and as such its importance seemed self-evident. Such interest was also prepared for, in some part, by my prior listening to troubadour and trouvère songs where the sometime climactic declamation of names in the chansons of Thibaut de Champagne, Peire Vidal, Marcabru or Gace Brulé, seemed to bring the works to life with an overt and particular presence.

I am, of course, aware that it is perhaps my etic perspective that emphasises this particular aspect of the songs, since a more encompassing and full understanding was at the time of this encounter not available to me due to my basic language skills and
limited awareness and understanding of Alevi culture. That is, for the emic listener, perhaps this was merely unremarkable. While recognising that such an etic perspective does not promise the same understanding or revelation of an emic participant in the tradition, I undertook this research project with the objective that in seeking to understand the naming convention in the Alevi deyiş for myself, my interpretive journey may also contribute to a wider awareness of the rich expressive tradition of Alevi lyric song. As John Miles Foley (1995, 140) states:

One must start, I believe, by admitting that outsiders to a performance tradition can seldom if ever achieve a mother-tongue fluency in a register outside their own cultural repertoire, even if the tradition is ongoing and readily available for study. There will always be an endemic shortfall for the ‘analytic’ or ‘etic’ interloper, a comparative lack of the kind of first hand knowledge gained only through active, iterative experience of the tradition. Hopefully, the external perspective available to the outsider will in part compensate for that shortfall: he or she may be able to offer new insights by intentionally stepping outside the performance arena, by citing comparative material from other traditions, and so on.

Since this project emerges from the dilemma faced by an etic performer, or at least the dilemma in pursuing the possibility for such performance, it will not remain entirely outside the performance arenas. Foley is really suggesting the possibility of ‘entextualisation’ whereby the performance of culture may be viewed not just in its ‘context’ but as a coherent text in itself in which we may discover how textual integers suggest meaning. This would seem to be a fundamentally phenomenological approach in which the process of hermeneutical appropriation is a reflective process to actualise the meaning of texts through self-understanding. This returns me to the objective of this research project, which is how to interpret – and perform
interpretation with – the ‘signed’ songs of the Alevi aşık-s including, especially, the greatest and at once the most representative, extraordinary and engaging of them all, Pir Sultan Abdal.

1.2 Need for research

Alevi expressive culture, specifically the poetic musical works in their performance context, has received relatively little scholarly attention, particularly in the English speaking world. Thus a very rich creative tradition has not been usefully investigated and researched and made generally more accessible for the purpose of comparative studies. Indeed even in Turkey this is the case, and while there has been a substantial amount of publication on issues in respect to Alevilik (Alevi cultural identity) since the mid-1980s, and there are countless collections of anthologised deyiş texts, there are few interpretive studies of this expressive form and those that do exist are concerned mostly with elucidating general themes, subjects and structures. In particular, the naming convention in the traditional lyric form (the deyiş), which we can refer to as the mahlas tradition (mahlas geleneği), has received little consideration beyond typology and categorisation in Turkish scholarly literature and virtually none in English language and comparative scholarship.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to provide a modest contribution to the accessibility of this rich but little investigated aspect of Turkish, and specifically Alevi, oral culture, through the presentation of interpretive materials, including a representative collection of translations. In particular in respect to the poetic persona of Pir Sultan Abdal my study will be of use to researchers with interests in traditional orality, music and performance, the traditional lyric form and authorial identity.
1.3 Theoretical considerations and model

The theoretical structure of this thesis is the tripartite model proposed for ethnomusicological study by Timothy Rice in his article "Toward the remodeling of ethnomusicology" (Rice 1987) and expanded and applied in his book May it Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music (Rice 1994). Rice formulated his model following anthropologist Clifford Geertz's claims regarding symbolic systems as being historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied. Moreover, in order to undercut the antinomy between the objectivity of musicology and the subjectivity of musical experience, Rice promotes an epistemology based on the phenomenological hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Phenomenology centred hermeneutics offers the prospect of moving beyond authorial (composer) intentions (Benson 2003, xii-xiii) and moving towards reflective answers to questions “concerning what we can know about music, and how we can know it” (Titon 1997, 93). Rice proposes Ricoeur's philosophical perspective as an encounter that seeks, not to understand the inner experience of people of another culture – the fundamental impasse – but rather to understand the world that is suggested by music sounds, performance and contexts. To Rice’s method I would also add the process of ‘entextualising’ which Bauman and Briggs (1990, 73) describe as “the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting”. However my purpose for such entextualisation is not essentially to decontextualise or abandon context since, as Bauman and Briggs suggest, the extractable text “carries elements of its

1 Particularly in respect to Ricoeur’s application of phenomenological hermeneutics to the human sciences, for which my principal reference text is Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Ricoeur 1998).
history and use within it” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). As Silverstein and Urban (1996, 4) point out, “different interpreters, understanding themselves to be – or potentially to be – in different relations with the original source discourse, produce different texts” and my purpose in entextualisation is to more clearly focus on the immanent and associative aspects of the performance.

The structural model of my thesis also incorporates aspects of this epistemology based on Rice’s formulations from Ricoeur’s concept of the ‘hermeneutic arc’ in terms of pre-understanding (in which I include ideas of historical and textual encounters), explanations (the explication of textual and musical forms) and interpretation, the “anchorage of the arc in the ground of lived experience” (Ricoeur 1998, 164). Rice calls this interpretive process – the hermenutical arc – a “self conscious task” to bring pre-conceptions and pre-understandings “to language” (Rice 1997, 115) and finally aims “to move from pre-understanding to explanation to new understandings” (Rice 1997, 117).

While this thesis has an essentially ethnomusicological objective that is, in a simple characterisation, to explore the performance of a specific musical repertoire from the perspective of an etic participant-observer, the nature of the subject requires an approach that extends beyond any notions of a limited definition of the ethnomusicological discipline. In this approach I am influenced by John Miles Foley and the caution he suggests in respect to the study of oral traditional aesthetics.

It would be only too easy to fall into the clutches of one or another current literary theory and to communicate whatever can be discovered about oral traditional art solely through the exclusivist metaphor of that particular
theoretical approach. That would be a serious error, not because the approach itself might not be interesting and worthy, but rather because whatever insights are gained must necessarily be as free as possible of specialist assumptions in order to be most useful to the widest range of scholars. If we communicate exclusively through one or another critical methodology, then the possibility remains that the ground gained is no more than a product – perhaps an illusory product – of that methodology. (Foley 1991a, xii-xiii)

For practical considerations, of course, the theoretical framework is necessary and the discipline of ethnomusicology has proven a flexible and expansive (and of course disputable) centre from which to engage with many disciplines such as literature (including textual studies and orality), folklore, anthropology, history and critical reflection.

Rice proposed his model as a response to what he perceived as a separation of music from context in Merriam’s influential model involving the study of three analytical levels including conceptualisation about music, behaviour in relation to music and music sound itself. Rice does not reject Merriam’s analytical levels but suggests that they can operate more flexibly within the model he proposes. In Rice’s model the study of musical sound is less prominent – though certainly not absent – while people’s actions in creating, experiencing and using music is the objective of enquiry. Rice’s tripartite model involves processes of:

1. historical construction which includes the process of change and re-encounters with forms and legacies of the past in the present;
2. social maintenance or the way music is sustained, maintained and altered by socially constructed institutions and belief systems; and,
3. individual adaption, application and experience.
As Rice notes, his model, particularly in respect to the process of individual adaption, application and experience moves his ethnomusicology closer to the humanities (Rice 1987, 467) and in application the model “demands a move from description to interpretation and explanation” (Rice 1987, 480).

1.4 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in four chapters, the first three chapters aligning with the Rice’s characterisation of the ‘hermeneutic arc’, beginning with pre-understanding, moving through explanation to arrive at interpretation based on experiencing the songs in a variety of expressive contexts. The processes of Rice’s model – historical construction, social maintenance and individual application – may also be seen to align generally with the structure of the thesis while understanding that they are not constrained to this structure and inform the thesis more pervasively.

1. In the first chapter, which I headline as ‘Encounters’, I reflect upon ‘pre-understandings’ as an encounter with the principal catalyst for my study, Pir Sultan Abdal, as seen from the major preoccupations of the literature that surrounds his historical identity. This encounter suggests that the pursuit of authorial identity and consequent understandings of the mahlas as essentially an authorial signature is necessarily limiting. In order to provide context for this encounter I identify significant aspects of Alevi belief and lineage structure; and in order to broaden the perspective on the focus of historical identity suggested by the mahlas I also discuss text and identity in respect to
the poet Kul Himmet considered along with Pir Sultan Abdal as one of the seven great and seminal Alevi poets.

2. In the second chapter, which I headline as ‘Explications’, I move on to examine the lyric form that is central to Alevi expressive culture, the *deyiş*, and what I propose is the principle and defining traditional textual integer of that lyric form, the ‘self-naming’ device known as the mahlas. By analysing the form and structure of the *deyiş* and mahlas I assert that in the *deyiş* form the mahlas is the principal textual integer that potentiates the immanent associative qualities that constitute a significant traditional referentiality\(^2\), and demonstrates an absence of fixity in form and application that engenders creativity and interpretation within a socially maintained expressive culture.

3. In the third chapter, which I headline as ‘Experiences’, I take an interpretive approach to the Alevi *deyiş* using the mahlas as a referential textual integer while examining three perspectives of expressive culture and individual interpretation in performance. Firstly, I consider a series of recordings made by the influential Alevi musician Arif Sağ in the 1980s; secondly, a performance by his son, Tolga Sağ, at the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival in Banaz (Turkey) in 2002; and, thirdly, a critical reflective analysis of four of my own performances of Alevi *deyiş* in different performance contexts in Australia between 2002 and 2008.

\(^2\) I follow Foley in regard to the concept of traditional referentiality, for which see especially his book *Immanent Art* (Foley 1991a). Traditional referentiality understood in Foley’s words “entails the invoking of a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text”; and where “traditional elements reach out of the immediate instance in which they appear to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they bear meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode” (Foley 1991a, 7).
In the fourth chapter, which I headline ‘Translations’, I include a representative sample of translations of deyiş attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal, along with a small number of translations of deyiş of other poets given prominent consideration in this thesis. The functional purpose of this is to provide the first substantial body of Pir Sultan Abdal texts in English translation – fifty translations in total. However, this chapter is not intended as an appendix but rather as further demonstrating the hermeneutical objectives of this study. The process of interpretation is an act of translation, just as the act of translating is an act of interpretation, and much of this thesis necessarily arises from the central processes of interpreting and translating. While translating is perhaps a performance in itself, the act of committing the translations to text is also a (re)contextualising process that betrays the limits of interpretation, and so my purpose in this chapter is also to suggest the ongoing requirement of the hermeneutic endeavour.

1.5 Materials and methodology

The methods employed for this study follow three paths:

1. A broad reading and familiarity with the literature in English and Turkish relating to Alevi culture, society, poetry and history; together with contextual studies in respect to Turkish society, oral traditions, and self-naming conventions.

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3 Translations included in this chapter are referred to throughout this study. The Translations chapter is therefore conceived as ‘hyper-linked’ and the reader is encouraged to read to the translations referred to in the text as the thesis progresses, and perhaps read others along the way.
2. The observation (aural and visual) of Alevi and broader Turkish expressive culture through sound recordings, videos, television and the Internet; field trips to Turkey; and attendance at events and festivals in Turkey and Australia.

3. Experiencing and participating in the expression of Alevi culture through learning the *bağlama* (long-necked Turkish lute) and performing *deyiş* in concerts and informal gatherings; and participating in seminars and other events including Alevi ritual gatherings known as cem.

The materials informing this study are for the most part published materials including many texts emanating from Alevi writers and artists. Publication in Turkish on Alevi culture and belief has been considerable since the 1980s while numerous collections of folk lyric texts, including many devoted to Pir Sultan Abdal, have emerged since the 1920s. Of particular interest are many publications largely constituted of interviews, reportage and re-publication, a phenomenon perhaps peculiar to the Turkish tradition of publishing cheap editions, which in many cases may be considered as primary rather than secondary resource material\(^4\). Indeed it was suggested by Tord Olsson at a conference on Alevi identity in Istanbul in 1996 (Olsson 1998) that much of this publishing activity that has formed part of the public discourse and expression of Alevis and should be considered primary research material\(^5\). As the anthropologist David Shankland characterises them, they are “explorations of attitudes and beliefs which have previously been spoken rather than written down … they constitute in great part an oral tradition made literate”


\(^5\) As an example of the sometimes overt nature of this discourse, a dispute over the establishment of principal Pir Sultan Abdal organisations produced two substantial monograph publications on the claims, firstly by H. Nedim Şahhüseyinoğlu followed by a response by Ali Balkız, both interestingly published by the same publishing house (Şahhüseyinoğlu 2001; Balkız 2002). Many copies of Balkız’s book were distributed freely to attendees at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Banaz.
(Shankland 1999, 132), although Olsson cautions against seeing them as merely “sullied versions of pure oral traditions” and suggest they should be treated “in certain respects as ritual objects … to be studied in their own rights” (Olsson 1998). The especial value of such materials is in helping to understand the nature of discourse among Alevi artists, writers and community representatives.

The objective of my method of concentrating on this published material has been to develop the resources and an interpretive sensibility that is cognisant and revealing of the traditions and discourse of the (Alevi and Turkish) culture from which the songs, that are the subject of my study, emanate. Reading these materials including reported and transcribed interviews and other discourse afford a viable means to observe what DuBois calls a native hermeneutic in as much as I, as the scholar, observe this discourse without intervention. In my approach to the material I have sought to apply a “way of reading” that Foley calls “Immanent Art [which] seeks to open up traditional referentiality, to understand how the single instance resonates with implicit meaning” (Foley 2002, 117).

I aim to apply an interpretive focus to the mahlas, it being understood as fundamentally an oral traditional element defined as such by its ubiquity in the deyiş form and being an apparent acknowledgement of authorship transmitted orally within the text itself. I have approached the mahlas not constrained by understanding it merely as a formulaic entity or prosaic signature – though it may be that too – but as a textual integer encapsulating the vitality of Alevi expressive culture. While ‘text’ may be understood as a primary focus of my thesis, literally in the texts of the deyiş

\[6\] On native hermeneutics see DuBois (1996; 2006). DuBois’s typology of native hermeneutics is heuristic, as the researcher attends to and appreciates the norms of the community and, particularly, the “communal modes of interpreting traditional genres such as the lyric” (DuBois 1996, 263).
and interpretively in the entextualisation of performances and process of translation, the proposition of the mahlas as a textual integer with immanent meaning, directs us to the fundamental orality of the *deyiş* and, consequentially, that meaning manifests in the oral, performative and expressive context. As Foley (1991a, 7) explains:

> Traditional elements reach out of the immediate instance in which they appear to the fecund totality of the entire tradition, defined synchronically and diachronically, and they bear meanings as wide and deep as the tradition they encode. The ‘how’ of the traditional idiom, while overlapping at some points with the ‘how’ of the literary text, also – and crucially – includes an extratextual dimension uniquely the domain of oral traditional art. This idiom is liberating rather than imprisoning, centrifugal rather than centripetal, explosively connotative rather than claustrophobically clichéd.

While taking an approach that recognises the *deyiş* form and mahlas integer as fundamentally an oral tradition, I do not make claims to being exhaustive in my consideration of the vast body of traditional Alevi lyric, or even those of Pir Sultan Abdal; rather, I have sought to reveal interpretive possibilites, as DuBois (2006, 5) states by “allowing particular moments and examples to come into focus as evocative of greater wholes”. DuBois in his approach to the lyric of the oral traditions of Northern Europe seeks to centre the interpretive act as one that is “governed by traditions associated with the lyric songs themselves” (DuBois 2006, 243) and his approach tries to “provide a glimpse of the richly nuanced and effective repertoire of interpretive strategies that communities recognize, assert, and maintain alongside the songs they perform” (DuBois 2006, 5). This approach remains interpretive, and essentially an etic perspective, but it seeks to derive interpretive meaning – or
interpretive access – as far as possible from the ‘native hermeneutics’ of the subject tradition.

I have also been influenced in my interpretive method by DuBois’s typology of interpretive strategies, particularly in respect to the associative axis of attribution in which “a song becomes meaningful by association with a composer or performer connected with the song, or narrative character mentioned in the song’s text” (DuBois 2006, 3). DuBois sees “the act of attribution and the audience’s recourse to it as an interpretive strategy that marks this traditional response to a lyric” (DuBois 1996, 255). Indeed the mahlas tradition suggests itself as a richly worked example of such an interpretive strategy and, sui generis, a revelatory native hermeneutic.

In exploring the expressive aspects of Alevi deyiş I have made use of a large collection of commercial audio cassette and compact disc recordings mostly produced in Turkey and collected both in Australia and in Turkey since the mid-1980s. From the mid-1990s Kalan Müzik in particular has produced many valuable ‘archive series’ – arşiv serisi – editions of historic recordings on CD which has made early commercial and some source recordings available. For the same reasons that the many published texts expressing Alevi perspectives represent primary research materials and the evidence of native hermeneutics, these recordings, particularly as a corpus, represent a significant expression of Alevi cultural engagement with a wider community as well as with itself.

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7 See DuBois (DuBois 1996) for a discussion of native hermeneutics.
8 Only those recordings I have specifically cited are included in the discography (audio-visual materials cited) though many others have informed my understanding.
While location fieldwork was not the primary methodology for this study, I made two specific field trips to Turkey in 2002 and 2007 during which I made audio recordings of performances at the Pir Sultan Abdal Etkinlileri (Festivities) in the village of Banaz near Sivas in eastern Turkey. Other recordings of performances were made in 2002 in Ankara and Istanbul at Alevi commemorative events. In addition, I have made use of field notes and some recordings of generally informal communications with performers and researchers including Dertli Divani, Arif Sağ, Mehmet Özbek, Neşe Ayışıt Onatça and İsmail Onarlı.

My method in undertaking this study has also involved participant observation. This was centred on my learning of and performing with the bağlama and my informal and social association with an Alevi family living in Canberra, Australia. My experience with the bağlama was initially (and has remained for the most part) self-taught, learning from recordings and bağlama methods. However, in the late 1980s I took a small number of lessons with Sabahattin Akdağcık a former professional musician and arranger in Turkey who had worked with performers such Esin Engin, Zeki Müren and Bülent Ersoy and who was then living in Sydney, Australia. Although originally from Tarsus, he had studied in Erzurum, had known or worked with significant Alevi performers and aşık-s such as Ali İzzet Özkan and Arif Sağ; and was generally very knowledgeable and accomplished in the performance of both folk and classical forms of Turkish music. Later in the 1990s I met, took lessons from and played regularly with Eyyüp Aydoğmuş (Bevan) an Alevi from Divriği. Eyyüp was not a professional musician but is an accomplished and knowledgeable singer and bağlama player. For a number of years while he and his family lived in

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A number of other short trips to Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s travelling widely in Anatolia, while not specifically related to my research, may also be noted in providing the basis for my understanding of Turkish and familiarity with Turkish culture more generally.
Canberra we met weekly to play music, talk and socialise and it was from Eyyup and his wife Nargiz (a Kurdish Alevi whose family is from Tunceli and who is also a fine expressive singer) that I learned much about Alevi culture and music. We performed a number of times together at festivals and concerts and through Eyyup I was also able to attend and participate in a number of cem-s (Alevi ritual services) in Sydney, Melbourne and Mildura. Eyyup performed the service of zakir for these cem-s and on two occasions I was invited to participate in the services performing on bağlama.

As background material, I have also made use of numerous video tapes of performances recorded from live events and television programs of musical performances, cem rituals and interviews. Notable among which is a video recording of the Bin Yılın Türküsü events staged in Cologne in 2000 and widely disseminated on video (including in Australia) in the 1990s. These materials, like many of the cassette tapes were purchased from Turkish video rental stores during the 1980s and 1990s although some of this material has appeared more recently on the Internet. In the course of researching and writing this thesis the World Wide Web emerged as the pre-eminent medium for social expression. In fundamental respects the Internet and Web has made this thesis possible by providing remote access to research materials, the discovery (and purchase) of Turkish published resources and recordings while living at the other side of the world; as well as enabling communication with scholars and acquaintances through email. However, the expression of Alevi culture on the Web has not been a focus of this study although services such as YouTube and forums sharing out-of-print recordings have provided the only access to some valuable research materials.
1.6 Survey of relevant literature

The scope of this thesis has necessitated a broad reading approach to literature in a range of disciplines including ethnomusicology, folklore, literature, history, sociology and anthropology. In order to understand the historical, socio-political and cultural contexts in which this study is situated I have consulted works covering kızılbaş history – particularly Ottoman and Safavid history of the sixteenth century – and Alevilik (Alevi-ism) more generally. My reading in these areas relies heavily, though not exclusively, on English language texts which are referenced in the bibliography. In respect to scholarly studies of Alevis and Alevilik it should be noted that since the late 1990s publications have appeared in English which, although relatively small in number, cover a broad and diverse number of perspectives.

Clarke (1999) provides the most accessible overview of history, beliefs and issues and offers a good summation of Turkish views and also benefits from her scholarly interest in dede lineage and expressive culture. Shankland (2003a; 1999) brings an anthropological perspective and is particularly good on details of ritual in the Anatolian context. Until Shankland’s work there has been a heavy reliance on work of Birge (1994) originally published in the late 1930s which, although still extremely valuable in its rich detail, is derived from the Bektaşi tradition of European Turkey and the Balkans. The collections of essays edited by Olsson (1998), White and Jongerden (2003) and Markussen (2005a) provide a broad coverage of issues particularly in respect to the expression of Alevi identity including, in White and Jongerden, Kurdish Alevi identity. Sökefeld (2008) focuses on the significant phenomenon of the influence of Alevis in ‘transnational space’, specifically in Germany and their relationship to movements asserting Alevi identity. The small publication by Yaman and Erdemir (2006) is particularly valuable as a work written
by Alevis associated with one of the most prominent Alevi organisations in Turkey. Şener’s (2009) book, although poorly translated, provides an additional Alevi perspective from a prominent writer and commentator on Alevi issues.

I will focus this survey of relevant literature, then, on those areas that relate to the central concerns of this study, namely:

1. Pir Sultan Abdal – particularly as encountered as an identity encoded in the text of publications presenting his putative life and art;
2. The deyiş – a traditional lyric form as the primary mode of Alevi expression;
3. The mahlas – the (self) naming convention employed in the lyric songs as the key textual integer; and,
4. Alevi expressive culture – specifically Alevi music (song) as the means of interpretation.

### 1.6.1 Pir Sultan Abdal

A substantial literature in respect to Pir Sultan Abdal has appeared since the second decade of the twentieth century and the founding of the Turkish Republic. The major part of this consists of collections of lyric texts with additional material concerning his putative and legendary life and the form and content of the lyric poems attributed to him. The significant early works include the short essay by Köprülü published under the name Mehmed Fuad in Ottoman script in the Hayat Mecmuası in 1928 and republished in a Latin script translation in Ulucay (1997) and particularly the 1929 monograph by Sadettin Nüzhet (Ergun 1929) which is the first substantial work, including 105 lyrics, devoted to Pir Sultan Abdal. These works establish at the outset the focus of much of the literature to follow including the matter of mahlas

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10 Citation of the works by Mehmed Fuad and Sadettin Nühzet generally use the surnames they later adopted, Köprülü and Ergun, though these do not appear on the original publications.
attribution being confused, particularly with Hatayı (Shah Ismail); his identity as a kızılbaş Alevi; and an interest in his historical identity and that of his nemesis Hızır Paşa. Also particularly useful is Besim Atalay’s work *Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı* published originally in Ottoman script in 1340 in the Ottoman calendar (1924 CE) (Atalay 1340 (1924)) which includes a number of Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş and many others. This work was subsequently published in a Latin script translation by V. Atila (Atalay 1991). Access to both these edition has allowed me to check transcription issues and note the conventions of presenting the mahlas in Ottoman script. Both Köprülü and Ergun acknowledge an earlier publication by Derviş Ruhullah titled *Bektaşi nefesleri* (published in the same Ottoman calendar year as Köprülü’s article) that included a small number of Pir Sultan lyrics, however I have not been able to consult a copy of this work.

Arguably the most significant work to date and the one on which I have relied most heavily is that of Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943; 1991). This publication is particularly interesting and useful as it combined the work and approaches of two major scholars, one the literary historian Gölpınarlı and the other the pioneering Turkish folklorist Boratav. Gölpınarlı provides considerable historical and literary context, particularly in respect to mystical traditions, and knowledge of manuscript sources, cönk and mecmua. Notable is the inclusion of three of the earliest lyrics recorded as being attributed to Pir Sultan from an early seventeenth century manuscript copy of the *Menâkıbu ’l-esrar behcetü ’l-ahrâr* (a book of Alevi principles and conduct attributed to Bisatî, originally compiled in the late sixteenth century) though Gölpınarlı unfortunately never published this manuscript itself and he only

11 On the important place of Boratav in the history of the study of Turkish folklore see Öztürkmen (2005; 1992) and Birkalen (2004).
gives sketchy details about its provenance. In this respect Ahmet Taşgın’s edition of the *Menâkıb* of Bisatî is useful as it is based on a different manuscript than that in the possession of Gölpınarlı and includes different lyrics attributed to Pir Sultan. Taşgın’s edition also includes a facsimile of the original manuscript although this is poorly reproduced in the published work. The 1943 publication by Gölpınarlı and Boratav considerably expanded the information available particularly because of the contribution of Boratav who undertook field work in the Sivas region, including Pir Sultan Abdal’s village of Banaz, collecting legends and *deyiş*, thus introducing the first folkloric research in respect to Pir Sultan. I have relied on Gölpınarlı and Boratav’s work because it is the earliest publication that brings together lyrics from manuscript, publication and folklore sources and it is also one of the few collections to identify the source of the lyrics, if only in very modest detail. The expanded edition of their book, published in 1991, includes additional texts that had appeared in other publications since the 1943 edition.

Cahit Öztelli’s (1971) work significantly expanded the collection of texts available and also included twenty-five notated musical examples. Many of these additional texts (and the music) were from Vahid Lütfi Salcı (Vahid Dede) a renowned Bektaşi and musician from the European territory of Turkey. Öztelli produced many collections of folk lyrics of which, besides his work on Pir Sultan Abdal, most notable and useful are *Bektaşi gülleri* (Öztelli 1971), *Uyan Padişahım* (1976), *Evlerinin önü* (Öztelli 2002) and, most importantly, *Pir Sultan’ın dostları* (Öztelli 1996) one of the few substantial works concerning the life and work of Pir Sultan’s disciple (murid) Kul Himmet.

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12 It should be noted that Ergun (1929) included six notated examples in his collection.
13 See Yaprak (2003) for detail about the life and work of Vahid Dede.
The work of the Sivas folklore scholar İbrahim Aslanoğlu’s looms large in this thesis owing to the influence his work in seeking to identify and organise the historical identities of the major Alevi poets – Hatayi, Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Himmet. Most significant is his publication Pir Sultan Abdallar (Aslanoğlu 1984) in which he proposes six separate identities, ranging over a number of centuries, for the poets to which the lyrics of Pir Sultan are attributed. These poets are largely, though not soley, identified and organised on the basis of their mahlas: Pir Sultan, Pir Sultan Abdal, Pir Sultan’ım Haydar, Pir Sultan Abdal (Halil İbrahim), Abdal Pir Sultan and Pir Sultan Abdal (a poet writing in the weighted aruz metre rather than syllabic, hece, metre). Similarly his work distinguishing the identities of Kul Himmet and Kul Himmet Üstadm has been influential and widely adopted. The late literary historian and scholar Asım Bezirci (1994) was a particularly strong advocate of Aslanoğlu’s idea of the multiple Pir Sultan Abdals and the assertion that the original (asıl) identity was one using the mahlas Pir Sultan, not Pir Sultan Abdal. Bezirci in fact proposes eight Pir Sultan Abdallar including four using the mahlas Pir Sultan Abdal and two using the mahlas Pir Sultan. I have found Bezirci’s work, however, most useful in his discussion and analysis of the form of the lyrics, as is the work of Haydar Kaya (1999).

While the work of Aslanoğlu and Bezirci has sought to uncover identities or distinguish identifiable voices among the body of lyrics attributed Pir Sultan Abdal other scholars assert the primary importance of the transmission process of the oral tradition and the concept of a ‘Pir Sultan Abdal tradition’ (Pir Sultan Abdal geleneği), most notable being the prominent folklorist İlhan Başgöz in his essay

The most dedicated Pir Sultan Abdal scholar in recent times is Ali Haydar Avcı who has produced a number of substantial works (Avcı 2003; Avcı 2004), particularly in respect to issues of identity, culminating in his monumental publication of 878 pages titled *Osmanlı gizi tarihinde Pir Sultan Abdal ve bütün deyişleri* (Pir Sultan Abdal in the hidden history of the Ottomans and his complete deyiş) (Avcı 2006) that follows the format of introductory material concerned with the life and work of Pir Sultan Abdal followed by the most substantial collection of lyrics to date, some 410 texts. Avcı’s work is the most thorough in examining Pir Sultan in the historical context as well as issues to do with identity. Mention should also be made of the small collection published by the literary scholar Memet Fuat (Fuat 1977, 1999). The modest dimensions of the collection belie its size by offering a fine representative collection of deyiş and includes a particularly useful gloss accompanying the lyric texts. The works of Tahir Kutsi Makal (1977; 1999) have also been very useful since they incorporate information derived from a visit to Banaz in the late 1970s in which his principal informant was the late Banaz aşık Nuri Kılıç (who used the mahlas Deryant) 14.

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14 David Grabias’s film *Asıklar: those who are in love* includes rare video footage of Aşık Nuri (Grabias 1996) and the associated soundtrack CD includes three recordings of Nuri singing Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş (Various 1999). When I visited Banaz in 2002 Nuri’s brother Salih allowed me to copy a recording of Aşık Nuri made in the village, probably shortly before his death. I was assisted in my visit to Banaz by ‘Kızılbaş’ Mehmet Aslan, a Banazlı now living of Australia, who was a contemporary and school friend of Nuri Kılıç.
Despite the considerable literature surrounding Pir Sultan Abdal in Turkish, even allowing for the repetitive nature of a sizeable amount of it, there has been little scholarly interest in English. Indeed there has been little interest in Turkish folk literature generally. Başgöz who has written over a long period in both Turkish and English has produced the most substantial literature in English regarding Turkish folk culture, however his focus is primarily the minstrel ‘romance’ or cantefable tradition, hikaye, of eastern Turkey (Kars and Erzurum).\textsuperscript{15} Other scholars such as Eberhard (1955), Moyle (1990) and Erdener (1995) have followed a similar interest. Literary historian and critic Talat Halman has edited useful collections of essays, including his own, in regard to the major Turkish mystical folk poet Yunus Emre (Halman 1972, 1981) and other collections of works on Yunus Emre have also appeared in English the most scholarly being the translations of Grace Martin Smith (1993) providing literary, linguistic and historical background material. A small volume of English translations of lyrics by the seventeenth century \textit{aşık} Karacaoğlan appeared as part of Indiana University’s Turkish Studies series (Karabaş and Yarnall 1996) and Jennifer Ferraro in collaboration with the Turkish-American musician Latif Bolat produced another small but welcome collection of translations of Alevi-Bektaşi lyrics including two Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics (Ferraro and Bolat 2007).

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century no collection of Pir Sultan Abdal \textit{deyiş} has appeared in English translation and, indeed, the first substantial collection to be published anywhere in translation is that by Jean-Louis Mattei of 100 lyrics translated into French (Mattei 2010).

\textsuperscript{15} A collection of Başgöz’s articles published over five decades was edited by Kemal Silay (1998) and his most recent work is a monograph on the hikâye folk romance tradition (Başgöz 2008).
1.6.2 Deyiş

There is scant literature on the deyiş as a lyric or musical form. This is due in part to the issue of terminology and definition. While it is generally understood what the deyiş is – a type of lyric song associated with the folk poets (aşık-s) and most commonly understood has having mystical or ‘Alevi’ themes – sufficient attention has not been given to the way the deyiş is perceived, conceptualised or used. The Alevi-Bektaşi nefes, which in certain respects – though not all – can be considered synonymous with the deyiş does broaden the scope of the literature. Many works touch on or define the deyiş particularly as a lyric form, but the only substantial work that considers the deyiş from both its textual and musical perspectives is that of Duygulu (1997). Duygulu identifies the deyiş as a distinct genre but one that must be thought of in broad terms especially in respect to subject matter. The work of scholars focusing more broadly on other aspects of Alevi expressive culture have established the distinction of the deyiş as a thematic and functional genre and the various writings of Markoff, Birdoğan, Clarke and Onatça are particularly useful in this respect.

1.6.3 Mahlas

While the literature gives prominence to the collecting and organising of Alevi (deyiş or nefes) texts as well as their thematic concerns, as in the case of Pir Sultan Abdal, the principle upon which such work is based and its structural elements has received little attention. The mahlas, specifically, has not been systematically studied to any significant degree in respect to its use in the Turkish folk tradition which is somewhat remarkable given its ubiquity in the work of the Turkish folk poets (halk
şairleri, saz şairleri or aşıklar). The most cited study is the relatively brief article by Şükrü Elçin (1997a). Doğan Kaya also provides a useful study, particular in respect to the forms of the mahlas based on his researches of the mahlas taking tradition in the Sivas region. Works devoted to particular aşık-s or anthology collections in some cases provide information in the form of anecdotes and legends about how mahlas have been adopted or assigned16. What interest there is in the literature is largely concerned with stories of how a mahlas was taken or issues of lyric attribution where a lyric may be attributed to one poet’s mahlas in one source and to another in another source. Even in the influential work of İbrahim Aslanoğlu in regards to identifying multiple Pir Sultans, where the mahlas is implicitly the central issue, there is no analysis of the function of the mahlas in the deyiş, rather the concern is that of establishing and categorising specific identities by associating the form of the mahlas with other textual referents.

What interest there has been in the mahlas has centred on the Ottoman poetic tradition. The only published monographs on the mahlas in Turkish, the works by Yıldırım (2006), Çalık (1999) and Semih (1993) are largely constituted of lists of mahlaslar although Yıldırım certainly tries to more broadly contextualise but relies on Elçin in respect to the mahlas in folk tradition. Despite the fact that much of the literature in respect to Turkish folk literature is organised around the attribution provided by the mahlas, the literature reveals little systematic interest in how the mahlas functions, how it means or how it is used beyond the identification of issues of dubious or confused attribution.

16 See for example Atılgan (1992) and Aslanoğlu (1985).
Outside the Turkish tradition there is only slightly more interest in related self-naming conventions and these focus on classical and high traditions. Meisami (1990; 2003) and particularly Losensky (1998a; 1998b) consider the function of the mahlas in the Persian tradition and Andrews (1985) touches on its function respect to the Ottoman divan literature. Arberry’s (1946) paper discussing the poetry of the Persian Hafiz is significant in conceptualising the mahlas as a metaphorical ‘clasp’ closing a polythematic poem. The works of Rosenberg (2004) who discusses the role of signature bearing terminal part stanzas, the envoi, in Medieval French trouvère song and Kimmelman (1999) who sees a nascent modern literary identity in the self identification of troubadours such as Marcabru, provide useful perspectives from another tradition in the process of transition from an oral to written (textual) culture.

While my study does not venture into the comparative study of self-naming conventions and authorial auto-citation the contrasting perspectives from these (high) traditions has helped to inform my approach and settle on my framing of the function of the mahlas as less of a rhetorical literary device than a traditional textual integer.

1.6.4 Alevi music

Given the extensive literature concerning Alevilik that has emerged since the 1980s and the generally accepted and stated significance of aşık-s, the centrality of ritual and the oral transmission of Alevi culture through song forms, it is perhaps surprising that Alevi music, so defined, has received relatively little attention. Gloria Clarke writing in the late 1990s notes that “one cannot say that Alevi or even Turkish is a well-studied sound” (Clarke 1999, 140). There is, as Clarke also observes, no shortage of material since there has been significant work undertaken in collecting and preserving the music. In part the paucity of interest may be due to the difficulties
in describing Alevi music as a distinct genre (Clarke 1999, 144). It is notable that the semah, as a genre, has received the most interest, due to its specific ritual function, its broader expressive qualities including dance, and distinct musical characteristics such as rhythmic changes. A number of substantial works on semah have been published which include some consideration of musical aspects including notated examples and indications of rhythm and tempo, form, texts sung as well as the context of performance (Salcı 1941; Erseven 2001; Bozkurt 1995; Dinçal 1997; Markoff 1994a). A major work based on a masters degree study by a member of the Ankara Devlet Türk Halk Müziği Korusu (Ankara State Turkish Folk Music Choir) analysing the musical aspects of fourteen regional examples of the kırklar semahi appeared in publication in 2007 (Onatça 2007). Other musical forms associated with Alevi ritual practice, most notably the central and fundamental expression of Alevi belief the duaz-t imam, have not received the interest given to the semah; and Ahmet Yürür’s analysis of the miraçlama from structural and gnostic perspectives is a rare study demonstrating how the significance of structural elements in Alevi music point to evidence of intrinsic values of the cultural community (Yürür 1989).

Interest in describing musical characteristics of Alevi music date back to the 1930s with the work of Vahid Lütfü Salcı (Vahid Dede) coalescing in his two short monographs published in the early 1940s (Salcı 1940, 1941). Salcı’s work sparked the interest of the French scholar Eugene Borrel who published two substantial articles on Alevi music in French during this period (Borrel 1934, 1947). Salcı highlights the ‘secret’ nature of Alevi music (and also its susceptibility to corrupting effects from outside Western influences in the cities) which has largely to do with the nature of the texts; and while the music is contiguous with ‘open’ folk music he
suggests there are identifiable differences in musical style and manner of playing (Salcı 1940). Later writers specifically referring to Alevi music have generally characterised it based on the textual content as demonstrating two sides, one constituted of religious elements the other of social, civil or other subjects not specifically related to ritual practice (Odabaş 2001; Birdoğan 1995; Zelyut 1998). More substantial is the work of Duygulu noted above who provides a broader perspective on Alevi music including consideration of musical structure in respect to the deyiş more generally (Duygulu 1997).

Given the wider interest in issues of Alevi identity it is perhaps not surprising that ethnomusicological interest has also concentrated on music in respect to the expression of Alevi identity and society, although in the case of researchers like Markoff (1986a; 2002b; 1986b) and Clarke (1999; 2001) this also includes an interest in the characteristics of musical sound, organology and expressive culture; while Poyraz’s (2007) monograph looks at political and economic aspects of Alevi music culture. A principal informant for Poyraz’s work is the prominent virtuoso Alevi musician Arif Sağ and two books of interviews with Sağ (1993; 2004) also provide some of the most useful insights into the expression of Alevi music.

Markoff, herself a former bağlama student of Sağ, remains the most prominent scholar of Alevi expressive culture writing in English and her work is particularly resonant in my study, not the least because she conducted her original fieldwork and research on the performance practice of Turkish bağlama specialists in the early 1980s, a period of significant emerging public expression of Alevi music. While Markoff’s thesis considered the specialist bağlama performer more broadly in
Turkish musical culture, the timing of her research and the fact that many of her informants were among the most prominent and renowned Alevi musicians of the late twentieth century make her scholarly contributions in respect to Alevi music particularly valuable.
2. ENCOUNTERS: PIR SULTAN ABDAL, KUL HİMMET AND THE MAHLAS PERSONA IN HISTORY, LEGEND AND TEXT

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I propose an encounter with two of the pre-eminent figures of Alevi oral culture: Pir Sultan Abdal, variously described as poet, minstrel, bard, rebel, saint and martyr; and Kul Himmet, Pir Sultan’s mürid (disciple) and the youngest of the seven great bards of Alevi tradition. My intention in establishing this encounter is to highlight the issue at the centre of my investigation: how the persona of the aşık in the Alevi tradition transmits meaning through presence of persona in the Alevi lyric song, the deyiş. Pir Sultan Abdal is arguably the most significant figure in Alevi oral tradition and as such presents an example that is in some respects unique. However, it is my contention that the example of Pir Sultan Abdal, in as much as it is extraordinary, reveals and highlights inherent processes, rather than obscures them, since the possibilities of meaning and interpretation of the tradition – the received texts and the legendary persona – are more fully developed, or at least expanded, in the case of his persona and the body of lyrics attributed to him.

The encounter I propose is in some respects fully formed as it is based on nearly eighty years of folkloric and literary research interest and publication in respect to Pir Sultan Abdal in Turkey. Moreover, this body of research and publication itself represents much turning over of the same ground with a focus on (possibly necessarily) limited questions in respect to a putative historical identity. For this reason I characterise this encounter, phenomenologically, as being a ‘pre-
understanding’ since it does not extend to the explication of the oral lyric form or interpretation of examples of the expressive culture which will be the focus of subsequent chapters. As Ricoeur states: “the most fundamental condition of the hermeneutical circle lies in the structure of pre-understanding which relates all explication to the understanding which precedes and supports it” (Ricoeur 1998, 108). In respect to Pir Sultan Abdal, as the exemplar of the Alevi lyric tradition, pre-understanding is necessarily directed towards an analysis of identity imagined through the collection and active construction of a ‘divan’ or authored body of texts that has engaged scholars and anthologists since the 1920s. The textual weight of the Alevi lyric, most particularly the body of work attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal, understandably and not inappropriately compels towards a “mediation by the text” by “expression fixed in writing” the feature of which, Ricoeur suggests, “is that the meaning contained therein is rendered autonomous with respect to the intention of the author” (Ricoeur 1998, 108). One of the possibilities of this mediation by the text is the potential reconstruction of a body of lyrics based on the internal and assumed attribution of authorship. This central purpose and theme of the many works on Pir Sultan Abdal and what I will refer to as the ‘textualisation’ of Pir Sultan Abdal is the point of encounter from which I determine the direction of this study through subsequent explications and interpretations.

Perhaps the most evident result of the textualisation of Pir Sultan Abdal is the determined, even laborious, attempts to establish or situate a historical identity for the author of the lyrics. It is not my intention in this chapter to engage definitively in the debates over the details of a proposed historical identity, by which I mean that I do not intend to analyse the available research with the purpose of establishing a
definitive position on the propositions in respect to the historical identity of Pir Sultan Abdal. While I will cover this territory – and it is an area that anyone interested in Pir Sultan Abdal will find themselves drawn into, engaging with, and no doubt forming opinions about – my purpose here is to establish and describe the necessarily limited scope of this research.

This chapter establishes a context against which the subsequent parts of my thesis can be read: these being my explications of the deyiş form and the mahlas convention; and my descriptions and analysis of aspects of popular Alevi expressive culture. Thus, I aim to demonstrate that even the textualisation – that is, the process of committing a canon of texts to an authorial identity – and study of Pir Sultan Abdal points us toward the fundamental orality of the subject and the central place of the Alevi lyric form, the deyiş, and its signifying element the mahlas self-naming convention. I also aim to demonstrate that the overt personalisation of the lyric texts in fact points to a social and communal function, rather than the objective of authorial individualism.

This chapter begins with a discussion of aspects of Alevilik (Alevi cultural identity) to establish a background to the cultural context from which Pir Sultan Abdal and the deyiş lyrics emerge. It is my purpose here to highlight relevant aspects of foundational beliefs, authority and transmission.

### 2.2 Alevilik (Alevi-ism)

In order to provide an essential cultural background to the introduction of Pir Sultan Abdal it is necessary to describe the relevant context of Alevilik. It is not my
objective to engage deeply in the issue of Alevi identity, nor its historiography. However, as a contribution to the study of Alevis examining the place of personal identity in the principal artistic and cultural expressive form of Alevi society, the deyiş, a position as to what is understood by Alevilik is clearly important. In part this may be semantic, though it is certainly not merely a semantic issue. My purpose is to highlight those aspects of Alevilik that significantly bear upon my thesis, not to provide a thorough summation of Alevi beliefs, ritual and culture that constitute Alevilik.

The literature on Alevilik in Turkish has, since the mid-1980s, amounted to a vast documentation of primary sources, commentary and scholarly analysis. As has been noted earlier, much of the writing on Alevilik in Turkish can be considered a primary source because much of the assertion and working through of Alevi identity in the public space has taken place through the publication of books, articles, interviews and other media documentation. The cultural story and historiography of Alevis and Alevilik is a complex one emanating from and sustained in oral tradition and rural communities on the one hand but engaged with and transformed through the migration to urban life and the social and political consequences and influences of such change. To add to this inherent complexity is the long-standing secrecy about Alevi culture and the suspicion with which Alevis have historically been considered by the majority orthodox Sunni Turks; and the relationship in respect to fundamental beliefs and shared cultural artefacts (specifically the traditional lyric tradition) with the urban Bektaşi tarikat. The dialectic of the processes of establishing, negotiating and asserting Alevi identity (Alevilik) has been supported by and generated by the prolific publications by Alevis and about Alevis from the mid-1980s onwards and for
the considerable literature produced remains a primary source for scholarship.

The designation Alevi (and, it follows, Alevilik) must be understood, in its current meaning, to be a historically constructed term. As Shankland notes, as a “blanket term … to refer to the heterodox groups of Anatolia as a whole” the term Alevi is recent, perhaps no more than a century old (Shankland 2003a, 19)17. Livni also stresses the historical construction of the use of the term and that the study of Alevilik “should be connected to the study of Turkish history, because Alevi identity is a product of the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic” (Livni 2002, 15). As Livni notes, historically the heterodox communities of Anatolia may be identified by terms such as kızılbaş, fesatçı (plotter, intriguer) or rafizi (heretic) (Livni 2002, 10). The term Alevi is less common and rarely found in the historical documentation. In the record of the mühimme defteri18 those who might now be understood as Anatolian or Türkmen Alevi were referred to by a multitude of characterisations which Şener lists as: rafizi, kızılbaş, ışık taifesı (dervish crew), seyitler, zındıklar (misbelievers), mühlitler (transgressors, heretics), kafirler (infidels), ehli-sünnet el cematten olmayanlar (those who are not Sunni Muslims), şarap içenler (wine drinkers), halife (followers), müfsit (mischief maker), cuma namazına gitmeyenler (those who do not go to Friday prayer), ehli sünnete haraket edenler (those acting against Sunni Muslims), eşkiyalar (bandits, brigands), hırsızlar (robbers) et al. (Şener 2002, 12). In other words, those who are now understood as

17 Shankland cites Irene Melikoff as supporting this view. In referring to the term used for this general identification being no more than a century old he places its adoption to the early part of the twentieth century. See also Melikoff (1993, 26) and Clarke (1999, 10, 14).

18 Ottoman official records of “significant issues” dating from the sixteenth century.
Alevi or proto-Alevi, during the formative sixteenth century, may be understood as representing a broad category of antinomian and anti-state activities.

This is not to question nor diminish the reality of Alevi identity – Livni while critical of the projection backwards of an Alevi identity agrees there is “an Alevi society and religion in modern Turkey” (Livni 2002, 5) – but rather to understand that the expression of ‘Alevi’ identity represents a coalescing of heterodox Anatolian communal identity as a public expression of shared essential defining characteristics, particularly in respect to the perception and acceptance of opposition to the state and religious orthodoxy and the consequent subjection to suppression and oppression.

Yaman and Erdemir see the kızılbaş as the ancestors of Alevis and Bektaşi-s and that the name kızılbaş was abandoned for Alevi to overcome the pejorative meaning it gained in the Ottoman era. They also see little essential difference between Alevis and Bektaşi-s, the main difference being in the social organisation – Alevi as migratory or semi-migratory and Bektaşi-s as urban – and while there are “some formal differences in some religious rites and practices” they are “in unity … in regards to their faith and moral principles and literature” (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 6).

The use of the term Alevi is of historical interest and a matter of importance to the expression of identity by contemporary Alevis. İsmail Kaygusuz argues passionately in defence of the historical use of the name Alevi before the nineteenth century citing as one of his principal pieces of evidence a lyric attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal (Kaygusuz 1995, 101).19

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19 Clarke summarises Kaygusuz’s dispute with the Irene Melikoff over the term Alevi. As Clarke points out, the significant question behind such dispute, and why this questions require further
Pir Sultan çağırır Hint’té Yemen’de  
Dolaştırsam seni Sahib – zamanda  
İradeet getirdim ikrar imanda  
Hüseyni’yim, Alevi’yim ne dersin  
(Öztelli 1971, 189)

Pir Sultan cries out in India in Yemen  
If I cause you to wander Mehdi master of time  
I brought the command of the pledge in belief  
I am Husayn, I am Alevi, say what you will  

This text is the mahlas verse of a duaz-i imam (invocation in praise of the Twelve Imams of Shi’a tradition) and offers no evidence of dating this to the sixteenth century, or even attributing it to Pir Sultan with any certainty, although the duaz-i imam is a foundational Alevi lyric form. The text does not appear in the earliest collections of Atalay (1991), Ergun (1929) and Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943). A lyric resembling this and attributed to Kul Himmet has a slightly different refrain: Hüseyniyiz mevaliyiz, ne dersin (We are Hüseyin we are the Master, say what you will) (Öztelli 1996, 119-120). All of which proves little except that the lyric in this form being attributed to two of the major poets of the sixteenth century clearly accommodates a degree of interpretation with only one version expressing the designation Alevi explicitly. More convincing of at least the existence of the term in this early period is another lyric of Kul Himmet that Gölpınarlı records from a manuscript in his possession of the Menâkıbu’l-esrâr behcetü’l-ahrâr (that is the research, is whether the term Alevi, as Melikoff asserts, has been historically used only for those who are actually descendents of Ali, or whether it also encompasses the supporters of Ali (Clarke 1999, 14-15). The common, functional and widespread use and acceptance of the designation Alevi in the early twenty-first century for the heterodox community in Turkey would seem to leave dispute over the intrinsic meaning of the term as a largely matter of academic interest however.

20 The full text and translation is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.19.  
21 The duaz-i imam will be discussed in more detail in the Experiences chapter below.
bütük buyruk, the ‘great’ book of beliefs and ritual) of Bisâti (Gölpınarlı 1963, 32-33):

*Cümlle bir mürşide demişler belî*
*Tebihleri Allah Muhammed Alî*
*Meşrebi Hüseynî ismi Alevî*
*Muhammed Alî’ye çıkar yolları*

 Altogether they say yes to the guide,
 Their prayer beads [repeat] Allah, Muhammad, Ali,
 Their affiliation is Hüseyni, their name is Alevi,
 Their way leads to Muhammad Ali
 (Translation from Dressler (2007, 93)).

As Dressler notes, such examples are at best rare and hardly signify anything other than veneration of Ali and claims of Alid pedigree (Dressler 2007, 93).

The usage and semantics of the term are rather a reflection of the historical and social processes. The politicisation of the Alevis (or proto-Alevis) in the sixteenth century emphasised the designation *kızılbaş* through association with the Safavid cause (Clarke 1999, 15). The designation of Alevi, whatever its historical currency, is best understood in contemporary terms as encompassing the fully charged gamut of social, political, historical, organisational, belief and ritual concepts, expressions and processes. In short, the very lives and identities of those who identify as Alevi in all their complexity.

This is in an important respect a broadening and generalising process; as Yaman and Erdemir state: “historical differences between Alevi and Bektaşî have started to lose
their meaning and the name ‘Alevi’ has been started (sic) to be used more commonly” (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 6). In settling on a designation that is inclusive of those groups with an essential commonality of belief, principles and literature the interpretive potential is enriched since broader experiences are brought into play around the foundational beliefs and perceptions of history.

In broadening the perception of what Alevilik can be or how it can be interpreted, there is also an impetus towards definition by distinction – it is perhaps easier to conceptualise Alevilik by what it is not. So the expression of Alevi identity can encompass assertions of an essentially Islamic identity, a heterodox or syncretistic belief system or a philosophical belief system that proposes the centrality of the ideal human. Yet all positions reject identification with orthodox, Sunni Islam. Şener for example asserts the place of Alevilik in Islamic tradition, though distinct from Sunni Islam, defining it as “an original interpretation of Islam that defends the uniqueness of God, being Prophet of Muhammad and being holy of Caliph Ali. It is very different from Sunni’s interpretations” (Şener 2009, 15). As Shindeldecker summaries in his short publication on Alevis produced for the Şahkulu Sultan Külliyesi Vakfı, it is impossible to give a brief and simple definition of Alevilik or indeed any other faith. In respect to Alevis, as for other faiths, there are “a variety of interpretations and a spectrum of attitudes: traditionalist, fundamentalist, conservative, nominal and liberal” (Shindeldecker 1998, 59). Alevis live and engage in the modern urban and transnational world and can no longer been seen as merely a rural culture. Alevilik is therefore necessarily interpreted within the complexity and

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22 Clarke’s discussion of the definition of ‘Alevi’ and ‘Alevism’, surveying the literature of the 1980s and 1990s highlights the range of categorisations by which Alevi identity can be understood (Clarke 1999, 9-36).

23 An Alevi dergah complex and foundation in Istanbul.
plurality of modern circumstance and life if it is to provide a relevant structure for contemporary Alevis. The inherent esoteric characteristic of Alevilik provides for the capacity for wide interpretation but to remain within the ambit of what is accepted as Alevilik this necessarily depends on an engagement with the foundational and fundamental beliefs, symbols and authority structures.

2.2.1 Foundational beliefs

As Dressler (2007, 106) states in regards to beliefs and practices:

The religious worldview of Alevism is based on a bâṭini interpretation of Islam stressing the inner meaning of religion ... Alevīs play down both the literal meaning of the Qur’an as well as the practical religious duties of mainstream Islam.

Or, as Yaman and Erdemir (2006, 43) write:

Alevi faith depends on the beliefs, institutions, and practices that are shaped around the love of God-Muhammad-Ali (Hak-Muhammad-Ali). This understanding of faith and worship has its own distinctive aspects. The basis of this understanding depends on its acceptance of the essence as the foundation, rather than the form, and on its opposition to formalism. Although there are formal practices and worship in Alevism, what is essential is not the form and apparent meanings (zâhir, exoteric), but the essence and hidden meanings (bâṭın, esoteric).

The bases of faith and ritual, worship and practice are directed towards this ‘essence’ or esoteric experiences that ultimately “give shape to the ideal person”, the insan-ı
kâmil, the mature human being which evokes relative concepts “to die before death’ and “to be God with God” (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 44).

While Shi’a motifs abound and permeate the textual tradition, religious language, imagery and ritual these, as Dressler notes, reflect marginalised popular Shi’a narrative not orthodox Shi’a theology and include belief in the divinity of the Imam Ali. This dominance of Shi’a mythology is largely attributed to the Safavid influence during the formative sixteenth century and the subsequent buyruk texts (Dressler 2007, 109). Alongside the apotheosis of Ali, the foundational narrative for Alevis emerges from the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn (Turkish: Hüseyin) at Kerbela (Karbala) in 680 CE and establishes the “chain of suffering … emotively commemorated” (Dressler 2007, 109) in the ritual ceremony the cem expressed in form through the performance of the mersiye or Kerbela ağit as well as the invocations of Twelve Imams in the duaz-t imam.

Clarke (1999, 11) quoting and translating Dierl (1991, 34) summarises four foundational beliefs:

1. Theory that all existence comes from God (sîdîr teorisi)
2. Perfect human theory (kâmil insan teorisi)
3. Love for Ali (Âli aşkı)
4. Rejection of Muslim religious law (shariat) and the use of ancient Turkish social values in its place.

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24 A number of the marginalised, exaggerator, or religiously extreme sects covered by the term ghulat located in Iran, Syria and Turkey (including the kızılbaş-Alevi) are examined by Moosa who defines the cornerstone of their religious system as the apotheosis of Ali (Moosa 1988).
The foundational beliefs point in the direction of those aspects that bear most significantly on the expressive and interpretive potential inherent in Alevilik including one’s position in relation to the path to profound moral maturity. Specifically the focus on the perfection of the human through esoteric exploration inspires a commitment to a moral and exemplary life, a position in respect not only to God but to community and, indeed, the world more generally. This personal responsibility is summarised in the Alevi edep (rule): eline, diline, beline sahip ol (be the master of your hand, tongue and loin). In addition, the concept of the perfect human relates also to the love for Ali and the suffering of Husayn in which is founded the roots of lineage; and lineage establishes authority and the forces of communal inclusiveness and cohesion. To this is added the relegation of form to values. Ritual is important in maintaining the foundation of belief but is not the end in itself. Fundamental values demonstrated through lines of authority that strive for the purity of the person structured around ritual but rejecting of dogma – as specifically written tenets – provides a structured, focused and sustaining culture that also permits, and perhaps even requires, the impetus of interpretation and re-creation because of its basis in, and adherence to, orality. The rich tradition of Alevi lyric production from the sixteenth century until the present, which is altogether re-affirming, re-iterative and re-inventive is a demonstration of this.

2.2.2 Authority: ocakzade and dedelik

Traditional Alevi communities are connected and formed around hereditary, charismatic and hierarchical lineage and authority. In village society this can be complex and may determine relationships between villages with a dede having talips (followers) in a number of local villages (Shankland 2003b, 40). The dede obtains
authority from lineage that can be traced back to the household and descendents of
the Prophet – the ehlibeyt\(^{25}\) – that is Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn and
the imams descended of Imam Ali together constituting the Twelve Imams of Shi’a
tradition. For Alevi those who follow the ehlibeyt are of the true path (yol) and so
love of the ehlibeyt “constitutes the base of Alevism” (Yaman and Erdemir 2006,
46). As Clarke notes, while some ocak\(^{26}\) families even produce documents to prove
the lineage and the historicity of such claims are certainly doubted by scholars, it is
the belief in such truths that shapes behaviour (Clarke 1999, 89).

The hierarchical structure and relationship of ocak-s, dede-s and their followers can
be complicated and degrees of reputation and authority at variance (Dressler 2007,
114) a factor that may in fact serve to enhance the mysterious authority of the dede
lineage. Yaman and Erdemir (2006, 52-53) classify the Alevi religious leadership in
four categories:

1. Independent Ocazkade Dedes\(^{27}\),
2. Dedes/Babas/Vekil (representatives) affiliated with the Çelebis of Hacı
   Bektas,
3. Dikme Dedes/Babas commissioned by Ocazkade Dedes\(^{28}\),
4. Halifebabas\(^{29}\), Halife and Babas affiliated with the branch of Dede Baba.

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\(^{25}\) Ahl al-bayt.

\(^{26}\) Literally ‘hearth’, referring to the dede lineage.

\(^{27}\) Literally the son of an ocak family; that is, a dede. The ocazkade dede-s are assumed to be
descendants of the Prophet and are accordingly called seyyid (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 52).

\(^{28}\) Dressler (2007, 114) explains the dikme ocaks as “makeshift ocaks” arising from the historical
ability of dedes to designate representatives from among talip followers who would temporarily take
over some of the dede’s functions and that this position was then bequeathed to their offspring; but
these dikme ocaks lack the charismatic quality of the Alid pedigree.

\(^{29}\) Korkmaz (2005a, 306) defines the halifebaba as “tarikat mürşidinin dergâhtan uzak bölgelere
atadığı, halife aşamasında temsilci” (a representative with the rank of successor/assistant sent to
regions at a distance from the dervish lodge by the spiritual leader).
The function of the ocak-s is to maintain social structures at the community level and to maintain an independence in the face of marginalisation (Clarke 1999, 92-93); and the conviction of lineage sustains a genealogy of inherent authority and community order and leadership in the person of the dede or his delegates.

Clarke (2001, 18) quoting Ali Yaman, summarises the essential requirements of the ocakzade dede as being:

1. Descended from the Prophet (ocakzade);
2. Able to teach, train and discipline;
3. Knowledgeable and in character able to be an example to others;
4. Able to conform to the essentials of both the written decrees (buyrukla) and established Alevi traditions.

Yaman and Erdemir (2006, 53) lists the functions of the dedes and babas as:

1. They guide the community in social and religious issues, and serve as a model for the community with their life style;
2. They enlighten and inform the community;
3. They maintain unity and solidarity;
4. They lead the social and religious ceremonies (cem, funeral, wedding etc.);
5. They maintain social justice and punish criminals through the institution of düskün (excommunication);
6. They practice and transfer Alevi faith and customs;
7. People, who have health, moral or financial problems have recourse to them to benefit from their holy powers.

In traditional village society the ocakzade dede-s have a primary responsibility for “the conducting of rites and thus of preserving and transmitting the culture” (Clarke
A responsibility of the dede is to enlighten (*aydınılatma*) according to the Alevi (Bektaşi) way and as Shankland notes, this embraces a spiritual and temporal authority: “only dede are permitted to pronounce Alevi prayers or lead Alevi ceremonies and, within the overall framework of the religious ideology, they are given authority to mediate in disputes” (Shankland 2003b, 40). Scholars have pointed to the weakening of the institution of spiritual leadership (dedelik) after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, not simply because of the closure of the tarikat-s in 1925 but more particularly because of the socio-economic changes especially the mass migration from rural to urban centres and developments in educational institutions and mass-media, in effect disrupting the Alevi community and the dede-talip relationship (Clarke 1999, 125-126; Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 53).

The asserted and accepted authority of lineage and charismatic warrant and persona is fundamental to understanding Alevi society and culture. Its importance in respect to the continuity and coherence of Alevilik suggests that as social circumstances change and traditional structures are weakened or changed, either Alevi society must be weakened or changed or will find new ways to sustain, assert and utilise the sub-structures of lineage, authority and charisma. However, it is in a further essential characteristic of Alevilik, the expressive culture of the poet-singer (*aşık*), that the potential appears for sustained nodes and pathways of authority and expressions of identity in a modern, networked, media dense and transnational society.
2.2.3 Transmission: Alevi aşık-s

The transmission of Alevi belief and the expression of identity has, at least until the late twentieth century, depended upon the continuity of practice of ritual and the leadership and lineage of the dede-s and the institution and products of the ‘bard’ or ‘poet-minstrel’, known variously as aşık, zakir or ozan. Essentially these vehicles of transmission are that of an oral culture although written documents do form a part. Most important in this respect are the buyruk-s (literally, ‘decrees’) or religious manuscripts “regarded as guides of the principles of the Alevi faith” (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 58). The buyruk texts are classified generally into two sources, the Şeyh Safî buyruğu (represented by the Menâkıbu ‘l-esrar behcetü’l-ahrâr of Bisâtî also known as the büyük buyruk) and the İmam Cafer-i Sadık buyruğu. The earliest buyruk date back at least to the middle to late sixteenth century and the reign of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp; and, as Dressler notes following Otter-Beaujean, the variety of buyruk manuscripts suggest they were “not seen as unalterable sacred canons, but rather used and transmitted in line with the needs of a mainly oral culture, and subject to alterations and additions” (Dressler 2007, 102-103).

The buyruk contain doctrinal instructions and direction for the roles and obligations relating to rank and the rules and stages of the religious path; as well as reminders for the conduct of ritual and elaborations on the central mythologies such as the kırklar cemi (Dressler 2007, 103; Shankland 2003a, 103-104). The buyruk-s historically might have served kızılbaş-Alevi dede-s as sources for ritual and mythological knowledge (Dressler 2007, 103); that is, functioning as an aide memoire or adjunct to the primacy of the oral tradition as understood, lived and expressed by the dede-s and

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30 Published editions of buyruk-s include those by Taşğın (Bisâtî 2003), Atalay (1999) and Bozkurt (2006).
The **aşık** (sometimes **âşık**), meaning literally ‘lover’ is commonly equated in English with the terms ‘minstrel’ or ‘troubadour’\(^\text{31}\). It is perhaps difficult to avoid the use of such terms since there is no single English language term that fully or even adequately correlates to the **aşık**. While ‘troubadour’ captures something of the **aşık**’s quality as a lyric poet creator and ‘seeker’, together with the suggestion of a musician, the association of a courtly context is inappropriate. Terms such as minstrel (the jongleur or mere musician) are obviously inadequate and diminishing of the **aşık**’s role\(^\text{32}\); and ‘bard’ while better is perhaps too suggestive of the specific Celtic tradition to be entirely helpful. In the context of Alevi culture the **aşık** is a poet and transmitter of the poetic tradition to which he or she belongs – in Alevi tradition the **aşık** is not solely the provenance of the male – who may also be expected to embody ‘enraptured’ or transcendent qualities. **Aşık**-s may also perform the musical services in the ritual cem ceremony. The **aşık** in Alevi culture therefore strives for

\(^{31}\) Markoff, for example, uses terms such as “Turkish minstrels” (Markoff 1986a, 56) and “poet-minstrels” (Markoff 2002b, 799), Shankland has “minstrel, folk musician or poet” (Shankland 2003a, 186), and Dressler following Reinhard’s discussion on Alevi music states they “can be compared with the Celtic bard, the French troubadour, or the German minnesinger” (Dressler 2003).

\(^{32}\) The problems of finding an adequate English description is demonstrated by the 1997 Nobel Prize Lecture, “Contra jogulatores obliquentes”, by Italian dramatist Dario Fo who made reference to Pir Sultan Abdal (in the context of the riots outside the Madımak hotel in Sivas in 1993) as a famous medieval Ottoman ‘jester’. Fo used the term ‘giullare’ meaning a jester or buffoon or, more generally, minstrel; but not poet or bard, which would be more accurate though less in keeping with the theme of his Nobel Prize speech. In the official English version of the lecture ‘jester’ is used, thus fully misrepresenting the standing of Pir Sultan Abdal, and the **aşık** tradition more generally.
and occupies a privileged and authoritative position through the ability to create and transmit, both within and without the ritual setting, the lyric expressions of Alevi beliefs, rituals, mythologies and social views.

In discussing the Alevi aşk some distinction must also be made from the aşk-s of the minstrel tradition of eastern Turkey, a tradition that has received rather more attention in English language scholarship than that of the Alevi aşk. Köprülü writes of the aşk tradition as arising from the influence of Ahmed Yasawi (Yesevi), and being a group of “folk poets” distinct from, although influenced by, the tekke (Sufi) poets, who wandered with saz (lute) in hand “from tekke to tekke, coffee house to coffee house and city to city” (Köprülü 2006, 174). These “minstrel poets” Köprülü says replaced the older Turkish ozan-s and bakshis and had no madrasa education and were thus better acquainted with popular taste and folk culture. These aşk-s took inspiration from Islamic tradition as well as from the legends of famous saints, old epics, national subjects and contemporary events (Köprülü 2006, 174-175).

Köprülü’s summary is of course tinged with a Turkish nationalist purpose but he does identify the plausible process of the aşk emerging from an older tradition that was adaptable to social and religious influences. While the Alevi and non-Alevi aşk traditions emerge from a common ancestry, the Alevi aşk’s role is founded in, though certainly not restricted to, the expression of esoteric (batıni) knowledge and pursuit and is particularly subject to the influence of the kızılbaş ehlibeyt topos that emerged from the late fifteenth century.

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33 The work quoted, published in English translation by Leiser and Dankoff as Early mystics in Turkish literature was originally published in Turkey in 1918, a time of nascent nationalist struggle, as Türk edebiyatında ilk mutasavvıflar.
As distinct from the Alevi tradition, the minstrel tradition of eastern Turkey more generally centres on the performance of the hikâye, the ‘folk romance’, a stylised performance of story-telling interspersed with song. The hikâye aşık, though commonly from a poor background, is often a semi-professional artist who seeks respect and recognition through the power of his inventiveness, sharp-wittedness and ability to entertain. The performances of these aşık-s are essentially a public performance often in a competitive context\(^{34}\). Some of the finest Alevi aşık-s, such as Ali İzzet Özkan and Davut Sulari, have participated in this tradition\(^{35}\) but it represents an altogether different motivation and focus of expression.

The Alevi aşık, to draw the distinction from the aşık of the folk romance (and principally Sunni) tradition, is a creator (or re-interpreter) and transmitter of songs on religious and social topics and issues and who also expresses the troubles and concerns of the Alevi community. The aşık performs a central role in Alevi worship and the finest and most renowned obtain a holy status because of the significance attached to the lyrics (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 59-60). It is also a dedicated and deeply committed pursuit. Taken as a whole, Alevi (and Bektashi) aşık-s are responsible for an extraordinarily active and prolific body of lyric composition. Özmen’s (1998) monumental five volume collection covering seven centuries of Alevi-Bektashi poetry includes more than five hundred poets, many being represented by only a sample and fraction of their attributed compositions. And this must represent a mere portion of what has been produced in the oral tradition over centuries. The ‘complete’ collections of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics include around four


\(^{35}\) It is also the case that within the society that the eastern Anatolian hikâye minstrel tradition operates Alevi aşık-s may consider the need to deliberately conceal their Alevi identity, as in the case of Aşık Pünhani (1917-1988) from the Sarıkamış region (Başgöz 2008, 72).
hundred deyiş (Avcı 2006; Kaya 1999; Pir Sultan Abdal divanı 1996) though in 1934 Vahit Dede reported having seven hundred and twenty-three Pir Sultan nefes in his possession (Saleçı 1934)! Doğan Kaya (1994) has compiled a collection of four hundred and seventy-two lyrics for the Sivas aşık Ruhsatı (1835-1911) and a collection of Ştktı Baba’s (1865-1928) deyiş runs to over two hundred pages (Gül 1984). Twentieth century Alevi aşık-s have produced substantial bodies of lyrics for which we retain evidence through their published collections. Tanırlı Aşık Yener’s (1928-2009) collected deyiş, for example, fill a book of nearly eight hundred pages with almost six hundred lyrics (Yener 2000). Aşık Daimi’s (1932-1983) collected lyrics amount to over four hundred and fifty pages at roughly one deyiş per page (Orhan 1999) and published collections of works by renowned aşık-s such as Aşık Mahzuni Şerif (1939-2002), Nimri Dede (1909-1986) and Melûlı (1892-1989) include over two hundred pages of deyişler (Şerif 1999; Buran 2006; Özpolat and Erbil 2006).

Establishing the point to which we may look back to the origins of Alevi aşık tradition is in part problematic for the same reasons that defining ‘Alevi’ is problematic, since it depends in some part on the perspective of modern concept of Alevi society and culture. The mystical poetry of the Sufis of medieval Anatolia certainly influenced the later Alevi tradition; so, for example, the Hurufi poet Nesimi is counted among the great masters in Alevi tradition. The dominant figure in Anatolian mystical and Turkish folk literature generally is Yunus Emre whose work has had a pervasive influence on the aşık-s of Turkish Anatolia (Köprülü 2006, 368). The inclusive tendencies and perspective of modern Alevis view Yunus Emre as an aşık in the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition and anthologies of Alevi aşık-s particularly when
associated in the broader definition of Alevi and Bektaşi literature commonly include his poetry\textsuperscript{36}. This inclusiveness is challenged by the view that sees Yunus more properly located in a broader Islamic tradition and while he may be reasonably associated with the Bektaşi mysticism he cannot be counted among the historically distinct “eastern Bektashi”, that is the Alevi (Başkal 2010).

In fact the seven established ‘great’ \textit{aşık-s} or ozan-s, that is the yedi ulular (or yedi ulu ozan), firmly establish the formative period as the late fifteenth and, particularly, the sixteenth centuries. The seven are Nesimi (d. 1418), Yemini (fl. early sixteenth century), Virani (fl. early sixteenth century), Hatayi (Shah Ismail, d. 1524), Fuzuli (d. 1556), Pir Sultan Abdal (fl. mid-late sixteenth century) and Kul Himmet (fl. late sixteenth century)\textsuperscript{37}. Lyrics attributed to Nesimi, Fuzuli, Virani and Yemini are among those that are still performed in Alevi cem rituals, however it is the three great sixteenth century \textit{aşık-s} Hatayi, Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Himmet that are particularly associated with Anatolian Alevi identity. The development of a body of \textit{deyişler} attributed to these \textit{aşık} in a simpler more direct Turkish and the association of powerful charismatic identities, most evident in the case of Pir Sultan, suggests that these voices – the lyrics attributed to them – spoke more completely to the lives of the \textit{kızılbaş} (Alevi) communities. This is manifested through a lyric corpus combining \textit{batıni} (esoteric) themes on steadfastness and commitment to the true ‘way’, exemplified by the ehlibeyt, together with the social and political themes often expressing opposition to an oppressive government or general injustice and suffering. So the lyric songs of Pir Sultan Abdal, Hatayi and Kul Himmet earned a central place in the ritual life of the \textit{kızılbaş} Alevi where such authoritative personas and identities

\textsuperscript{36} See the collections of Özmen (1998: 1), Gölpınarlı (1963), Koca (1990) and Yıldırım (1995).

\textsuperscript{37} See Ulusoy’s \textit{Yedi ulu'lar} ([n.d.]).
are maintained and affirmed; consequently enabling and extending the reach of the 

deyiş, a vehicle suited to the plain and direct language that is most evident in the 

lyrics attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal, to reflect broader social issues and to inspire the 

creative and interpretive tradition of the Alevi aşık that has continued at least up to 

the end of the twentieth century.

It remains to be seen how well, indeed whether, this tradition may survive into the 

internationalised and media-connected world of the twenty-first century. However, 

the deaths of prominent late twentieth century aşıks, some tragically such as Muhlis 

Akarsu and Nesimi Çimen in the 1993 attack on the Madımak hotel in Sivas and 

others such as Mahzuni Şerif and Mahmut Erdal of natural causes, do seem to 

suggest the end of an era and active young aşık-s with claims to authority and 

genuine inspiration such as Dertli Divani (b. 1962) appear increasingly rare. Alevis 

themselves recognise the changing social circumstances, urbanisation and technology 

that contribute to the disappearing tradition of the creative aşık.

Nowadays, the artists prefer to compile the poems and their tunes, perform 

them in public, rather than compose new ones. It can be seen that the 

enthusiastic and socially thematic literature and music of Alevisim are almost 

in a process of transformation. Though poems, dūaz and semah of Pir Sultan 

and Şah Hatayi are performed in cems enthusiastically, new literary and 

musical works lack their depth. The bard tradition is replaced with popular 

artists who are educated in the conservatoires. The albums of these artists 

attract attention and are liked by the people. (Yaman and Erdemir 2006, 61)

The important point that Yaman and Erdemir make is that the processes observed are 

transformational. In part the objective of this study, although more narrowly focused
on the content, form and expressive interpretation of the *deyiş* itself, is to provide a way of looking at significant aspects of how Alevi songs, *deyiş*, evince meaning in the context of expressive culture that may inform future study of how Alevis view and manage such social transformation.

2.3 Pir Sultan Abdal

2.3.1 Introduction: the distraction of identity

Of all the great Alevi figures, particularly those animating the lyric tradition in which Alevi belief and ideas are communicated, Pir Sultan Abdal appears as the most strikingly dimensional in the range of lyrics attributed to him which embraces not only fundamental Alid *kızılbaş* expression and mystical sentiments but also lyrics that assert his character and his fate as the signal demonstration of the life of conviction to the ‘true way’. In his renowned martyrdom by a figure representing both oppressive authority (an Ottoman governor named Hızır Paşa) and personal betrayal (this being his own former disciple) Pir Sultan Abdal is the figure who embodies the connection with sufferings and the martyrdom of Husayn and Hasan for the Anatolian *kızılbaş* (Alevi). He is less removed from the people than the earlier martyr Seyyid Nesimi, also counted among the seven great masters of Alevi lyric tradition and whose martyrdom to some degree inspires Pir Sultan’s38, and as such his story has found in its fundamental contrast of inner fidelity and steadfastness with

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38 Seyyid Nesimi’s martyrdom – legend has him flayed alive – for his “bold espousal” (Birge 1994, 59) of Mansûr al-Hallîj’s assertion of *anâ*’-Haqq (Turkish: enel Hak or enelhak, I am the Truth or I am God) also provides a direct connection to the brutal martyrdom – involving flagellation and dismemberment – of Hallîj as the “first high-profile Sufi to be executed in such a prominent manner by a Muslim government” who “was to some extent a willing participant in his own martyrdom” and “who is remembered [in Persian and Turkish Sufi traditions] as something of a Husayn- or Jesus-like figure whose death was entirely the result of an evil government and vile mob working together against a blameless holy man” (Cook 2007, 68).
worldly corruption and dissembling a long resonance equal to the changing times and circumstances. As Faroqhi suggests, in Pir Sultan’s opposition to the worldly excesses of the Ottoman Sultan there is a resonance that was readily adopted by the leftwing protestors four hundred years later in the 1960s and 1970s (Faroqhi 2005, 98). In their evocation of character, circumstance (specifically his fate at the hands of Hızır Paşa) and place – the Anatolian landscape – the lyrics of Pir Sultan Abdal tantalise with the suggestion of historical identity and situating that identity has become a central concern for scholars and popular writers alike.

Many of the lyrics attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal suggest a historical context that can certainly be situated in the history of Ottoman-Safavid conflicts in the sixteenth century, enough indeed for some historians to boldly assert an active role in such conflicts. Shaw for example states “the great Kızılbaş rebel and supporter, Pir Sultan Abdal, participated actively in the revolts against the sultan around Sivas before being executed for his crimes” (Shaw 1976, 149) although he does not state which revolt in particular and the evidence for such claims is based only on the evidence of the orally transmitted lyrics. Similarly the Turkish historian Halil İnalcık on the basis of the same evidence (the lyric poems) asserts that Pir Sultan Abdal expressed the feelings and political ambitions of the kızılbaş during the time of the Ottoman-Safavid wars of 1534-1535 (İnalcık 1973, 194-195). As Vansina notes in respect to oral tradition: “traditions about events are only kept because the events were thought to be important or significant” (Vansina 1985, 118); and further: “the importance accorded to events is a matter of general consensus in a community [and] is tied to the social impact of such an event” (Vansina 1985, 119). If we understand that it is the significance or importance of events that compel the persistence of event memory
in the oral lyric tradition then it is the truth (perceived, received and expressed) of the events, that is to say, their meaning, more than the factual detail or accuracy, that is functionally critical in the historical construction of the persona.

The lyrics of Pir Sultan Abdal in their expression of ‘event truths’ nevertheless afford significant temptation to look for historical detail and fact and this has characterised a central concern of scholarship in respect to his identity as a leader, rebel and martyr. Any encounter with Pir Sultan Abdal necessarily involves addressing the issue of identity – the historical fact – as an engaging distraction from the issue of persona – the embodiment of received and expressed truths.

2.3.2 The (re)construction of historical identity

While there are no known contemporaneous written sources that definitely identify Pir Sultan there also seems little cause to doubt that there was indeed a historical identity behind the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal and that he lived all or a major part of his life in the sixteenth century. To establish some context we know, for example, of Shah Ismail, the first Safavid Shah of Iran as an historical identity who also composed poetry in Turkish and whose poetic legacy as been maintained or more accurately reconstructed and nuanced in the Alevi oral tradition. Moreover, there is no tradition of mere invention in respect to the aşık composers and transmitters of deyiş among the Alevi. The importance and authority attributed to the aşık-s as the composers and transmitters of Alevi culture, which is fundamentally oral, argues against such possibility.

Many researchers have tried to locate the historical Pir Sultan and most published editions of the lyrics attributed to him address this issue to a greater or lesser degree. The attempts to locate the historical identity are necessarily based, in large part, on finding plausible connections between known historical circumstances and the content of his songs along with a concordance of his putative life with historical record and scraps of group biographical data – suggestive of, if not strictly, a prosopographical approach. Specifically this comes down to two fundamental contentions: that Pir Sultan was involved in rebellious activity against the Ottoman authorities (in support of the Safavids) when such activity was fervent during the sixteenth century; and, that he was executed by an Ottoman governor by the name of Hızır Paşa. To this might be added the documentary evidence of the Menâkıbu ’l-esrar behçetü ’l-ahrâr in which, in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century manuscripts, we have the first record of lyric works attributed to Pir Sultan. Since the other poets included in this buyruk such as Hatâyi (Shah Ismail), Nesimi and Kaygusuz Abdal, are among the major Alevi-Bektaşi poets, it would seem that Pir Sultan’s name and reputation was sufficiently established by this time to be included in such company in this text.

It is not my purpose here to enter into, nor specifically critique, the arguments for or against particular datings in detail in order to establish or suggest a definitive position. It is more important to emphasise the prevailing interest in locating Pir Sultan Abdal in time which may reflect a desire to reach a historicist interpretation of the persona. This interest is specifically focused on establishing the date of his death (from which therefore his approximate period of birth and the years he was active may also be deduced) and the likely uprising he may have participated in. Other
issues also arise from situating the historical person, such as his possible travels, particularly to the Balkans and Iran.

The establishment of Safavid rule in Iran under Ismail I with his adherence to Shi’a Islam opened up the Anatolian landscape to popular religious infused conflict and rebellion. In his promulgation of a charismatic hegemony in the poetically transmitted persona of the Shah he “embodied a range of sacred manifestations” (Gallagher 2009, 174), including the eschatological figure of the mahdi and the reincarnation of the Imam Ali, the aspiration of Turcoman tribes could find a religious and political leadership which “led thousands to rally to him in expectation of the immanent reappearance of the Twelfth Imam” (Finkel 2005, 97). The fertility of Anatolia for this message was fed by the already established presence of a plenitude of dervish adherents and itinerant mendicants. Of particular interest in this context are the Abdals of Rum with their devotion to Ali, Hasan, Husayn and the Twelve Imams.\textsuperscript{40} As Barkey (2008, 168) observes, there existed, a vast network of individual dervish figures (Haydarîs, Babaîs, Hamzavîs, and Abdals), who were mostly in ideological and cultural conflict with the centralizing Ottoman state and who were especially dangerous to the state because they travelled, spreading ideas and sedition and taking advantage of the fluidity of premodern society as well as of different centres of heterodox worship.

In 1511 the first major kızılbaş uprising occurred around Teke in south-western Anatolia lead by Karabıyıkhoğlu Hasan Halife better known as Şahkulu (Shah Kulu

\textsuperscript{40} Karamustafa (1994; 1993) gives a vivid picture of a number of these renunciant, antinomian dervishes in the period leading up to the middle of the sixteenth century. While many of these dervishes were wild in appearance and behaviour and socially marginal they also had a familial relationships with institutional Sufism being its “rebel progeny” (Karamustafa 1994, 99).
or Shah Kuli). While this uprising emerged out of the opportunity provided by
Ottoman dynastic struggles the religious and political character and threat to the
Ottoman Sultan was clear in the timing of the uprising (being during Muharrem the
anniversary of Husayn’s martyrdom) and Şahkulu’s support for Shah Ismail. When
Selim I became Ottoman Sultan in 1512 open conflict with Ismail ensued climaxing
in the defeat of Ismail at the battle of Çaldıran in the eastern borderlands of Anatolia.
While Ismail’s defeat cost him prestige in Iran it also left the Ottoman Sultan
determined to purge kızılbaş dissent in eastern Anatolia (Shaw 1976, 82). At times
during the rest of the sixteenth century the remnant inspiration of Ismail’s
charismatic declaration and Alid claims among the kızılbaş and other antinomian
groups would draw the Ottoman authorities into assertive and oppressive action as
the ferman-s relating to the suppression of the kızılbaş in the mühimme defterleri
from the 1560 to the 1580s attest (see below). Many of the lyrics attributed to Pir
Sultan Abdal, whether or not they were composed during this period or later, by Pir
Sultan or others, do exemplify the lasting constructions of the power and persistence
of that inspiration. The articulation of hope and identity in the Alid declarations and
inspiration of the ‘Shah’ provided the powerful revelatory and coalescing force for
the proto-Alevi antinomian groups and disaffected rural populations that went to the
distinction of fundamental identity not only economic or social circumstance. As
Barkey (2008, 178) summarises, seeing this process as a factor contributing to the
consolidation of Sunni identity of the Ottoman state:

As networks of Turcoman peasants and tribesmen got caught in the web of
geopolitical rivalries, they added a religious-ideological layer to the
socioeconomic discontent, expressing themselves through the Sunnî-Shi’îa

divisions, which provided Ottoman authorities both opportunity and cause for further consolidation of the political and religious identity of the empire.

In the decade and a half following the Şahkulu uprising and the Ottoman-Safavid wars climaxing at Çaldıran there were a number of other disturbances particularly in the region ranging from Tokat and Amasya to Bozok (Yozgat) including the Nur Ali Halife uprising in 1512 and the Şeyh Celâl uprising in 1519. The latter assumed the name of Shah Ismail, proclaiming himself the Messiah, and again challenged the state from the ideological and political position of Shi’a identity and Safavid support. He gave his name to a later phenomenon of banditry and mercenaries, the celalis, which would plague the Ottomans from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century.\(^{42}\)

In the mid-1520s there were further serious and widespread revolts in Anatolia ostensibly arising from actions in the region of Cilicia to undertake cadastral surveys towards assessing tax revenues. As the revolts spread they took on the now familiar political and religious character (Finkel 2005, 142; Shaw 1976, 92). The first of these were Baba Zünnun and Zünnunoğlu Halil uprisings in 1526-1527 but the most significant was the revolt of Kalender Çelebi in 1527.

Kalender Çelebi (or Kalender Şah) was a Kalenderi dervish and descendent (at least spiritually) of the eponymous Bektaşi saint Hacı Bektaş. The Kalenderis were reputededly characterised by itinerancy, the beating of drums, chanting and singing, and a direct communication with ‘divine truth’ (Karamustafa 1994, 65-67). The band of rebels who joined Kalender Çelebi included Abdal and Kalenderi dervishes

\(^{42}\) On Şeyh Celâl and the celalis see Barkey (2008; 1994), Finkel (2005, 113; 180f) and Shaw (1976, 86).
(Inalcik 1973, 195), the latter being in Barkey’s description “a mystical fraternity organized around incorporation and dissent” (Barkey 2008, 165). Adding social and political elements to the mystical leadership the rebels were joined by dispossessed fief holders following the annexation as an Ottoman province of the principality of Dulgadir in south-east Anatolia in 1522. So the rebel band under Kalender Çelebi grew in force around Elbistan to be eventually crushed by a force led by no less than the Ottoman grand vizier himself, İbrahim Paşa, near Tokat to the north-west of Sivas. Avcı indicates the widespread nature of the revolt noting a number of places in central Anatolia in which uprisings associated with Kalender Çelebi emerged including Kırşehir, Nevşehir, Kayseri, Maraş, Bozok (Yozgat), Tokat and Kazova (Avcı 1998, 26).

The Kalender Çelebi revolt is one of the principal candidates that has been proposed for a rebellion in which Pir Sultan may have been involved. The most notable scholar arguing for this is İsmail Kaygusuz who sees in a number of Pir Sultan Abdal attributed lyrics references to Kalender Çelebi and the landscape of that uprising. Two of the most important lyrics Kaygusuz cites in support of this view are those beginning Yürüyüş eyledi Urum üstüne (He made a march upon Anatolia / The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming) and Gözleyi gözleyi gözüm dört oldu (Watching and waiting I was all eyes / My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come). Kaygusuz noting the outbreak of the uprising in the Ankara-Kırşehir region as being in the vicinity of the Hacı Bektaş Dergah makes the point that in Pir Sultan’s lyric ‘the beautiful successor of Ali’s line’ comes from the west –

44 Full texts and translations are included in the Translations chapter below; see sections 5.5.50 and 5.5.26.
45 The dergah is in Hacıbektaş town located halfway between Kırşehir and Nevşehir.
“mağripten çıkar görünür görünür” (emerging from the West again he appears) – not
the east, not from Iran or Horasan. Kaygusuz (1995, 365-368) equates the ‘one of
Ali’s descent who is coming’ and another name reference “Koca Haydar Şah-ı Cihan
torunu” as none other than Kalender Çelebi. And in the deyiş Gözleyi gözleyi
gözüm dört oldu he sees the pivotal line “sancağımız Kazova’ya dikilsin” (let our
banner be raised at Kazova) as a rallying point and cry for those to join from afar:
Kızıl Irmak gibi bendinden boşan / Hama’dan Mardin’dan Sivas’a döşen (Like the
Red River breaking loose from its barrage / Spreading from Hama and Mardin to
Sivas). The point being that Kazova is the plain between Sivas and Tokat the
territory with which Pir Sultan is most identified.

Kaygusuz develops his argument at some length and as such provides an example of
how with the ambiguous evidence of the lyrics it is possible to suggest associations
with specific historical events. Kaygusuz’s view certainly receives some support
from Avci, one of the most prominent Pir Sultan Abdal scholars, who concludes
that Şah Kalender (Çelebi) is one of the possible referents for the motif of the ‘Shah’
in Pir Sultan’s lyrics along with Ali, Husayn, Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp; and
that the Kalender Çelebi rebellion is one of the most important influences on the
development of the identity of Pir Sultan (Avci 2006, 397).

Kaygusuz also sees Pir Sultan’s involvement with the Kalender Çelebi uprising as
explaining the existence of a Pir Sultan Abdal tradition in the Balkans. To explain

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46 The line is open to interpretation. Kaygusuz (1995, 366) reads it as meaning the ‘descendent of
Monarch of the World, Koca Haydar’ that is Koca Haydar (Kalender Çelebi), Hacı Bektaşi’s
descendant. However, this line is read by Fuat (1977, 101) and Avci (2003, 28) to refer to Shah
Tahmasp, Shah Ismail’s son and Sheik Haydar’s grandson, the Safavid monarch at the time of the
Kalender Çelebi uprising.

47 While Avci only touched on any connection of Pir Sultan to the Kalender Çelebi uprising in his
monograph on the rebellion (Avci 1998) he considered the evidence at length in his later works (Avci
this tradition, Turgut Koca asserts the existence of a distinct fifteenth century Serezli Pir Sultan, the spiritual leader of the Macedonian tekke-s of Bahçe and Cuma (Koca 1990, 145-150). Kaygusuz suggests however that Pir Sultan Abdal may have fled to the Balkans and into a period of hiding to escape slaughter following the uprising (Kaygusuz 1995, 377-381) while Avcı (2006, 318-323) again reviewing the evidence suggests Koca’s conclusion is based on a name confusion, associating evidence of ‘Piri Baba’ with ‘Pir Sultan’. As Avcı notes there is a common widespread tradition of using appellations such as ‘baba’, ‘dede’ and ‘sultan’ (Avcı 2006, 322) 48.

Perhaps the most evocative records of the times in which the historic identity or identities behind the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal lived are to be found in the mühimme defterleri (records of significant issues) which record the orders sent from the Ottoman Divan to local authorities (sancak bey-s, beylerbeyi-s) to deal with problems such as rebellious and insurgent activities. These records commence in the mid-sixteenth century and a number of those for the later part of the century are orders to deal with insurgent pro-Safavid kızılbaş activity. These records are often brief and tantalising, opening the door, if only fleetingly, on such activity in Anatolia 49. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that some researchers have identified possible connections with Pir Sultan Abdal in the mühimme defterleri. Though there is no mention per se of Pir Sultan, Saim Savaş suggests a certain named Şeyh Haydar as a possible candidate for the historical Pir Sultan Abdal.

48 Claims for a Serezli Pir Sultan persist as in the work of Yaltırık (2002, 37) on the tasavvufi halk müziği of Thrace which includes many texts attributed to Pir Sultan including ones as Karşıda görünen ne güzel yayla that are also associated with the Anatolian Banazlı Pir Sultan Abdal. It is also instructive that the most important collector of Pir Sultan nefes (deyiş) from the Balkan region (Thrace), Vahid Dede (Vahit Lütfi Salcı) makes no claim nor hint of distinction of identity in his early publication on Pir Sultan (Salcı 1934). Birge certainly gives no particular prominence to Pir Sultan in his work which relies heavily on Albanian Bektaşi informants. He mentions Pir Sultan only once, quoting a verse from Ergun’s 1930 publication Bektasi Şairleri (Birge 1994, 137).

49 Imber (1979) gives a detailed account of these records in reference to the subjugation of the kızılbaş in the sixteenth century.
noting the fact that Pir Sultan’s real name was Haydar (Savaş 2002). Şeyh Haydar makes an appearance in the historical record in 1585 in a village near Amasya, apparently after a long absence, claiming to have been with the Shah and having undertaken to raise 40,000 men from the region for his cause. Şeyh Haydar was captured by Ahmet Çavuş and imprisoned in Çorum (Savaş 2002, 83-85; Imber 1979, 262-263). Savaş (2002, 85) further proposes the possibility of him being removed from Çorum prison to the Toprakkale prison in the provincial centre Sivas, thus effectively connecting the historically recorded Şeyh Haydar with the legendary execution of Pir Sultan in Sivas. His indictment was as a halife (sanctioned agent) of the kızılbaş active for some time in the Çorum and Bozok regions (Imber 1979, 262). His father, Şeyh Tuzi (or Türabi) was recorded as having been executed for leading a kızılbaş heresy (Imber 1979, 262-263; Savaş 2002, 85). It is also worth noting that the name, Şeyh Haydar, evokes the father of Shah Ismail and the deviser of the symbolism of the twelve gored scarlet headgear responsible for the pejorative appellation applied by the Ottomans of ‘red head’, kızılbaş (Savory 1980, 19). While the identification the historical person of Pir Sultan can be no more than speculative, it is possible to see historically constructed elements that may have found their way into legend such as the active agency of kızılbaş activity, imprisonment, execution, names and locations.

One further documented case of Safavid inspired insurgency should be mentioned, that of the so called ‘False Ismail’ which also appears as a plausible fifth column

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50 So legend tells us and such is the commonly held understanding. Aslanoğlu rather complicates the issue by identifying the poet of the lyric who associates this name with the mahlas as an identity distinct from the eponymous Pir Sultan.

51 It is worth noting that in the songs and legend of Pir Sultan Abdal no mention is made of his father. If his father were a notable kızılbaş leader we might expect that fact to indeed be proclaimed in his songs.
movement that may have contributed to the legendary Pir Sultan or at least gives a picture of the milieu in which he lived. Pir Sultan is certainly not mentioned by name in relation to the False Ismail events though at least one notable follower (halife) is identified by the name of Yunus (Imber 1979, p. 251-254). This False Ismail (Düzmece or Sahte Şah İsmail) suddenly appears in the mühimme defterleri in the middle of 1578 and disappears equally mysteriously a few months later around January 1579. False Ismail claimed to be Shah Ismail and is reported to have emerged from the Syrian borderland, organising rebellion in the Elbistan region and attracting a large following particularly in the Bozok (Yozgat) region and moving on to Hacibektaş. He may have been acting independently, as an agent of the Iranians or indeed inspired by the factional rivalries following the death of Shah Tahmasp leading to the accession and short-lived reign of Ismail II (August 1576-November 1577). In the next three years there appeared a number of false (pseudo) Ismails in various Safavid territories. As Savory notes these pseudo-Ismails could go to some length to impersonate, physically, Ismail II, giving “a strangely messianic quality more proper to extremist Shi‘ite and other heterodox beliefs than the question of succession to the Safavid throne” (Savory 1971, 468). The aspect of the False Ismail mentioned in the mühimme defteri as described by the halife Yunus mentioned above at the very least appears striking and outlandish (in the Anatolian context) being Persian speaking, tall, blue-eyed with thick blond beard and long hair (Imber 1979). These pseudo-Ismails were described as qalandar (kalender) dervishes.

52 Specifically named kızılbaş insurgents do appear in documents from the time which makes the absence of any mention of ‘Pir Sultan’ all the more intriguing. For example, Öz in his collection of Ottoman documents connected to Alevilik (in modern Turkish translation) includes a ferman dated from 1577 that mentions a kızılbaş (rafizi) sought in the Elbistan area named Yitılmış Abdal (Öz 1997, 63).

suggesting antinomian and charismatic influence. The appeal, if only fleeting, of the False Ismail in Anatolia may have been in the persistence of this messianic and charismatic eminence aided by the easy confusion of appellations; for while the False Ismail events may have arisen from the succession issues surrounding Shah Tahmasp’s son Ismail II, the Anatolian kızılbaş may well have been convinced of the return of Tahmasp’s father the messianic Ismail I 54.

While a picture of the sixteenth century Anatolian world in which an identity, or identities, remembered in the persona of Pir Sultan can be drawn, the problem remains that, despite plausible and attractive propositions, no certain identification of Pir Sultan can be made in the documentary record studied to date 55. Events such as the Shah Kulu and Kalender Çelebi revolts, the rebellious activities of Şeyh Haydar and call to rally to the Shah by the likes of the False Ismail give a plausible picture of a society of villagers, tribesmen and some lesser land holders (sipahi-s) 56 receptive for and animated, if sporadically and at times with little tangible objective, by fleeting and charismatic identities – the stuff, indeed, to find meaning in legend.

54 Imber (1979, 254) concludes that the episode demonstrated the weakness of the political opposition of the kızılbaş to Ottoman rule, the receptiveness for allegiance to a self-styled ‘Shah’ betraying little notion of who the Shah actually was. Imber is referring to an unclear concept that the followers may have had in regard to the real political identities, however the ‘Shah’ as a messianic figure may not have been vague to the hopes and objectives of the kızılbaş themselves.

55 This lack of any contemporary documentary record to identify the historical Pir Sultan behind the persona leaves open the possibility of all manner of speculation upon improbable identities. Perhaps the most extraordinary assertion is that of Erdoğan Çınar (2007) who reads the absence of mention of Pir Sultan in the Ottoman records as the significant point. Çınar sees this lacuna as evidence to suggest that the source of Pir Sultan’s identity emerges not from the sixteenth century but that its origin can be found in the identity of the seventh century founder of the Paulicians Constantine (‘Pir’) Silvanus.

56 This follows Imber’s concise characterisation of the Anatolian kızılbaş at this time (Imber 2002, 249). Sipahi-s held small military fiefs (timar) or tax concessions in return for their service.
2.3.3 The legend of Pir Sultan Abdal

The legendary story of Pir Sultan Abdal is understood from songs that are part of the Pir Sultan Abdal tradition and in folk legends, the latter collected particularly from the Sivas region. The following gives an outline of the essentials of the Pir Sultan Abdal story. According to legend and song, Pir Sultan’s family came originally from Yemen and was descended from Imam Ali’s grandson, the fourth imam Zeynel-Abidin. His family settled in Banaz north of Sivas is the shadow of Yıldız Dağı (Star Mountain). Pir Sultan’s real name was Haydar.

Figure 1: The author standing by the stone believed to have been brought by Pir Sultan from Horasan to Banaz.

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The story is recounted to a greater or lesser extent in most of the books devoted to Pir Sultan and even expanded into novel form by Pehlivan (1993) and Ural (1990). For simplicity, the version given here is largely follows that of Fuat (1999) and Öztelli (1971). Boratav draws on his valuable field research undertaken in 1939 in the Sivas region including in Banaz for the best documented account of the folk legend (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943) from which many have subsequently drawn.

Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, it is recounted that Pir Sultan’s family came from the Horasan region (Khorasan) in north-eastern Iran, a place noted for its strong connection to Turkmen Sufic and esoteric (batıni) dervish traditions and the birthplace of the Bektaşi patron saint Hacı Bektaş Veli. Boratav visiting Banaz in 1939 reports that he was shown the mill stone (taş) reputedly brought by Pir Sultan from Horasan (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 34). Makal (1977, 68; 1999, 42) visiting Banaz four decades later reports villagers saying this stone was brought by the Pir from Yemen by horse. Aşık Banazlı Nuri (Nuri Kılıç, also known as Aşık Deryani, d. 1997) tried to unravel the mystery of Pir Sultan’s family origin for Makal saying all Turks come from Central Asia through the mixing pot (‘harman yeri’ literally ‘threshing place’) of Horasan but from the perspective of belief (‘ibadet’) and essence (‘mana’) they come from Yemen, Hijaz, Mosul, Damascus and Bagdad (Makal 1999, 44). The stone can still be seen in Banaz.
One day when the seven year old Haydar was giving his father’s sheep pasture near Yıldız Dağı he fell asleep and began to dream. In his dream he saw a white bearded old man holding liquor (içki) in one hand and an apple in the other. Haydar first took the liquor and drank; then after taking the apple and seeing the palm of the old man’s hand was a gleaming green he understood that this man before him was Hacı Bektaş Veli. In the dream Hacı Bektaş Veli gave Haydar the name Pir Sultan. Thus he found himself among the erenler\(^{59}\) playing and singing his poems with the name Pir Sultan and his fame became widespread.

Some time later, in the village of Sofular, located between Sivas and Hafik, there lived a certain Hızır who, hearing of Pir Sultan’s fame, ventured to Banaz. Hızır spent seven years with Pir Sultan (for some time as his müрид\(^{60}\)); then one day he came to the Pir asking for his favour and advice as to what post (makam) he should come to. Pir Sultan replied that Hızır would become a great man and, ultimately, would return to hang him, Pir Sultan.

In due course Hızır goes to Istanbul and with Pir Sultan’s support he continues there and becomes a Pasha. Finally he becomes the Vezir (governor) of Sivas where he gains a reputation for suppressing the poor, eating unlawful food (haram), and dishonesty. At this time in Sivas there lived two judges (kadı) also known for unlawful indulgence (eating haram). Their names were Kara Kadı (Black Judge) and Sarı Kadı (Yellow Judge). Pir Sultan gives the same names, karakadı and sarıkadı, to his two dogs. Hearing of this the judges have Pir Sultan brought to Sivas for

\(^{59}\) Those seeking and attaining the enlightenment of the divine truth.

\(^{60}\) Disciple.
questioning whereby Pir Sultan says to them that his dogs are better than them because unlike the judges they do not eat haram food. And to prove it, Pir Sultan challenges the judges to a test. The town’s worthies (hacılar, hocalar) prepare a pot of helal (rightful) food and a pot of haram food. The judges sit down and eat of the haram food while Pir Sultan’s dogs do not go near it but go straight to the helal food. The worthies declare that the good dogs prevailed over the bad judges. On this event Pir Sultan composes and sings the song beginning: 

*Koca başlı koca kadi* (The fat headed old judge)⁶¹.

Meanwhile a fetva is declared by the Sultan forbidding the mention of the name of the Shah – that is the Safavid Shah of Iran – and giving orders to kill those followers of Ali (the kızılbaş). Pir Sultan records this in the song beginning: *Fetva vermiş koca başlı kör Müftü* (The fat headed blind Mufti has passed judgment)⁶². Pir Sultan rises to this challenge and makes it clear he will not abandon his devotion to the Shah and sings the song beginning: *Padişah katlime ferman dilese* (If the Sultan desires an order for my murder). As Pir Sultan begins to stir up trouble, Hızır Paşa sends for Pir Sultan and makes to treat his former şeyh (teacher) well, placing good food before him. But Pir Sultan is not swayed and tells Hızır Paşa that he (Hızır) has left the true path (yol), has eaten haram food and stolen the inheritance of orphans. Pir Sultan says he will not eat, not even his dogs would eat and to prove this he calls to his dogs to come from Banaz⁶³. Hızır Paşa becomes angry and casts Pir Sultan, his former spiritual master, into the prison at Sivas’s Toprakkale.

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⁶¹ See text and translation in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.35.
⁶² See text and translation in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.20.
⁶³ A distance of some forty-five kilometres!
Hızır Paşa remains uneasy inside and after a time he brings Pir Sultan before him again and says if Pir Sultan will sing three songs without mentioning the Shah he will pardon him. In response to this Pir Sultan does indeed sing three songs but entwines all three from beginning to end with many references to the Shah. These are the songs beginning: *Hızır Paşa bizi berdar etmeden* (Before Hızır Pasha hangs us), *Kul olayım kalem tutan eline* (I shall be at the mercy of the hand holding the pen) and *Karşidan görünen ne güzel yayla* (How beautiful the plateau opposite appears).64

Hızır Paşa is enraged by Pir Sultan’s response and orders him to be hanged. And so a gallows is erected in a place in Sivas called Keçibulan.

As Pir Sultan goes to his place of execution he sings the song beginning: *Bize de Banaz’da Pir Sultan derler* (They call us in Banaz Pir Sultan).65 Hızır Paşa orders the populace to stone Pir Sultan while he proceeds to the gallows and commands death to anyone who does not follow this order. At this time, Pir Sultan’s closest friend (musahib), Ali Baba, is troubled at what to do and so he casts a rose as though it were a stone. At this act Pir Sultan sings the song beginning: *Şu kanlı zalimin ettiği işler* (The deeds of that blood tainted tyrant)66 expressing the fact that he is wounded greatly by this dissembling act while the stones that the strangers throw do not touch him.

The next morning there is much talk in the coffee houses of Sivas. Someone says: ‘Hızır Paşa hanged Pir Sultan’ while another says: ‘Impossible, I saw him this morning on the Koçhilar road, in Seyfebeli’. Another says: ‘How can this be, I saw him this morning on the Malatya road, on the Kardeşler Pass’. Someone replies:

64 See texts and translations in the Translations chapter, sections 5.5.1, 5.5.37 and 5.5.34.
65 See text and translation in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.9.
66 See text and translation in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.44.
‘You are mistaken, I saw him this morning on the Yenihan road on the Şahna Pass’.

To which another says: ‘I saw him this morning on the Tavra Narrows’. So the people get up and go to the gallows place to look. There they see Pir Sultan’s hurka (dervish cloak) hanging on the gallows but he was gone. The Pasha’s watchmen race out after him and come to the Kızılırmak (Red River) where they see Pir Sultan who has crossed over a bridge to the far bank of the river. Seeing the watchmen Pir Sultan calls out to the bridge to bend which it does and sinks into the water so the watchmen are left on the other side. Pir Sultan then goes to Horasan to the Shah and sings the songs beginning: İptida bir sofı Şah’a varıncă (At first a devotee upon reaching the Shah) and Diken arasında bir gül açıldı (A rose opened among the thorn)\(^67\). From Horasan he goes to Ardabil where he dies and is buried.

Pir Sultan is believed to have had three sons, Seyyit Ali Sultan, Pir Mehmet and Er Gaip Sultan (Pir Gaip); and one daughter, Senem, to whom a famous lament (ağať) on her father’s death is attributed\(^68\):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pir Sultan kızıydım ben de Banaz’da} \\
\text{Kanlı yaş akıttım baharda güzde} \\
\text{Dedemi astılar kanlı Sivas’ta} \\
\text{Darağacı ağlar Pir Sultan deyişi}\end{align*}
\]

(Fuat 1999, 160)

I am Pir Sultan’s daughter and in Banaz
I shed bloody tears in spring and autumn
They hung my master in bloody Sivas
The gallows tree weeps crying Pir Sultan

\(^{67}\) See texts and translations in the Translations chapter, sections 5.5.32 and 5.5.16.
\(^{68}\) Avcı provides a good account of the information we have about Pir Sultan’s children (Avcı 2006, p. 375f).
\(^{69}\) The full text and translation in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.17. The text of version including in the Translations chapter is a slightly different variant taken from Ergun (1929).
2.3.4 Hızır Paşa

The central figure in both the historical and legendary encounter with Pir Sultan Abdal is Hızır Paşa, the agent of his demise, according to the legend and the songs. Because Hızır Paşa is believed to have been the vali (provincial governor) in Sivas responsible for Pir Sultan Abdal’s execution, he is a figure more likely to appear in historical record, and thus the key to the historical location of Pir Sultan Abdal. This line of enquiry begins with the earliest publication concerning Pir Sultan Abdal by Köprülü in 1928 (Köprülü 1997). Three possible Hızır Paşa-s are commonly identified:

1. A governor in the Damascus and Bagdad regions in the 1550s and 1560s who died around 1567. The proposition is that this governor while on his way to Bagdad may have passed through Sivas and so dealt with Pir Sultan Abdal around 1560.

2. A certain Deli (Crazy) Hızır Paşa a governor in the eastern Ottoman provinces from the 1580s until the early years of the seventeenth century who was briefly in Sivas in 1588 and 1590. So these dates are given as possible dates for Pir Sultan Abdal’s execution.

3. Another Hızır Paşa is mentioned in a letter from Mehmet Hüdai to Sultan Ahmet I recommending action against the kızılbaş in the vicinity of Dobrici Zağra (in the Balkans). Köprülü (1997, 11) believes this is the Hızır Paşa that Pir Sultan Abdal refers to and thus would date his execution to sometime between 1603 and 1608.

In fact no Hızır Paşa in the historical record can be definitely associated with Pir Sultan Abdal other than by the assumption of possible (and chance) association
through location and time. Indeed the name Hızır is not particularly rare in the sixteenth century Ottoman records. The centrality of Hızır Paşa to the Pir Sultan Abdal legend certainly suggests an authenticity to this relationship though it does not preclude the possibility of a confusion of names and identities in the oral tradition. In this context Makal reports that the people of Banaz, the principal keepers of the legend, had a rather ambiguous perception of the name. As the people of Banaz point out the name Hızır is in fact understood as sacred and should not be associated with wickedness – “Hızır, diyor bizim için kutsaldır ... Hızır dedin mi kötülük düşünmeyeceksin” (Makal 1999, 31), “Hızır, bir kutlu yaratık, adı kötülüğe karıştırılmamalı” (Makal 1999, 37) – since the name is associated with the immortal prophet-saint Hızır (Khidir), said to have drunk of the water of life and a guardian spirit for the dervish in his time of need (Birge 1994, 119). As the Banazlı Aşık Nuri sings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pir Sultan Abdal’ım, kalmıştır nazır} \\
\text{Elhamdülillah, sırrım meydanda, hazır} \\
\text{Binbir ismi ile gelmişir Hızır} \\
\text{Daha ondan gayri pîr bulamadım} \\
\text{(Makal 1999, 37)}
\end{align*}
\]

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, he remains vigilant
Thank God, my secret is in the open, present
Hızır has come with his thousand and one names
I was not able to find a master greater than him

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70 See for example the Hızır Ağa-s, Hızır Beğ, Hızır Efendi-s, Hızır Çavuş-oğli and Hızır Paşa-s that appear in the pages of Selânniki Mustafa Efendi’s history covering the period 1563 to 1600 (Selânniki 1999).
This leads to suggestions that Hızır should more properly be understood as the name ‘Hıdır’\(^71\) or even that it is a corruption of *hınzır* (Makal 1999, 32) meaning a ‘swine’ or ‘brutal’ person. While the identity of Hızır Paşa is the most tantalising key to establish the dating of Pir Sultan Abdal’s execution, there remains much ambiguity and uncertainty that precludes any definite association or conclusion in regards to establishing an historical Pir Sultan Abdal.

There is however, little doubt about the importance of the relationship of Pir Sultan Abdal and Hızır Paşa in the legendary record. A feature of the legend of Pir Sultan Abdal that pervades most presentations of his life is the personal story focusing on his resilience and steadfastness in his time of travail at the hands of his persecutor and ultimately executioner named as Hızır Paşa. The significant aspect of this story is the relationship of Pir Sultan Abdal and Hızır Paşa since, as we have seen above, the latter was formerly the notable disciple of Pir Sultan Abdal. The story is not merely one of oppression, corruption, rebellion and downfall: it is personal and is raised to universal levels because of this fact. It is the act of personal betrayal by Hızır Paşa that elevates the mythology of Pir Sultan Abdal’s steadfastness: ‘Dönen dönsün ben dönmezen yolumdan ’ (Let the one who turns away, turn, but I will not turn from my path)\(^72\) sings Pir Sultan. This is the great betrayal of Hızır Paşa, that he had turned from the true path – it is certainly as important as his position representing the Ottoman authorities. Similarly, in the famous song *Şu kanlı zalimin ettiği işler* it is the dissembling act of Pir Sultan Abdal’s mürid, Ali Baba, in casting the rose in place of the stones, that is presented as the wounding betrayal. It is the

\(^71\) This is indeed how the name is pronounced in the Banaz Sivas dialect. Aşık Nuri clearly says Hıdır Paşa as can be heard on recordings made by David Grabias of Nuri singing Pir Sultan Abdal *deyiş* (Various 1999).

\(^72\) Text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.36.
inner integrity that is betrayed by Ali Baba. Pir Sultan’s final and fatal act of composing three songs calling on the (Safavid) Shah is rather more a personal affront and dismissal of Hızır Paşa’s challenge not to do so in order to save his (Pir Sultan’s) life, as it is any statement of political ideology.

The *deyiş* of Pir Sultan Abdal nevertheless do present a political context to the confrontation with Hızır Paşa and the judges (*kadi*) and religious authorities (*müftü*) of Sivas who are characterised as corrupt and hypocrites. Pir Sultan Abdal’s identity as a *kızılbaş* and his commitment to the Safavid Shah are explicit in the songs. This activity is clearly remembered in a lyric from the Banaz tradition attributed to an Aşık İsmail which describes the efforts of a descendent of Pir Sultan, İnce Mehmet, in seeking confirmation and deed from the Hacı Bektaş *dergahi* of his lineage to present himself to the agents (halife) of the Shah and the Shah himself. This *deyiş* recounts Pir Sultan’s lineage from Ali, his taking up the cause of the ‘Great Shah’ (the Safavid Shah) in the symbolic acceptance of the apple (elma), how ‘eighty thousand men’ came out of Horasan, and how he accepted his fate as a martyr. Yet the songs of Pir Sultan Abdal do not constitute an articulation of a political agenda, rather they express the aspiration of the antinomian *kızılbaş* dervishes (and those they represent) of Anatolia and a commitment to hope, in the person of the Great Shah, and to the virtuous and true way of the ehlibeyt and ultimately a challenge to the dissembling and the corrupt. But this is ultimately played out, as expressed in the songs, not on the rebel’s battlefield, but in the fatal but highly personal confrontation between Pir Sultan Abdal and the representative of

73 See for example the lyrics *Koca başlı koca kadi* and *Fetva vermiş koca başlı müftü* in the Translations chapter, sections 5.5.35 and 5.5.20.
74 The full text and translation of Aşık İsmail’s *deyiş* is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.7.1.
dissembling and corruption, Hızır Paşa. While the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal may be seen as historically constructed and contextualised, the meaning of the story that his persona represents, as revealed in the legends and songs maintained in oral tradition, is found in the morality rather than the historical or political fact or detail.

2.3.5 The typology of the Pir Sultan Abdal mahlas – what’s in a name?

The name Pir Sultan Abdal can be seen as a quite generic appellation if particularly exulted. Pir carries the meaning of a patron saint or the founder and leader of a tarikat, a dervish order or brotherhood; or, more simply, a spiritual master or leader. Sultan clearly has connotations of high standing and for Alevi-Bektaşi-s refers to a saint or a great master of the tarikat. Korkmaz also notes its use in place of ‘you’ (sen) among Alevi-Bektaşi (Korkmaz 2005a) and Anadol (2001, 20) notes its use as a spiritual title given to a Sufi şeyh (sheik). The basic meaning of Abdal is a ‘dervish’ but also may refer specifically to one belonging to one of the “mystical anarchist” (Karamustafa 1993) antinomian groups active in sixteenth century Anatolia, that is the Rum Abdallar (Abdals of Anatolia). Birge (1994, 251) also notes a formal mystical meaning in respect to abdal connoting the ability to change from a physical state to a spiritual state.

The name thus constituted clearly designates Pir Sultan Abdal as a mystical leader and dervish of the highest order. It is, then, perhaps not so remarkable that we do encounter references in the historical record to other shadowy ‘Pir Sultans’. It is perhaps rather more remarkable that they are indeed elusive, particularly in the

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75 This and the following definitions follow Birge (1994) and Korkmaz (2005a). The latter gives a particularly detailed consideration of pir.
76 In Pir Sultan Abdal’s mahlas it may perhaps even be suggested that ‘Abdal’ is descriptive and used in an adjectival sense in respect to the nominative Pir Sultan.
historical record of sixteenth century Anatolia; and it is all the more tempting because of their scarcity to look for some connection to the Pir Sultan Abdal of legend no matter how tenuous. For example, Mustawfi, a contemporary (that is fourteenth century) source, mentions a certain Pir Sultan as being the son of the Ilkhanid Rashid al-Din, the Persian historian and the brother of the vezir Ghiyath al-Din who along with his brother were executed in 1336 (Morton [n.d]). In Baluchistan a mysterious saint called Pir Sultan is reported as providing holy protection and to have rendered innocuous all the snakes in the area (Tate 1909, 46). He is also said to have given his name to the great mountain Kuh-i-Sultan which is claimed to have engulfed the saint when he died (Tate 1909, 19). In raising such far-flung examples I mean only to suggest a degree of caution in establishing historical identity based on the construct of the mahlas.

Scholars who have asserted the identification of multiple Pir Sultan Abdals (Pir Sultan Abdallar) such as İbrahim Aslanoğlu (1984) and Asım Bezirci (1994) construct their typologies of identity around the form of the mahlas name. I don’t mean to suggest that their identification of distinct identities is based only on the name, since they use internal evidence of the lyrics that indicate locations and other associations – although their methods are not revealed in detail – however, the identities are established and grouped under forms of the name. For Aslanoğlu these are:

1. Pir Sultan
2. Pir Sultan Abdul
3. Pir Sultan’ım Haydar
4. Pir Sultan Abdul (Halil İbrahim)
5. Abdul Pir Sultan
6. Pir Sultan Abdal (aruz şairi)

For Bezirci they are:

1. Pir Sultan
2. Pir Sultan’ım Haydar
3. Abdal Pir Sultan
4. Pir Sultan Abdul (I)
5. Pir Sultan Abdul (II)
6. Pir Sultan Abdul (III)
7. Pir Sultan Abdul (IV)
8. İkinci (second) Pir Sultan

While these typologies do not categorise the identities under discrete mahlas forms – Aslanoğlu has three Pir Sultan Abdals and Bezirci four as well as two Pir Sultans – it is the mahlas forms that identify the typologies based generally on three distinctions: the presence or not of ‘Abdal’, the placement of ‘Abdal’ before or after ‘Pir Sultan’ and the presence of the additional name ‘Haydar’.

It is not my purpose to analyse or specifically critique these typologies at length though scholars, notably Avcı (2006, 292f; 2004, 163f), have done so, noting among other things that the forms Pir Sultan and Pir Sultan Abdal appear in the early manuscripts of the Menâkıbu’l-esrar behçetü’l-ahrâr and the fact that the some deyiş appear in different sources with different mahlas forms, as indeed might be expected through the process of oral tradition. What in fact the typologies of Aslanoğlu and Bezirci suggest is that that the mahlas should be understood as stable or fixed, a proposition that is not supported by the evidence from Yunus Emre to contemporary
Usuoy accounting for the distinction of the forms Pir Sultan and Pir Sultan Abdal suggest that it may be that at different stages of his life he used a different form of the mahlas; or, perhaps more interestingly, that if the poems are connected with him or a statement belonging to him in the last verse he uses the form ‘Pir Sultan Abdal’ whereas if the poem invokes a wish from a higher authority he uses the form ‘Pir Sultan’ (Ulusoy [n.d.], 157-158). Ulusoy’s proposition also seems to suggest a certain stability and fixity of form for the mahlas that it would be hard to sustain; but more usefully Ulusoy identifies the mahlas as not merely a name or title but something that may function with subtly and meaning connected to beliefs expressed in the lyric.

The presence of ‘Abdal’ is the most overt variation of the mahlas that distinguishes the proposed identities, whether it comes before or after the principal name content ‘Pir Sultan’. Yet Abdal has a strong descriptive rather than nominal quality, designating a mystic, dervish or identification with the Abdals of Rum and in that sense is inherently an optional assertion. Moreover, it is a very common appellation among Sufi poets contemporary with Pir Sultan or earlier such as Kaygusuz Abdal, Virani (whose works are attributed variously to Virani, Virani Abdal and Virani Baba), Abdal Musa, Genç Abdal and Muhyeddin Abdal among a number of others. Kaya lists twenty-nine poets using the ‘Abdal’ mahlas, nineteen of which he identified as appearing in cönk manuscripts held in villages in the Sivas, Divriği and Zile region (Kaya 2004).

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77 This will be discussed further in the section dealing with the mahlas in the Explications chapter below.
78 Kaya does distinguish Abdal Pir Sultan and Pir Sultan Abdal as distinct mahlas.
The identification as ‘Abdal’ understood as a descriptive addition to the mahlas perhaps suggests the potential of the mahlas to assert inclusion through the introduction of an ambiguity – a distanciation – in the person of the lyric voice. It may imply, for example, that ‘I am Pir Sultan of the Abdal class’; or, as others suggest, that it means ‘I am Pir Sultan’s Abdal’ – “Pîr Sultan’ın Abdali olan ben” (Ulusoy [n.d.], 157). In the context that Ulusoy suggests, this does not necessarily mean a distinct poet is involved but rather it is a perspective of the lyric voice towards the persona evoked by the nominal aspect of the mahlas ‘Pir Sultan’. Even from less subtle perspectives, ‘Abdal’ suggests the presence of community, lineage and identification as a dervish, as in the final lines of the deyiş attributed to a son of Pir Sultan called Pir Muhammed (elsewhere Pir Mehmet):

Abdal Pir Sultan’ın Abdul oğluyum
Adim Pir Muhammed Pirim Ali’dir

I am Abdal Pir Sultan’s abdal son
My name is Pir Muhammad my Pir is Ali

If indeed this is the voice of Pir Sultan’s son – and irrespective of provable fact that is the implication of the deyiş – then it clearly expresses the descriptive and inclusive value of ‘Abdal’ in respect to Pir Sultan. If it is not the voice of Pir Sultan’s son the point still remains that the appellation has a fundamentally associative meaning.

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79 The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.6.1.
80 Aslanoğlu certainly disputes this attribution and attributes the deyiş to a later Pir Muhammed who lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century and uses this lyric as evidence of Abdal Pir Sultan as a distinct and later identity than Pir Sultan (Aslanoğlu 1984, 79-82).
Finally, on the matter of the mahlas forms associated with Pir Sultan Abdal, if we look at one *deyiş, Uyur idik uyardılar*, that appears in publication from many sources – including the earliest publications – we can see the facility with which the mahlas may appear in different forms demonstrating the untenable perception of the mahlas as a stable or fixed integer. Aslanoğlu (1984, 379) reproduces the earliest source, Derviş Ruhullah⁸¹, with the mahlas verse:

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım şunda  
Çok keramet var insanda  
O cihanda bu cihanda  
*Ali’ye saydilar bizi*

Ergun (1929, 40) has the same mahlas form although the verse continues differently:

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım şunda  
Ulu divan sürür günde  
*Pîrim şimdiki zamanda*  
*Ali’ye kattılar bizi*

In Besim Atalay’s 1924 collection (Atalay 1991, 127) the mahlas form is different while the rest of the verse is the same as for Derviş Ruhullah:

*Pir sultanım ne var şunda*  
Çok keramet var insanda  
O cihanda bu cihanda  
*Ali’ye saydilar bizi*

---

⁸¹ From his 1924 publication *Bektaşî nefesleri.*
In the collection published under the auspice of the Şahkulu Sultan Dergahı in Istanbul (Pir Sultan Abdal divanı 1996, 186), the mahlas form is different again:

\[\text{Pir Sultan’ım Haydar şunda}\\Çok keramet var insanda\\O cihanda bu cihanda\\\text{Ali’ye saydilar bizi}\]

Bezirci (1994, 374)\(^{82}\) presents another variant of the mahlas line:

\[\text{Pir Sultan’ım eydür şunda}\\Çok keramet var insanda\\O cihanda bu cihanda\\\text{Ali’ye saydilar bizi}\]

Öztelli includes two versions, the first with the mahlas line \text{Pir Sultan’ım Haydar şunda} (Öztelli 1971, lxix) and the second, included among the example lyrics with musical notation derived from Vahit Dede, with the mahlas line \text{Pir Sultan’ım eder şunda} (Öztelli 1971, musical example 22). This would appear to be the form prevalent in the Istanbul and Balkan Bektaşı tradition as the same form is given in a version from musicologist Rauf Yekta’s publication from 1930s, \textit{Bektaşı Nefesleri}, reproduced by Gölpınarlı (1992, 287) and in the collection of Bektaşı nefes compiled and published by Koca and Onaran (1987, 42).

It is perhaps all the more remarkable that these variations occur in a lyric of only eight syllable lines where less room for variation might be expected than in the

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\(^{82}\) Avcı (2006, 513) publishes the same form with the slight variation in the spelling with eydur rather than eydür.
longer eleven syllable koşma form. Unless one allows that the expression of the mahlas is not necessarily fixed but that it is subject to variation, and ultimately interpretation, then the conclusion must be that some versions are erroneous, a conclusion inherent in the arguments based on the stability of the mahlas form yet contrary to the essential orality of the deyiş and its manner of transmission.

2.3.6 Themes and subjects

As is evident from the my concentration on aspects of Pir Sultan Abdal’s identity and legend, many of the songs attributed to him concern the events of his life and his connection to the kızılbaş and Safavid Shahs. However, the thematic centre of Pir Sultan’s deyişler is Alevi belief (inanç) as expressed most importantly through the primacy of the Imam Ali. Kaya established from an analysis of 400 texts that around 75 percent of them refer either explicitly or covertly to Allah, Muhammad, Ali, Husayn or other Alevi-Bektaşi identities (Kaya 1999, 47, 55). The lyric voice that expresses this belief is that of the fervent dervish, vowed to follow the truth path, in pursuit of his master (Pir) and esoteric understanding (batını). This is the persona that emerges from the lyrics form the earliest source the Menâkıbu’l-esrâr behcetü’l-ahrâr.

Benim pîrim Şah-ı Merdân Ali’dir
Selâmını göndür bedr-i sabahdan
Ben tâlibim ne haddim var pîr olam
Piire duâciyum her gün sabahdan

My master is Ali, Shah of the Seven Guides

83 Three lyrics identified as appearing in early copies of the Menâkıbu’l-esrâr behcetü’l-ahrâr from which these verses are taken are included in the Translations chapter; see sections 5.5.4, 5.5.42 and 5.5.25.
Send him your greetings by the moon at dawn
I am a seeker, how could I dare to be a master
I pray to the master every day in the morning

…

_Uyan bu gaflet hâbîndan_
_İşbat isterler bâtîndan_
_Her aşîka sohbetînden_
_İkrar ile yol isterler_

Awake from this somnolent stupor
They require proof of the inner person
For every dervish, from his meeting,
They require declaration of the way

…

_Gelsin ikrarîna belî diyenler_
_Înîltîm derdim Muhammed Ali ’dir_
_Îsmin annca salavât verenler_
_Meşrebim virdim Muhammed Ali ’dir_

Let those who affirm their vows come
My moan of suffering is for Muhammad Ali
They give invocation mentioning the name
My disposition my recitation is for Muhammad Ali

The themes of resistance, asserting the true path and ultimately the climax of martyrdom are also prominent. Pir Sultan views his own fate as a direct line of martyrdom from the Imam Husayn through to the Hurufi _batîni_ (esoteric) poet Seyyid Nesimi_84_ (whose own martyrdom was connected to his sympathy for Mansûr

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_84_ Özmen (1998, 249-396) includes a usefully substantial collection of Nesimi’s poems and detail about his life. See also Kaygusuz (2005, 256-278).
al-Hallâj martyred for his assertion of *anâ ’l-Haqq* – Turkish *enel Hak* – ‘I am God’\(^{85}\)). So Pir Sultan sings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Üçüncü ölmem bu hain} \\
\text{Pir Sultan ölür dirilir}
\end{align*}
\]

This treachery is my third dying
Pir Sultan dies and returns to life
…

\[
\begin{align*}
Pir Sultan Abdal’im Seyyid Nesimi \\
Șu âleme destan ettin sesimi
\end{align*}
\]

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, Seyyid Nesimi
You made my voice the story for this world
…

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Çeke çeke ben bu dertten ölmürüm} \\
\text{Seversen Ali’yi değme yarama} \\
\text{Ali’nin yoluna serim veririm} \\
\text{Seversen Ali’yi değme yarama}
\end{align*}
\]

Ever enduring I die from this malady
If you love Ali don’t touch my wound
I devote myself to the way of Ali
If you love Ali don’t touch my wound
…

\[
\begin{align*}
Pir Sultan’im Haydar Nesimî’yiz \\
Tâ ezelden Şah’a kurban serimiz \\
On İki İmamlar dâr meydanimiz \\
Biz şehidiz Ali’dir serdârimiz
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{85}\) About Mansûr al-Hallâj and *anâ ’l-Haqq* see Schimmel (1975).
I am Pir Sultan, Haydar, we are Nesimi
Even from eternity we are given to the Shah
The Twelve Imams is our dwelling place
We are martyrs and Ali our commander

Pir Sultan’s verse is robust and expresses the esoteric and heterodox beliefs emanating from the time when Alevi-Bektaşi identity was coalescing from out of the antinomian Anatolian dervish groups of the sixteenth century (Karamustafa 1993; 1994, 83f). It also reflects a response to times of social and political unrest as the Ottoman government asserted its authority in Anatolia in the face of the new threat posed by the Safavid rulers in Iran. At times the voice of the suppliant dervish turns to an ecstatic vehemence as in the deyiş beginning Hazret-i Ali’nin devri yürür (May the time of Lord Ali advance):

Çağırırlar filân oğlu filâna
Ne itibar Yezid kavli yalana
*Kılıçın Arş´tadır doğru gelene*
*Ya ser verip ya ser alınmalıdır*

They call out such and such to the sons of so and so
What regard is due the word of the lying Yezid
His sword raised on high at the one advancing
The head must be devoted or seized

Pir Sultan Abdal’s manner of defiance is expressed in hope of the coming of the Shah, a figure that can be understood both as the temporal Safavid rule – the figurehead of opposition to the Ottoman ruler – and as the coming order of those of

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86 Barkey (1994, 2008) and Faroqhi (1995) are particularly useful on the issue of social unrest in Anatolia and the administrative response to it.
87 The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.29.
true belief, the ehlibeyt, most particularly in the person of the Imam Ali. The great optative lyric Haktan inayet olursa is a litany of such hope:

Haktan inayet olursa  
Şah Uruma gele bir gün

By the grace of God  
May the Shah come to Rum one day  
...
Çeke sancağı götüre  
Şah İstanbula otura

May they raise and bear the banner  
May the Shah sit in Istanbul  
...
Pir Sultan’ın işi ahtır  
İntizarım güzel Şah’tır  
Mülk iyesi padişahtr  
Mülke sahib ola bir gün

Pir Sultan’s work is but a sigh  
I am in expectation of the beautiful Shah  
The administration that is sovereign  
May he be its master one day

One of the most engaging and significant aspects of Pir Sultan’s verse is the manner in which he imbues these themes with references that evoke a sense of the Anatolian landscape, the real world of places and the resonances of the seasons; a factor that plays a part in connecting his verse intimately with the people.

Bahar oldu otlar bitti güz geldi
On’ki İmam’lara giden turnalar

Spring is done, the grass gone, Autumn come
The red cranes are going to the Twelve Imams
...

Abdal olup dağdan dağa dolandım
Aştığım bellere göç eylemişim
Kızıl ırmakları bulandırınca
Kayalı göllere göç eylemişim

I wandered as a dervish from mountain to mountain
I migrated to mountain passes that I went beyond
When the waters of the Red River were churned to mud
I migrated to the rocky lakes
...

Bu yıl bu dağların karı erimez
Eser bâd-ı sâbah yel bozuk bozuk
Türkmen kalkıp yaylasına yürümez
Yıkılmış aşiret il bozuk bozuk

The snow doesn’t melt on the mountains this year
The morning breeze blows an ill wind of ruin
The Turkmen no longer start out for the highlands
The nomads have cleared off and the land is in ruin
...

El ettiler turnalara kazlara
Dağlar yeşillendi döndü yazlara
Çiğdemler takınsın söyle kızlara
Niçin gitmez Yıldız-Dağı dumanın

They signal to the red cranes and the falcons
The mountains are turned green for the new seasons
Let the crocus be worn; speak to the young girls
Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?

This lived world, the connection to seasons and place, as expressed through the verse suggests a plausible sound oral ‘chain of transmission’ (Vansina 1985, 29) and the strong possibility that we have to a large extent an authentic voice in the deyiş of Pir Sultan. This is not to assert that this is an individual voice or authorship, but rather that the texts have been maintained, formed, phrased and supplemented following these central themes with considerable authenticity and integrity through successive generations of performance.

The memory, or expressed idea, of actual events is present but ambiguous, for the most part, suggesting the meaning of such events rather than retention of reportage. The historical construction of the lyrics and the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal evidently arise from the world of Ottoman-Safavid conflict in sixteenth century Anatolia but this is imagined in the oral lyric tradition to express the importance of integrity, commitment and hope. So, as I have suggested earlier, the circumstance of probable historical event and detail is distilled into the personal conflict of Pir Sultan Abdal and Hızır Paşa that the songs express. Pir Sultan Abdal’s voice is certainly a voice of challenge to authority constructed from historical circumstance, but it is more refined and deeply felt than the expression of a political ideology as some might glibly suggest. Pir Sultan Abdal has surely engaged the imagination of Alevi over centuries and developed a corpus of orally sustained deyiş that extends beyond the

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88 Even a knowledgeable scholar engaged with Alevi music such as Bates can still reduce a characterisation of Pir Sultan to irrelevent cliche in discussing contemporary aşık-s who “sing of the life history and political ideology of Pir Sultan Abdal … rural Anatolia’s ‘Robin Hood’, who fought against authoritarianism and was ultimately hung for his resistance” (Bates 2011, 7).
forms for ritual devotion – and so in later times engaged wider communities of interest – because the persona and his exemplary story is received as a universal truth, the confession of a moral community and the harbinger of hope.

_Pir Sultan Abdal’im bu sözüm haktır_  
_Vallâhi sözümün hatası yoktur_  
_Şimdiki sofunun yezidi çoktur_  
_Ali´m ne yatarsın günlerin geldi_

I am Pir Sultan Abdal this word of mine is true  
I swear to God there is no lie in my word  
Nowadays the deceitful dervishes are many  
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come

2.4 The case of Kul Himmet and ‘üstadım’

Kul Himmet like Pir Sultan Abdal is counted among the seven great poets of Alevi-Bektashi tradition and chronologically stands as the latest of the seven being active, most plausibly, in the second half of the sixteenth and perhaps in the early part of the seventeenth century. Like Pir Sultan Abdal there is no documentary evidence of his actual identity and even less about his putative life and activity can be drawn from

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89 The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.26.

90 Aslanoğlu (1997a, 4) makes the observation that Kul Himmet was living when the _Menâkıbu’l-esrâr behcetü’l-ahrâr_ (the büyük buyruk of Bisâti) was written, that is around 1576. Öztelli also uses the evidence of the _Menâkıb_ to determine that the Kul Himmet like the other poets included in the buyruk lived in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. (Öztelli 1996, 15). There are no lyrics with the mahlas of Kul Himmet in the edition of Bisâti’s _Menâkıb_ edited by Taşım based on a copy from around 1612-1613 (Bisatî 2003) however Gölpınarlı says that Bisâti’s _Menâkıb_ includes four nefes while there were twenty attributed to Hatayi, three to Pir Sultan and one each to Kul Adil, Kul Maslum and Şah Adil (Gölpınarlı 2007, 178). So while Hatayi stands out as the principal voice Kul Himmet appears on an equal footing with Pir Sultan. The common epithet of ‘Kul’ among the included poets is also of some interest. Gölpınarlı includes three of the four Kul Himmet nefes from the _Menâkıb_ in his book _Alevi Bektashi nefesleri_ (Gölpınarlı 1992, 32-33; 138-139; 192-194). Gölpınarlı does not give any detail about the provenance of his manuscript source other than to say it was a copy made around 1608-1609 (1017 hicri) (Gölpınarlı 2007, 654). Sadettin Nüzhet earlier mentions the presence of Kul Himmet lyrics being among the nefes in the _Menâkıb_ and other mecmua (Ergun 1929, 2).
the lyrics attributed to him. Both Öztelli and Aslanoğlu report evidence of his memory in the traditions of the village of Gürümlü (formerly known as Varzil) in the vicinity of Almus in the region of Tokat (that is to the northern side of Yıldız Dağı). During their visits to the village made separately by Öztelli and Aslanoğlu they received reports of cönk held in the village containing nefes by Kul Himmet, though some of the villagers were rather coy about revealing them. In the centre of the village is the presumed tomb of Kul Himmet with an inscription identifying it as being constructed in 195891. He is generally understood to have been an associate and mürid (disciple) of Pir Sultan; and so a contemporary or younger contemporary of Pir Sultan (Öztelli 1996, 45-47; Aslanoğlu 1997a, 11-17). From the evidence of the lyrics he also appears to have been educated and proud to state it:

Kul Himmet’im okur yazar
(Aslanoğlu 1997a, 174)

I am Kul Himmet one who reads and writes

Kul Himmet’im okur, asıl gelirim
(Öztelli 1996, 97)

I am Kul Himmet one who reads, I come as genuine

Gölpınarlı includes Kul Himmet along with Pir Sultan as the two greatest lyric poets in Alevi-Bektaşi literature (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 19). Hatâyi, Pir Sultan and Kul Himmet together form the foundational triumvirate voice of Alevi lyrical

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91 The most substantial works dealing with Kul Himmet are Aslanoğlu (1997a) and Öztelli (1996). Important earlier publications that include Kul Himmet lyrics are those by Atalay (1991) and Gölpınarlı (1963; 1953a).
expression and the model for the *aşık*-s that came after as can be seen expressed in a lyric attributed to Kalender Abdal\textsuperscript{92}: 

*Kalender, yok bu sözümün hatası*

*Beş harfendir aşıklarım futası*

*Üç aşık dır cümle aşık atası*

Hatâyi, Kul Himmet, Pir Sultan geldi

(Öztelli 1996, 28-29)

Kalender, my word has no error
The apron of the *aşık*-s is of five letters
Three *aşık*-s come as ancestors of all *aşık*
Hatayi, Kul Himmet, Pir Sultan

Kul Himmet himself was the *mürşid* (teacher and guide) of another significant poet of Alevi ritual lyrics, Kul Hüseyin\textsuperscript{93} demonstrating the establishing of links and momentun of authority from seminal poets represented in the *Menakıb* within the ritual tradition.

Kul Himmet’s lyrics show similarity in the themes relating to belief and ritual function to Hatayi and Pir Sultan indicating the influence of those poets or the common historical constructions from which they emerge – the coalescing of *kızılbaş* identity around the expressive charisma of Alid and ehlibeýt Shi-ism. It is not altogether remarkable that lyrics are found in the cönk and mecmua collections

\textsuperscript{92} Öztelli attributes the lyric to Kalender Abdal who he says was active in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century (Öztelli 1996, 28), thus making him a contemporary of Kul Himmet. The identity of Kalender Abdal is, however, confused. Some associate this poet with Kalender Çelebi (Özmen 1998: 2, 23f) who lived in the early sixteenth century making this attribution anachronous. More likely the Kalender Abdal associated with this lyric is the same poet to which the renowned lyric ‘Dün gece seyrimde seyrim içinde’ is attributed, for which see Başgöz (1967: 9-10); and whom Doğan Kaya speculates lived at the latest up until the nineteenth century (Kaya 2004).

\textsuperscript{93} On Kul Hüseyin see Öztelli (1996) and Özmen (1998: 2, 325-344).
sometimes attributed to Kul Himmet and sometimes to Pir Sultan or Hatayi. There is a prevalence of Alevi-Bektaşi themes in Kul Himmet’s lyrics and, as Öztelli (1996, 43) observes, this is common to all these ozan-s (aşıklar) and so it is little surprise that the attribution of lyrics is adaptable or not completely fixed. While ostensible confusion in attribution is commonly represented as a matter of error or ignorance, and may be so, it may be more instructive to see this, whether by intent or error, as demonstrative of a functional strength of the oral traditional form in allowing an expansive approach to the traditional lyric that permits the interpretive potential of attribution. Understood in the terms of DuBois’s (2006) associative axis the lyric is made meaningful through the act of attribution. In the common or variable (even strictly erroneous) attributions among Hatayi, Pir Sultan and Kul Himmet we may witness the working through and affirmation of authority and permeable personas. Indeed plausible adaptable attribution may be understood as a way that connections, associations and communities of authority are strengthened and sustained by those working in or being part of the traditional culture.

2.4.1 Kul Himmet Üstadım

As a seminal poet of ritual and didactic lyric it not surprising that, as for Pir Sultan and Hatayi, there should also be a tradition of appropriation and reworking of the Kul Himmet identity. The multiple identities seemingly forming the received poetic persona of Kul Himmet as an issue is again raised by the late and renowned Sivas folklorist İbrahim Aslanoğlu. The issue focuses on the identity associated with those lyrics with a mahlas form ‘Kul Himmet Üstadım’. The issue is particularly of interest, perhaps, since this identity is attributed to one of the most outstanding and,
since the early 1980s when a shortened version was recorded by Arif Sağ\textsuperscript{94}, most widely performed and recorded, tevhid duaz lyrics (and an outstanding example of a series of quatrains in mani form) beginning:

\begin{verbatim}
Bugün bize pir geldi 
Güllerı taze geldi 
Ünü sıra kanberle 
Ali murtaza geldi 
\end{verbatim}

(Atalay 1991, 165)

Today the Pir came to us 
Fresh came his roses 
Ali Murtaza came with 
Kamber his groom before him\textsuperscript{95}

This lyric appears among the earliest publications of Alevi Bektaşi lyrics sourced from cönk and mecmua in the early years of the twentieth century. Its earliest publication is in Besim Atalay where the mahlas verse is given as:

\begin{verbatim}
Kul Himmet üstadımız 
Bunda yoktur yadımız 
Şah Merdan aşkına\textsuperscript{96} 
Hak vere muradımız 
\end{verbatim}

(Atalay 1991, 167)

\textsuperscript{94} Sağ recorded the first five verses of the tevhid on his 1983 recording \textit{İnsan Olmaya Geldim} (Sağ 1983) and continued with another five verses on his next solo recording Halay (Sağ 1988). Neither recording included the mahlas verse. Many popular performers subsequently recorded the song including Özlem Özgür, the Akbaba duo, İbrahim Tatlıses, Nuray Hafıtaş and Sabahat Akkiraz.

\textsuperscript{95} The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.8.3.

\textsuperscript{96} This line as it appears in the modern Turkish version prepared by Vedat Atila is actually short one syllable as it omits the izafet construction and should more logically read Şah\textsuperscript{-}t Merdan aşkına as in later published versions. In the original Ottoman script publication of Atalay’s book (Atalay 1340 (1924), [108]) this construction reads: شاه مردان
Kul Himmet our master
We are not strangers here
For the love of Ali of the Seven Guides
Our hope is that God may deliver

Aslanoğlu’s version follows Atalay quite closely while including an apostrophe to emphasise the form ‘üstadım’ as a construction of the mahlas and the ‘ız’ as the suffixed third person verb – as well as capitalising it – thus making the line “Kul Himmet Üstadım’ız” (we are Kul Himmet Üstadım) and not allowing the reading and interpretation, possible in Atalay, of “Kul Himmet our master”. In the original publication in Ottoman script Atalay identifies the mahlas as Kul Himmet not Kul Himmet Üstadım using the convention of containing the mahlas in square brackets.  

Kul Himmet Üstadım’ız
Onda yoktur yadımız
Şahi Merdan aşkına
Hak vere muradımız
(Aslanoğlu 1995, 126)

We are Kul Himmet Üstadım
We are not strangers there
For the love of Ali of the Seven Guides
Our hope is that God may deliver

---

97 This convention is not used in modern collections in Latin script although italics or bold type is sometimes used to highlight the mahlas. The mahlas Atalay contains within brackets is قول همت استادیم (Atalay 1340 (1924), [108]) as the image below, taken from Atalay’s book, shows.
Öztelli writes that he has found as many as a hundred mani lyrics for Kul Himmet in the cönk manuscripts (Öztelli 1996, 175) – that is a hundred or so four line verses in this meter (not entire lyrics) and these are connected by the relation of the last line of the preceding verse with the first line of the following verse. In the version of the line of mani constituting the duaz tevhid given by Öztelli the mahlas is Kul Himmet not Kul Himmet Üstadım but, significantly, the concept of üstad (master) is retained in the mani in the second line and would appear to refer to one he understands as master – this being Imam Ali who is mentioned in the subsequent line as Şah-ı Merdan or perhaps even his spiritual guides Pir Sultan or Şah Hatayi.

Kul Himmet’in yâdı ne
Dilek diler üstadına
Şah-ı Merdan aşkına
Mevlâm ver muradımı
(Öztelli 1996, 179)

What does Kul Himmet mention
He longs for his master
For the love of Ali of the Seven Guides
Lord, grant my desire

What is instructive is the reworking of words that suggest the force of conceptual metonyms in different ways within such a succinct form. It is not the rendering of historical certainty (or uncertainty) but the discharge of expressive and interpretive possibility that that is revealed. Variation in the form neither proves nor disproves any eponymous identity but does hint at the more important characteristic of the metonymic resilience of the persona abetted by an adaptable or malleable mahlas form. So Kul Himmet in the mahlas verse is associated with the concept of master
(üstad) and this may be interpreted as an intrinsic part of the persona or even as the evidence of the work of later devotees (or scholarly interpreters).

2.4.2 Fleshing out the persona: Aşık İbrahim and Hacık Kız

Aslanoğlu (1997a, 7-9) identifies the principal identity of Kul Himmet Üstadjım as living in the second part of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth. He is identified as Aşık İbrahim of the Öksüzoğulları from Örenik village in the Karageban area of the region of Divriği. Aslanoğlu makes this identification on the basis of registers (defter) of the population for Divriği. Aslanoğlu states that while Aşık İbrahim’s name does not actually appear in an 1844 register his son’s, Hasan, does with his age being given as being sixty-five years old. Aslanoğlu calculates that if Hasan is sixty-five years old in 1844 he must have been born in 1779 and makes the assumption that if Kul Himmet Üstadjım was around thirty years old when Hasan was born his year of birth would be around 1749.

Aslanoğlu makes his identification of Aşık İbrahim as the identity of Kul Himmet Üstadjım from the internal evidence of the lyrics, most particularly on a reference to Aşık İbrahim in the opening line of one deyiş; and also because of references to contemporary poets and locations in the Divriği region. One deyiş bearing the Kul Himmet Üstadjım mahlas begins:

*Âşık İbrahim de bir mâ’na söyler*
Ben gidersem ismim kala dillerde
*Âşıklar derdinin dermanın söyler*
Ben gidersem imim kala dillerde

(Aslanoğlu 1995, 36)
Aşık İbrahim speaks of a truth
If I go let my name remain on the tongues
Aşık-s speak of sorrow’s remedy
If I go let my name remain on the tongues

Aslanoğlu suggests that the aşık introduces his name with a master (usta or üstad) to establish his own self; that, together with the name in the final quatrain (the mahlas quatrain), his name will also be remembered. This is a case of the aşık introducing his name with the master’s seemingly outside and even dubitable to the functional meaning of the mahlas. In time and in other places the poems became mixed up with Kul Himmet and so Kul Himmet Üstadım was forgotten as a separate personality (Aslanoğlu 1995, 11). This would logically and plausibly seem true enough; however it also seems to be an overly simplistic explanation and dubious strategy (or a significant misjudgement on the part of aşık) since, as Aslanoğlu implies, Aşık İbrahim’s Kul Himmet Üstadım identity was subsumed into that of Kul Himmet so the aşık’s name and individual identity survived precariously at best.

Oztelli suggests that Kul Himmet Üstadım was so devoted to Kul Himmet that he remembered his master in every poem by adding üstadım to the name (Öztelli 1996, 48). As Aslanoğlu and Öztelli both note, the nineteenth century Sivas aşık Fakir Edna used the same device to express his devotion to Hatayi. Interestingly, however, the example verse given by Öztelli gives üstadım in the grammatically qualifying position preceding the name, that is “üstadım Hatayî kurdu bu yolu”98, which can be understood to mean ‘my master Hatayi established this way’, and not in the more

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grammatically ambiguous post-position in which üstadım appears in the Kul Himmet Üstadım mahlas.

The suggestion of the meaning for the mahlas Kul Himmet Üstadım proposed by Aslanoğlu and Öztelli is that üstadım is a possessive construction – which is certainly unusual in respect to the mahlas. Even in the verse of Fakir Edna given as supporting evidence by Öztelli the use of üstadım is clearly adjectival and is presented as relating to the mahlas itself, and seems a rather unexceptional example of a convention of evoking the name of and devotion to the path or way of the great Alevi masters such as Hatayi and Pir Sultan. The postpositional ‘ım’ (as in üstadım) can be understood as either the first person possessive or as the first person verb ‘to be’. In reference to the convention of the mahlas as being fundamentally a device of attribution99, it is always understood as the latter – an assertion of the poetic persona. The suggestion here is perhaps that the sense of any grammatical meaning has to be lost and that üstadım becomes merely part of the pronominal Kul Himmet Üstadım. Yet it is instructive that the mahlas form ‘Pir Sultan Abdalım’ is never considered in the same way but rather as the assertion of the persona ‘Pir Sultan Abdal’ as in ‘I am Pir Sultan Abdal’100. In other words, why do we need to consider this mahlas as evidence of a separate identity rather than just as an epithet added to the mahlas in some lyrics, and as Abdal(ım) may be added to Pir Sultan, why not Üstad(ım) to Kul Himmet? The answer is of course we do not unless the purpose is to uncover evidence for locating the creative identities responsible for the lyrics. Yet this does not seem to be the expressive purpose of this mahlas persona. While it may well

99 He I emphasise attribution is not simply synonymous with authorship – though it can mean that too – but also attribution to an implied poetic persona or authority.

100 This point may be supported by an alternative form of the mahlas that has the descriptive abdal preceding Abdal Pir Sultan’ım – I am (the) Abdal Pir Sultan.
have derived from an individual who perceived himself in the tradition of his ‘master’, his choice of mahlas has the inherent ambiguity to devolve the lyrics into his master’s persona albeit retaining a distinct form that overtly expresses the fundamental metonymy to be understood in respect to the mahlas Kul Himmet – that of ‘master’.

Aslanoğlu builds his evidence for a later distinct identity for Kul Himmet Üstadım observing that in another deyiş Kul Himmet Üstadım mentions Aşıkî, a poet from Arguvan understood to have lived between 1763 and 1821 and who spent time with his şeyh Derviş Muhammed in the village of Anzahar in the Divriği region. Aslanoğlu also highlights the references in a number of deyiş to locations in the Karageban region of Divriği such as Sultan Oyuk and Sağrı Çamlık (Aslanoğlu 1995, 8).

Öztelli claims to have originally opposed Aslanoğlu’s view and believed Kul Himmet Üstadım was Kul Himmet until he himself came across a lyric he describes as a ‘documentary poem’ (“belgesel nefes”) (Öztelli 1996, 48-50) which reveals two indentities and which concludes with the mahlas verse:

\[ \text{Kul Himmet Üstadım, cemâlin cennet} \\
\text{Şol iki cihan severi Muhammed} \\
\text{Bin bir ismi vardır, bir ismi Himmet} \\
\text{Anın içün arzumanım Kul Himmet} \\
\text{(Öztelli 1996, 50)} \]

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101 Özmen gives the date of death as 1824 (Özmen 1998: 4, 47-74).
102 Sheikh. The head of a dervish order.
Kul Himmet Üstadım\textsuperscript{103}, your beauty is paradise
Muhammad loves the streams of the here and after
There are a thousand and one names, one name is Himmet
My desire is for him\textsuperscript{104}, Kul Himmet

In this lyric Öztelli sees the evidence of Kul Himmet Üstadım’s great love for Kul Himmet. Indeed the lyric throughout repeats the refrain “\textit{anın içün arzumanım Kul Himmet}” (my desire is for him Kul Himmet) and a reference to Teslim Abdal (alongside Hatayi and Pir Sultan) an aşık who it is supposed lived after Kul Himmet would seem to support Öztelli’s view. Öztelli does rely on the narrative coherence and logic of the lyric and especially the final mahlas verse, however evidence of Alevi deyiş, particularly in respect to the mahlas verse, might also suggest caution in relying on a narrative reading and the consistency of grammatical person markers (suffixes of the verb ‘to be’). One of the characteristics of the mahlas, and a central proposition of my thesis, is its meaningful ambiguity – by which I mean it is through the permitted ambiguity in the rhetoric of the lyric that meaning (interpretation) can take place. So, I would contend that in this lyric it is not necessary to look for the logical distinction of two identities in the lyric personas – though it is certainly a possible and valid perspective – but that other ways of meaning are possible. It could be interpreted that Kul Himmet addresses himself in the mahlas verse through the very meaning of his mahlas\textsuperscript{105}. From this perspective a possible reading is that Kul Himmet speaks of himself as master (üstadım = I am master) in the first person then changes grammatical person to say ‘your aspect is as paradise’ – such a shift in

\textsuperscript{103} Following my earlier argument, this could also be read as ‘I am Kul Himmet master’ following the common practice of including the first person verb ‘to be’ in the mahlas.
\textsuperscript{104} Or ‘for this’.
\textsuperscript{105} A device employed by many aşık-s from Hatayi to Şidki Baba to Dertli Divani which will be discussed further in the next chapter.
grammatical person is common in Alevi deyiş. He then speaks of the ‘thousand and one names’ of which one is ‘himmets’ which literally evokes the idea of ‘zeal’ or ‘endeavour’ or ‘moral influence’; and then the poet, that is Kul Himmet (literally ‘servant [or slave] of endeavour’), says it is for ‘this’ he desires; that is he desires to be the essence of Kul Himmet, to achieve what his persona, as expressed in his mahlas, means.

Somewhat surprisingly, Aslanoğlu having determined Aşık İbrahim as the principal identity of Kul Himmet Üstadım, then proposes a second Kul Himmet Üstadım, a girl named Hacık Kız (Hatice) who lived in the nineteenth century in Örenik in the Divriği region. This second Kul Himmet Üstadım accounts for the mention of a precise date of 1277 (i.e. 1860 CE) in one deyiş. Since this date post-dates Aşık İbrahim it becomes a problematic attribution to him. Aslanoğlu quotes local legend that says one day the villagers of Örenik asked Kul Himmet Üstadım (that is, Aşık İbrahim) “Aşık, after you is there nobody to attain and hold your place?” To which he replied “Don’t be anxious, when I die a girl will be born who will sing nefesler with my name” (Aslanoğlu 1997a, 10). So, Aslanoğlu locates a second Kul Himmet Üstadım that is directly connected to the first. Irrespective of the veracity of the claims of identity, the importance of linkage (lineage), continuity and authority is evident in such accounts – indeed this is perhaps the most important function to be understood by such accounts.

If we accept as plausible the veracity of the proposed Kul Himmet Üstadım identities, we may also see this as the process of the tradition revealed in practice.

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106 This ‘shiftiness' in grammatical person, which is a common characteristic of the deyiş lyric, particularly in the mahlas verse, will be discussed further in the next chapter.
Aşık İbrahim is one inspired to follow Kul Himmet as his master (üstadım) precisely as a way of connecting to the tradition and community – of asserting his participation in the tradition and his contribution to its continuity. He may assert his own identity to some degree and indeed may desire its memory, but his success and the success of the tradition in this approach is that his work was (or may have been) accepted and contributed to the vitality of the Kul Himmet tradition. Local tradition may retain the memory of notable individuals who animate and create the tradition, but their success depends upon their place in the larger tradition to which they look. It is the forces of coherency and authority that the great personas, such as Kul Himmet and Pir Sultan and Hatayi, exert that sustain this process. One reason Alevi lyric represents such a substantial expressive tradition is the tension between the structurally coalescing and sustaining and authorising forces and the local, communal and individually creative forces that re-interpret, invent and contribute. Within this creative tension identities emerge, establish personas, coalesce under the force of persona or become obscure.

It is not my intention to try disprove the identities proposed by Aslanoğlu – not the least because much of my argument is that this is ultimately of limited value at least for my purpose in understanding the expressive implications of the mahlas persona and how it means. The evidence of the lyrics suggests the limits of the task. What can we understand, for example, from this lyric in which the central concept of master ‘üstad’ is associated with Pir Sultan.

_Eydür Kul Himmet, üstadım Pir Sultan_
_Hem Küçük Yatağan, Büyük Yatağan_
_Erenler cellâdi yâ Hacım Sultan_
_Zâhirde, bâтиnda sen imdat eyle_
(Öztelli 1996, 96)
So says Kul Himmet, my master is Pir Sultan
Both Little Yatağan and Big Yatağan
Dervishes’ scourge Hacım Sultan
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you give help.

This mahlas line states (following Öztelli’s editorial punctuation) “Kul Himmet says, my master is Pir Sultan” although it could conceivably mean “Kul Himmet speaks, I am the master Pir Sultan”. However, if we remove the editorial comma, a reading such as “Kul Himmet Üstadım speaks of Pir Sultan” is possible. Here we have the term ‘üstadım’ associated with Kul Himmet in, at the very least, an ambiguous context though one that more persuasively speaks of his ‘master’ as being Pir Sultan and an assertion of authoritative lineage.

Finally, the comments of Ali Celalettin Ulusoy ([n.d.], 199) in respect to the issue of Kul Himmet Üstadım are instructive. Ulusoy is a çelebi (a claim of descent from Hacı Bektaş) and someone whose views can be understood to carry particular interest in regards to Alevi-Bektaşi expression. In his work Yedi ulu ’lar, Ulusoy provides only a very brief introduction to the lyrics works of Kul Himmet that he includes, only amounting to one page but half of this is given over to the issue of the identity of Kul Himmet and Kul Himmet Üstadım. Ulusoy notes a verse mentioning ‘Pirim

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107 The full text and translation of this deyiş can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.8.2.

108 See also this mahlas verse included by Aslanoğlu (1995, 107) as a Kul Himmet Üstadım lyric that clearly evokes Pir Sultan and indeed his locale of Banaz and Yıldız(eli) which seems at odds with the assertion of the Aşık İbrahim identity. Again, the reading can be ambiguous in respect to üstadım, either as the name Kul Himmet Üstadım or as “Kul Himmet my master reluctant Pir Sultan”: Kul Himmet Üstadım Pir Sultan nazlı Yıldız’dir yaylası köyü Banazlı Bir pınar akiyor oniki gözlü Suyu abı zemzem der Hacı Bektaş Kul Himmet Üstadım reluctant Pir Sultan Yıldız is his land Banaz his village A source flows the twelve discerning ones Hacı Bektaş speaks of the abundance of the source
Feyzullah’ whom Ulusoy identifies as Feyzullah Çelebi who lived between 1711-1759, and on this basis agrees it would be necessary to understand that the ozan with the mahlas Kul Himmet Üstadin lived in the eighteenth century. Ulusoy also states that it can be thought that poems with the mahlas Kul Himmet Üstadin belong to a poet who accepted the sixteenth century Kul Himmet as his master (ustad/üstad) but points out that up to now no documents have been come upon to confirm this for certain. Ulusoy suggests that a harmony with Kul Himmet can be seen in the Kul Himmet Üstadin poems in terms of characteristics and manner, such as his love for Ali and Hacı Bektaş Veli and also a didactic quality. Ulusoy concludes however that until at least conclusive documents come to hand, the most realistic approach is to accept they belong to Kul Himmet and he makes no distinction in the collection of lyrics he presents. Ulusoy points out that in this literature all the great poets are copied and in time these poems get mixed up and it becomes impossible to try to distinguish them in time. Ulusoy’s comments and approach to the issue are interesting. He does not attempt to argue against the possibility of Kul Himmet Üstadin as a distinct individual but that the logical approach, pending substantive evidence, is that we accept no distinction – in other words the challenge of authorial identities does not affect the attributive function evoked in the mahlas names of the didactic authority of the works and the suitability of their content to a master persona understand as Kul Himmet. This should be understood as a valid and not a contradictory position as it reflects the essential qualities, their genesis as historical creations and individual interpretations, but also the social maintenance of the function of the lyrics in Alevi ritual and belief culture. Ulusoy seems, as a scholar, to take an interest in the issue and must address it (but is wise to the need for rigorous proof) while at the same time seems dismissive of it to the extent that it is hardly
relevant; or at least finds no difficulty in accommodating authorial ambiguity when it does not compromise the meaning and function of the lyric. It certainly does not have a bearing on how we should approach Kul Himmet and the substance of the works bearing or reflecting his mahlas, indeed as Ulusoy makes clear the lyrics of Kul Himmet Üstadım are functionally indistinguishable from Kul Himmet and issues of historical identity do not disturb that foundation.

My purpose here is not to pursue or suggest any answer to the veracity of identities, rather to illustrate the nuances that the lyrics suggest in the expression of these identities. The veracity to be found in the identities is in their inclusion in the community of authority which pivots on and is expressed in ambiguous simplicity – and consequently with great interpretive potential – in the mahlas. The mahlas expresses the veracity of the authoritative identity within the tradition but of course it is real, flesh and blood, individuals that interpret and re-create the expression of these personas.

This discussion of Kul Himmet Üstadım also aims to illustrate how the scholarly attention, particularly from folklorists and literary historians reveal, through their activities, that the centrality of persona manifested in the self-naming convention is the ontological pivot of this expressive culture and the epistemological key. The objectives (and conclusions) of the attention given by scholars such as Aslanoğlu in seeking to disentangle authorial identity from the constellation of personas in the Alevi oral lyric tradition may lead us to non-conclusions and even away from the function and ontological vitality – its creativity and interpretive drive – of the expressive culture. In asserting this approach as characteristic of ‘pre-encounters’ I
do not suggest they are not of great erudition, purpose or value – quite the contrary, as they form, from a phenomenological perspective, a critical station of understanding that supports and propels, among other things, the hermeneutical objectives of this study.

2.5 Summary: the deyiş and the mahlas from encounters to explications

In this chapter I have characterised my examination of Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Himmet as encounters, by which I mean to suggest hermeneutical ‘pre-understanding’. This is not to imply false understandings but rather that it is an interpretive process that only proceeds to limited understanding. At the centre of this encounter I have focused on the principal preoccupation of the literature on Pir Sultan Abdal: his historical identity. It is certainly true to say that Pir Sultan Abdal in many respects represents a unique case because of the survival in the oral tradition of a powerful legend concerning his life that complements and shades - and undoubtedly inspires the creation of – the body of lyric texts attributed to his name. However, Pir Sultan Abdal’s singularity in this respect may also be understood as the possibilities of the oral tradition working with historically constructed and socially maintained material being more fully developed.

The concentration on the historical Pir Sultan Abdal certainly highlights the social and political context and circumstance from which this major voice of Alevi identity, as perceived and expressed in modern Republican Turkey, was formed. Pir Sultan Abdal is one of the most potent and pervasive prisms through which Alevi perceptions of resistance, steadfastness, virtue and martyrdom are focused. The persona represented by Pir Sultan Abdal in the lyric content attributed to him and in
his legendary life, indeed in the very nature of the name, asserts the authority of an
exemplary and unquenchable life. While scholars work hard to situate Pir Sultan
Abdal within the specific milieu of rebellious activities, the legend and songs focus
more on the personal encounter of Pir Sultan Abdal with his nemesis Hızır Paşa.
While this does not contradict a putative historical life of an eponymous Pir Sultan
Abdal involved in antinomian and insurgent activities of sixteenth century Anatolia,
it does suggest that it is the meaning of such a life rather than the narrative detail or
chronological veracity that has been maintained and developed within the tradition.
In a similar way, the suggestion of multiple Pir Sultan identities is neither surprising
nor particularly instructive in terms of our understanding other than highlighting the
maintenance of such an authoritative and meaningful identity within Alevi ritual,
cultural and social traditions. Indeed in focusing on the issue of persona and lyric
attribution I have sought to highlight the role such attribution, in all its ambiguity,
plays in forming and reforming the connections and transmission of authority and
lineage that are an important quality of Alevi oral culture.

In also considering encounters with the identities of Kul Himmet and Kul Himmet
Üstadım, where, unlike Pir Sultan Abdal, there is no developed legendary life, I have
sought to highlight the processes of the oral tradition (in which traditional lyrics are
maintained, constructed and interpreted) while suggesting the determination of
authorial identity ultimately provides a limited contribution to an understanding of
their functional meaning. Suggestions that a later poet may have contributed lyrics to
a tradition of lyrics associated with one of the great and seminal ozan-s, such as Kul
Himmet, are really not remarkable and reveal little more than the natural
maintenance of lyric works in the oral tradition. Again, I have suggested that in order
to move beyond these encounters, these pre-understandings, we need to look at the interpretive meaning. In the work of Kul Himmet or Kul Himmet Üstadım I have suggested, for example, that the interpretation of the metonym ‘master’ is of more significance.

It has also been my purpose in describing these encounters to establish the critical role of the mahlas. Ultimately the preoccupations with authorial identity, which is the main thrust of scholarly focus on Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Himmet Üstadım, settle upon establishing a corpus of work with an identity understood from the mahlas name. The many books and anthologies of deyiş categorised by mahlas identities represent the endeavour of establishing typologies of attribution. The mahlas is revealed as the single pivotal textual integer around which a body of lyrics is formed, primarily understood as the marker of putative authorship. The concept of attribution of authorship is significant and of course bears meaning in terms of authority. However the consequence and limits of such an understanding is the focus on errors of attribution implying the dysfunction of the tradition or those who express or collect the lyrics. In order to advance an understanding of the mahlas beyond the limits of an authorial signature, I intend in the next chapter to explicate upon the mahlas in the context of the lyric form which it essentially defines, the deyiş.
3. EXPLICATIONS: THE DEYİŞ LYRIC FORM AND THE MAHLAS TAKING TRADITION

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will undertake a detailed explanation of the mahlas and its role as a defining textual integer in the principal Alevi expressive form the deyiş lyric. I will discuss definitions, terminologies, structures and themes in respect to the deyiş lyric form and consider the example of variants in text and how this suggests interpretive processes. I will then examine the mahlas in some detail particularly in respect to the various means through which the mahlas is acquired and how it is perceived by the aşık-s. I will also consider the mahlas in the context of its structure and form within the deyiş to reveal how this may help us to arrive at an understanding of a more nuanced meaning and function of the mahlas than proprietary attribution.

3.2 Deyiş

The deyiş is the principal lyric form through which Alevi culture and identity is expressed. Alevi culture has been essentially and fundamentally an oral and expressive (performative) culture maintained through the services of the aşık both within the ritual setting (cem) and outside through the performance of deyiş in formalised gatherings (muhabbet) and elsewhere including popular recordings, television appearances, concerts and festival appearances by influential Alevi performers. Even (or perhaps owing to) the advent of more open expression of Alevi culture through publications, recordings and broadcasts, the deyiş remains a central vehicle for cultural expression and as a concise song form suggestive of associative
meaning well suited to the ‘oral culture’ of the Internet\textsuperscript{109} through video posting sites like YouTube.

Having seen in the previous chapter how perceptions of Pir Sultan Abdal are based upon the \textit{deyişler} attributed to him and how they are interpreted and used, I will examine the \textit{deyiş} lyric song form in order to understand how it supports the dynamics of Alevi expressive culture, which will be the focus of a later chapter of my thesis. I begin by establishing a functional conceptualisation of the \textit{deyiş} lyric form. I will consider the definition and terminology of the \textit{deyiş} and related and sub-genre forms; identify its main structural elements and subject themes; and, discuss its functional and expressive context.

### 3.2.1 Definitions

Standard (Turkish-English) dictionary definitions of the term \textit{deyiş} refer to “a kind of folk poem or song” (Redhouse yeni Türkçe-İngilizce sözlük = New Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary 1983) and “folk poetry” or “folk song” (Hony and İz 1992) with further reference to the derivation from the verb demek, ‘to speak’. Literally it means: a saying, a style of speech or a statement (Hony and İz 1992)\textsuperscript{110}. The standard Turkish dictionary (sözlük) published by the Türk Dil Kurumu (Turkish Language Foundation) provides definitions such as saying (deme) or statement (ifade) as well as \textit{halk şiiri} (folk poem) or \textit{halk türküsi} (folk song) (Türkçe sözlük

\textsuperscript{109} John Miles Foley is pioneering the study of the homologies of the oral tradition and the Internet which he characterises as ‘agoras’; the oral tradition as the oAgora, the textual as the tAgora and the Internet as the eAgora. Foley’s Pathways Project aims to “illustrate and explain the fundamental similarities and correspondences between humankind’s oldest and newest thought-technologies: oral tradition and the Internet” (quoted from http://www.pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/HomePage, viewed: 27 October 2010).

\textsuperscript{110} When referring to an adage, maxim or aphorism the compound form \textit{özdeyiş} (literally genuine or true saying) is used.
The Turkish -iş (or -ış depending on the rules of vowel harmony) suffix forms a verbal noun, thus deyiş has the sense of a ‘manner’ or ‘way’ of speaking. Lewis states that it connotes not only the manner but the “fact of action” (Lewis 1991, 172). Such definitions serve to direct us to the principal underlying concepts to be understood by the term; that is, its intrinsic meaning of being a statement and moreover the action involved or way of making a statement.

While the dictionary definitions quoted above do not refer to the use of the term in the specific context of Alevi expressive culture, it is in the context of Alevi culture that the deyiş is primarily, if not exclusively, understood. Arif Sağ makes the point that in talking of deyiş this also includes Sunni ozan-s, mentioning Ruhsati as an example (Poyraz 2007, 169)\(^1\). Sağ suggests that it is the internal meaning that defines it as Alevi not the deyiş form itself. Nevertheless the term has become particularly associated with Alevi expressive culture through the prevalence of Alevi deyiş – Sağ suggests seven out of ten – a predominance exerted through mass media, recordings and the Internet. The deyiş should therefore be understood in broad terms and even in the context of Alevi culture is most usefully understood as being broad ranging and inclusive of lyrics on any subject that relate to the themes of Alevi belief, social concerns, experience and identity.

Gloria Clarke in her monograph on Alevi culture and identity variously refers to deyiş as “Alevi songs” (Clarke 1999, 73), a “type of religious song” (Clarke 1999, 5), a “song poem” (Clarke 1999, 92) and even as “hymns” (Clarke 1999, 135; 138). In

\(^{111}\) Ruhsati is a major aşık from the Sivas region who occupies a somewhat ambiguous world between the Alevi and Sunni. Although his lyrics do not assert the fundamental themes of Alevi ritual belief he is certainly considered within the broader ambit of Alevi expressive culture. Özmen (1998) includes Ruhsati in his monumental collection of Alevi-Bektaşi poetry.
her glossary definition Clarke settles on: “songs and poems common in Alevi-Bektashi literature; themes related to tarikat beliefs and principles and describing their influence in daily experience” (Clarke 1999, 161). Markoff summarises succinctly both broad and specific definitions: “poetry of minstrels in general; poetry of mystical poets of Anatolia, especially” (Markoff 1986a, Appendix F) and elsewhere as “songs of mystical love” (Markoff 1994a, 1986b, 2002b) and notes that,

Alevi minstrels and musicians refer to their collective repertoire of sung mystical poetry as deyiş (from the verb demek meaning ‘to speak’ or ‘to declaim’ [poetry]. Deyiş in more specific terms refers to poetry by a known minstrel which is sung to the accompaniment of the folk lute (bağlama). (Markoff 1986a, 58)

Laxmi Tewari who collected field recordings from Alevi villages in the Divriği area in 1970 defines deyiş as a “kind of folk poem or song” and observes that according to the people of the villages they are “songs which are written about the Prophet Muhammed, his children and the twelve Imams or religious sayings set in poem” (Tewari 1972a).112

Korkmaz (2005a) in his dictionary of Alevi-Bektashi terms defines deyiş in the following manner:

“‘Alevi-Bektaşi edebiyatında, tarikat, yol inancını ve tarikat, yol ilkelerini dile getiren, bu kapsamda güncel yaşamı betimleyen, serbest konulu şiir.’

In Alevi-Bektashi literature, a poem on any subject relating to daily life that mentions the principles or beliefs of the dervish order or way.

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112 Tewari also produced a commercial long play record of some of his village recordings and reiterates this definition in the liner notes (Tewari 1972b).
Duygulu, who provides the most substantial treatment of the deyiş in Alevi culture, particularly concentrating on its function as a musical lyric form, supports Korkmaz’s definition stating that in Alevi music and literature deyiş is mostly used as a general name for poems describing the tarikat (dervish order) principles and beliefs. Özbek includes a similar definition in his dictionary of Turkish folk music terms, but also includes broader definitions including simply türkü (folksong) which he expands in a further definition to “önemli bir olay üzerine yakılmış türkü, mantı” (a folksong composed on an important event) (Özbek 1998).

The deyiş, then, may be understood as a traditional folk song form that has a purposeful intent – that of a statement, something spoken from a position. In the lyric form, being inherently a genre of experiences, emotions, feelings and instruction – rather than narrative or plot – where persona is a defining attribute, the deyiş represents the statement of a position, a point of view, which, I will argue, is asserted and sealed in the form of its ubiquitous (and defining) textual integer of attribution – the mahlas.

3.2.2 Terminologies

My purpose is to explore the deyiş as a folk lyric conceptualised as personally sealed – authorised – and to suggest that its defining characteristic of invoking attribution requires deeper consideration of how such attribution suggests meaning, particularly

113 “Alevi-Bektaşî müziğinde ve edebiyatında deyiş daha çok tarikat ilkelerini ve inancını anlatan şiirlerin genel adıdır” (Duygulu 1997, 5).
114 Curiously, in his later expanded dictionary of the language of folksongs titled Türkülerin dili Özbek (2009) does not include the term deyiş at all, suggesting perhaps that a common understanding of the term had settled by the late 2000s.
in respect to Alevi expressive culture, where the *deyiş* is created and maintained and interpreted.

While terminology is less important in respect to function than to the concept as it is understood, nevertheless, a consideration of terminology is necessary to establish its relationship to, and the meaning it inherits from, what can be understood as sub-genre forms of the *deyiş* as well as from related forms.

Duygulu states that the term began to be used from the thirteenth-century, noting its use in the form ‗*tiyiş*‘ in a gazel by Mevlânâ (Rumi); and that slowly over the centuries as *aşık* music and literature took shape the term established its place (Duygulu 1997, 1). While the term is in widespread use throughout Anatolia among Alevis and rural (köy = village) Bektaşi-s (Duygulu 1997), other terms are used including deme in the Malatya region, beyit in Erzincan and ayet in Sivas (Duygulu 1997, 8). Duygulu also notes that Bektaşi-s in Nurhak (located between Kahramanmaraş and Elbistan) refer to performed songs (*ezgili şiirler* = literally,

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115 Köprülü (2006, 261) identifies the same line from Rumi’s verse: “*hem men çakır içer men, hem men teyiş bilir men*” (I both drink wine and know *deyiş*). Gazel is the Turkish form of ghazal which Schimmel describes as a lyrical poem with monorhyme and a vehicle for love lyrics, prayer poetry and mystical songs; and common in the Persian, Turkish and Urdu tradition (Schimmel 2001, 162). It is one of the principle poetic forms of Persian and Arabic poetry, being the lyric form distinguished from the ode (qasida) quatrains (*ruba‘i*) and epic (masnavi) (Ernst 1997, 149-150). In Turkey the gazel is associated with Ottoman culture, employs the weighted aruz metre (rather than the syllabic metre of folk poetry) and, in Andrews words, “was the heart and soul of classical Ottoman literature … and a major voice in the song of Turkish culture” (Andrews 1985, 5).

116 Nurhak has become a prominent source of Alevi expressive culture through the influence of performances and recordings by Dertli Divani, a dede from Kısas village in the Şanlıurfa region, who often officiates at ritual services (cem) in Nurhak. Divani’s performing group Hasbihal also includes the Nurhaklı musician Mustafa Kılçık. Arif Sağ included the Nurhak Semahi on his 2002 recording *Dost Yarası* and both Divani and Sağ produced video clips of their recording which I witnessed broadcast on Turkish television popular music video clip shows in 2002.
poems with tunes) reflecting Alevi-Bektaşi philosophy and beliefs as deyiş.

However, older people call these songs nefes\textsuperscript{117}.

The areas where the term deyiş is in widespread usage, according to Duygulu, represents a large part of central and eastern Anatolia from near Ankara in the west to Kars in the east and from the Black Sea (Samsun) to the Mediterranean (Mersin). Specifically Duygulu (1997, 10-11) notes the usage as follows:

1. Among the Tahtacı tribes in the area from İçel (Mersin) to Gaziantep (although among some of the Tahtacı Türkmen of this area nefes is used);
2. Among the Alevis and village Bektaşi-s of Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Adıyaman; and,
3. Among Alevis in Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Sivas, Erzurum, Erzincan, Kars, Gümüşhane, Tunceli, Bingöl, Muş, Elazığ, Tokat, Amasya, Çorum, Kırıkkale, Kayseri and Samsun. Among the Kurdish speaking Alevi of Tunceli, Muş and Bingöl the related term dej is used.

3.2.3 Deyiş or nefes

The terms deyiş and nefes, as suggested above, may be interchangeable, particularly among older generations, where the term nefes may in fact be more common. The preference for the term deyiş in more recent times indicates a broader conceptualisation (and consequently a broader functionality) for the lyric form. Since the term has currency in Anatolian usage and an association that is not restricted to devotional use, nor a specific association with the urban Bektaşi tarikat, it is more suited to modern Alevi expression that derives its impetus from Anatolian culture.

\textsuperscript{117} I can report a similar experience with those of an older generation preferring the term nefes. When I would perform deyiş – including those of a more social rather than mystical nature – in the presence of the father-in-law (an Alevi Kurd from the Tunceli/Dersim region in his sixties) of my friend and baglama teacher he would always refer to them as nefes.
Early twentieth century writing on, and collections of, Alevi lyric works used the term nefes. Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun, who produced the first monograph on Pir Sultan Abdal in 1929, collected the lyrics of 105 songs in his work under the heading “Nefesler” (Ergun 1929). Besim Atalay in his 1924 monograph titled Bektaşılik ve edebiyati (Atalay 1991) and Köprülü in his 1928 article titled “Bir Kızılbaş şairi: Pir Sultan Abdal” (Köprülü 1991), both significant early works on Alevi-Bektaşı literature, use the term nefes. This usage has continued in significant publications on Alevi lyric poetry and song including works by Vahid Lütfi Salcı (1940) and Gölpınarlı (1963). These works, notably, come from a literary perspective and from an urban setting (specifically western Turkey) where the Bektaşi tradition was prominent in the perception of Alevi (kızılbaş) traditions. While these early work certainly did distinguish the social differences between Alevis and Bektaşi-s, both Köprülü and Ergun emphasising that Pir Sultan Abdal was Alevi or kızılbaş for example, the lyric songs themselves are generally understood as common to both traditions, as is clearly the case in the title of two editions of Gölpınarlı’s Alevi-Bektaşı nefesleri (Gölpınarlı 1963, 1992) and in İsmail Özmên’s monumental five volume collection produced for the Turkish Republic Cultural Ministry in 1998 Alevi-Bektaşı şiirleri antolojisi (Özmen 1998).

The term nefes is used to identify songs (deyiş) used in the ritual service (cem) for veneration or worship. Markoff, for example, defines them as “songs concerning the

118 Translation: Bektaşı-ism and its literature.
119 Interestingly, while Özmên obviously uses the generic term for poem – şir – in the title of his work, in the glossary to the first volume he defines nefes by two terms, soluk (the literal meaning of ‘breath’) and deyiş. However as deyiş is not included in the glossary at all it is assumed that this would be the current and more commonly understood term.
mystical experience” (Markoff 2002b). They are commonly conceived as hymns particularly associated with the Bektaşi tradition and related to the composed Sufi hymn form, the ilahi, but with a more simple folksong like melody (Korkmaz 2005a). So while in many circumstances the term nefes may be interchangeable with deyiş it does not encompass the broader scope of the deyiş. And when used in the Anatolian Alevi context nefes it specifically distinguishes the songs appropriate for services in the cem or formal and ritualised gatherings such as the muhabbet in which worshipful songs are performed. Yaman and Erdemir (2006) refer to them as “religious songs” encompassing the song forms specific to ritual including the düaz-ı imam, miraçlama, semah and mersiye. Nefes also remains the preferred term for Bektaşi mystical songs most particularly in the European (Trakya = Thracian) region of Turkey.

3.2.4 Structural characteristics – syllables and symbol

Deyiş are predominantly in the Turkish folk verse forms koşma and semai. The most common form, the koşma, consists of eleven syllables with a regular caesura in units of 6+5 or 4+4+3. The semai, which may in fact be understood as a type of koşma (Güzel and Torun 2005, 360-361), has eight syllables and units of 5+3 or 4+4. Taking the deyiş attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal as a sample Haydar Kaya’s analysis of the 407 deyiş in his anthology identifies 83 percent as being in eleven syllable koşma form and all but two of the rest being in eight syllable semai form (Kaya

See Clarke (Clarke 1999), Markoff (Markoff 1986a), Redhouse (Redhouse yeni Türkçe-İngilizce sözlük = New Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary 1983).

A substantial collection of nefesler from this tradition was published under the aegis of the Turkish Republic Cultural Ministry by Hüseyin Yaltırık in 2002 in a book titled Trakya Bölgesinin Tasavvufî Halk Müziği (notalarıyla) Nefesler, Semahlar (Yaltırık 2002). This collection, the title of which which can be translated as ‘Sufi folk music, hymns and ritual dances of the Thracian region with their musical notation’, includes many Pir Sultan texts under this designation.
1999, 54). Bezirci’s analysis comes up with a similar figure with 70 percent being *koşma* and 30 percent being in the semai form (Bezirci 1993, 120-121). The stanzas may be understood to be composed in quatrains (dörtlük) following a rhyme scheme of a,b,a,b for the first stanza followed by c,c,c,b; d,d,d,b etc. for subsequent stanzas. These forms utilise purely syllabic metre (hece vezni) in contrast to the weighted metre (aruz vezni) of Ottoman classical verse. The *deyiş in koşma* form have as a minimum three stanzas (Duygulu 1997, 37) but can range up to a moderately substantial length as in the example of Edip Harabi’s Vahdetname with 28 verses (Özmen 1998: 4, 528). However, for the most part the *deyiş* is a concise lyric form.

Bezirci’s analysis of 196 Pir Sultan Abdal texts shows that 53.4 percent have five stanzas with the majority of the rest having four (13.3 percent), six (15.4 percent) or seven (12.8 percent) verses (Bezirci 1994, 119).

*Deyiş* in other forms or syllabic metre while far less prominent than *koşma* and semai are encountered, including *deyiş* in mani form, a very widespread form of folk quatrain which is more commonly anonymous without attribution within the lyric. Like the *koşma* it has a syllabic meter but consisting of a seven syllable line with a rhyme scheme generally following the form a,a,x,a throughout. Anonymous folk mani may consist of a single quatrain, however they may also be strung together with repetitive elements forming a ‘chain of mani’. This may be the repetition of a the mahlas name at the beginning of each quatrain (Duygulu 1997, 43) or as the repetition of some or all of the last line of a preceding quatrain in the first line of the following quatrain. This may reflect a mnemonic device for longer thematically

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123 This would appear to be quite rare however. Markoff suggests that minstrels have shown minimal interest in using the mani form and that its principal themes are love and nature (Markoff 1986a, 60-61). Başgöz says that the main inspiration for mani is sensual and erotic love and among its many functions are as love messages between young people, in riddles and rituals and ceremonies (Başgöz 1998b, 62).
coherent lyric texts as demonstrated in what is perhaps the most notable example of
the use of the mani form in this way in Alevi tradition, the tevhid beginning Bugün
bize pir geldi attributed to Kul Himmet (Üstadım) which runs to a chain of more than
two dozen quatrains. Mani may also appear as a multiple versed lyric without the
repetitive elements but retaining the defining syllabic form and rhyme scheme.
Duygulu notes that in addition to the more common eleven, eight and seven syllable
forms of koşma and mani, five and fifteen syllable deyiş are also encountered
(Duygulu 1997, 44).

While traditional lyric forms employing a variety of syllabic meter, though most
notably the koşma, is the structural vehicle for the deyiş, this could not be said to be
the defining structural characteristic since these forms, while strongly identified with
the deyiş, have wider currency in Turkish folk song.

The common structural element that is most characteristic in defining the deyiş is the
mahlas beyit (verse). The final verse of the lyric includes reference to a named
persona, commonly understood as the aşık responsible for the lyric, the identity to
whom in some respect the lyric is attributed, whether that is authorship (most
overtly) or some other association. The mahlas will be discussed in more detail in the
second part of this chapter and the point to emphasise here is that the attribution or
reference to a poetic persona reinforces the character of the deyiş as a statement by
evoking a specific voice, or presence, to which authority and identity may be
attached or assumed. In proclaiming a responsibility through the attributed persona,
the deyiş is in fundamental respects the expression of commitment, certainly on

124 The full text and translation is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.8.3.
125 Duygulu includes an example from Pir Sultan Abdal, Alçak yemiş dalı (Duygulu 1997, 44).
behalf of the composer or the performer of individual lyrics in respect to the content of the lyric. It is also an expression of commitment to both the tradition that the convention of the form represents and to the community that identifies – and identifies with – the personas and determines how they are received and interpreted. That is, relationships are established that involve the personas in the lyric attribution, the performers, the interpreters or intermediary authorities (as in ritual contexts) and the receptive community and audience. In this respect the mahlas expressed within the *deyiş* form may be considered the essential traditional textual integer of Alevi expressive culture since it invokes a link in the web of charismatic authorial and authoritative lineage in expressive communal contexts – and this in turn naturally sustains and maintains the importance and function of the *deyiş* form itself. Names, actual or assumed, are symbolic labels; and understood as a textual integer in the context of the lyric may, through their symbolic and associative properties provide the evidence for, to co-opt Foley’s words, “value-added signification” and “extratextual reality” (Foley 1995, 140). In other words, the *deyiş* is characterised most significantly through the structural element of the mahlas as a lyric that has the inherent potential to express immanent and entextualised meaning (evoked by the attribution to the named persona) in addition to the thematic meaning of the text and the context of any given performance.

### 3.2.5 Specific genre forms and their relationship to *deyiş*

There are some song forms used in Alevi ritual that may be considered specific or specialised genre forms which also constitute an intrinsic or foundational component of what may be understood by the more generic apppellations nefes and *deyiş*. That is to say the *deyiş* (and nefes) are necessarily defined in part by their formal
relationship to these specific genre forms. These forms relate to functions they perform in the ritual context of Alevi expression and as such display specific thematic, subject and expressive characteristics that identify them as a distinct category of song. Consequently they are often referred to alongside the term \textit{deyiş}.

The main examples of these forms include:

- **duaz-ı imam** (otherwise düazimam, duvazdeh imam) – a hymn in honour of the Twelve Imams of Shi’a tradition;
- **mersiye** – a lament for the Imam Husayn martyred at Kerbela;
- **tevhid** – a song expressing unity, specifically of the unity of God and Ali as God’s companion;
- **miraçlama** – a song concerning the ascent of Muhammad to heaven; and,
- **semah** – a sacred ritual dance.

The semah is a particular ritual form of Alevi music that has attracted the most attention from scholars. Unlike the forms mentioned above the semah is not defined so strictly by the subject of its text; or at least the subject may vary considerably provided it remains within the bounds of the sacred purpose of the

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\[126\] See for example Zelyut’s discussion of Alevi music in which he distinguishes no less than nine forms: \textit{deyiş}, \textit{nefes}, \textit{düazimam}, \textit{mersiyye (ağrı)}, \textit{naat (övgü)}, \textit{zülfikarname}, \textit{miraçlama (miraçiye), devriyye} and \textit{samah} (Zelyut 1998, 169-179). Onaçta discusses a somewhat more straightforward list including \textit{deyiş}, \textit{nefes}, \textit{duaz-ı imam}, \textit{miraçlama}, \textit{mersiye} and \textit{semah} (Onaçta 2007). Yaman and Erdemir (2006, 58) identify the \textit{duaz-ı imam}, \textit{miraçlama}, \textit{semah} and \textit{mersiye} as subcategories of religious poems (\textit{nefes}). Interestingly they all omit the \textit{tevhid}.

\[127\] The \textit{duaz-ı imam} will be considered in more detail in the Experiences chapter to follow.

\[128\] Veliyetin Ulusoy (2010, 53) calls this the crowning devotional work (\textit{taçlama duazı}) in which the sacred names are remembered; also noting that the congregation (\textit{cemaat}) repeat in rhythmic time the monotheistic formula ‘La İllahe İllallah’ and sway from side to side in ecstasy and awe. The tevhid ends with the repetition three times of the seven lines:


dance. The function it serves as a mystical dance form tends to stress its expressive qualities rather than the subject of the text, though it should be noted there are semah such as the kerklar semahi (sacred dance of the Forty), the kirt semahi (the sacred dance of the grey horse) and the turna semahi (sacred dance of the red crane) that are characterised in some part by specific themes and references in the text. In the case of the turna semahi, for example, there is reference to the turna (red crane) a sacred symbol in Alevi-Bektaşî culture. Indeed, perhaps the most widely known and performed version of the turna semahi in the public space in recent years, that is the version that forms part of the Turkish Radio and Television repertoire, uses a somewhat incoherent text attributed to the renowned seventeenth-century minstrel from the southern Anatolian region of the Taurus Mountains, Karacaoğlan – whose lyrics do not include Alevi themes – though still including reference to the turna. While the text may be corrupted, with the mahlas identity changed to an aşık not specifically related to Alevi ritual culture, the song still functions as a prominent public representation of the Alevi semah due to its complex musical structure incorporating changes in metre and tempo, exemplary of the semah form. In Alevi song forms, even as ritually significant as the semah, there appears scope to extend the range or nature of the text, while a possibility of creative freedom or necessary cultural discretion can be achieved through the expressive aspects of the song or the

130 A factor that also applies to the musical aspects of the performance of the semah (Markoff 1994a, 103–104).
131 Specifically the turna is motif associated with the Imam Ali or with their possibility of providing a connection to Ali. As Elçin observes, Pir Sultan Abdal asks (in a deviş) whether or not the cranes have seen Ali when they came from the lands of Yemen and performed the “Semâ” (semah) in the air (Elçin 1997b). However, as Elçin’s study shows, the turna motif has a long and widespread tradition in Turkish folk literature (and broader than its specific function in Alevi-Bektashi lyric) especially as a news bringing (haber) motif.
132 The turna semah in this form is, for example, included on the recordings promoted as Alevi semah or 'classics works’ directed by the Alevi musicians Musa Eroğlu (1993b) and Zafer Güngödüş (Various n.d.).
retention of key signifiers that inherit immanent qualities\textsuperscript{133}. This is evident for the 

deyiş more generally when we consider the themes and subject range of the 
deyiş.

3.2.6 Themes and subjects in the deyiş

Duygulu states that the principal subjects treated by the deyiş can be separated broadly into those on religious subjects (dini konular) and those outside religious subjects (din dişi konular) (Duygulu 1997, 46). The straightforward division between songs of a religious or worshipful nature (ibadet) and those of a non-religious nature is an understanding that is commonly stated. In writing about Alevi music in the monthly journal of the Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği\textsuperscript{134} Battal Odabaş divides Alevi music into “dinsel içerikli” (of religious content) and “toplumsal içerikli” (of social content) (Odabaş 2001, 21). Arif Sağ draws distinctions in the technique of performance and in the textual (edabi = literary) aspects of Alevi music, that is “ibadet müziği” (music for worship) and that which he refers to as “dinleti müziği” (music for listening) (Yürüköğlu 1993, 43). Duygulu (1997, 46-60) notes the major themes that appear in the deyiş of a religious nature including:

- the theme of “teslis inancı” – that is, texts with a theme of the belief in the Allah, Muhammad, Ali trinity;
- the theme of “Ehl-i Beyt sevgisi” – that is, love of the Prophet’s family notably Ali, Hasan, Husayn and Fatima; and,
- the theme of the lives of prophets (peygamberler), saints and other dervish leaders and notables (pirler, evliyarlar, ulu kişiler).

\textsuperscript{133} Özbek has identified a corruption of texts in this version of the semah but considers that Mahmut Erdal, who is the source of this version, achieved an artistic thing in the version he presented to the teacher and folk song collector Nida Tufekçi (personal communication, Ankara, July 2002).

\textsuperscript{134} The Association of the Karacaahmet Sultan dergah (an Alevi ‘lodge’) located in Üsküdar on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus in Istanbul.
Duygulu characterises the themes outside the religious as having didactic and lyric subjects. These include legendary subjects of which the story of Pir Sultan is a significant example, particularly the relationship and climactic encounter with Hızır Paşa. Also, themes relating to Alevi-Bektaşi ‘philosophy’ (Alevi-Bektaşi felefesi) that embrace the subjects of Alevi-Bektaşi society, the perfected person (kâmil olan), deep friendship or companionship (dost olan) and the knowledgeable person (irkan sahibi olan). Further themes include love and passion (aşk, sevda); and deyiş that respond to the insult and calumny that Alevi-Bektaşi society has been subject to (Duygulu 1997, 51-58). Duygulu also makes the important point that even in the deyiş with social themes to the fore, the religious themes are never abandoned; and deyiş with a synthesis of religio-mystical (dini-tasavvuf) and social themes form the most characteristic part of the Alevi-Bektaşi repertoire (Duygulu 1997, 51).

By way of example, the deyiş known as Değiliz, by Aşık İbreti, is an expression of Alevi social identity confronting an assertive religious orthodoxy. It is indeed a strong statement that asserts Alevi concepts such as the value of inner integrity over outward show. This lyric, composed before the mid-1970s, displays an engagement with contemporary identity politics and an open and outwardly direct social statement.

Minareye çıkıp bize bağurma
Haberimiz vardır, sağır değiliz
Sen kendini düşün bizi kayırma
Sizlere kavgaya uğur değiliz

Her yerde biz Hakk’ı hazırlıriz
Olgun insanları Hızır biliriz
Bundan başkasını sıfır biliriz
Tahmininiz yanlış, biz kör değiliz

Eğer insanlıksa doğru niyetin
Nefsini ıslah et varsa kudretin
Bize lazım değil senin cennetin
Huriye gılmana esir değiliz

Arapça duaya değiliz mecbur
İster müslüman bil, istersen gavor
İnsan hor görmek en büyük küfür
Buna inanmışız, münkir değiliz

İbre, bu hâle insan acınır
Ham sofular bu sözlerden güçenir
Aslına ermeyen elbet göcunur
Onu avutmaya mecbur değiliz

(İbreti 1996, 23)

Don’t climb up the minaret and cry out to us
We know this stuff, we’re not deaf
Think about yourself, don’t worry about us
We have no mind to quarrel with you

We know God is present everywhere
We know the mature human is immortal
We know anything beside this is nothing
Your estimation is wrong, we are not blind

Wherever there is humanity your resolve is true
Improve you own self if you have the strength
We have no necessity for your heaven
We’re not slaves to your houris and pageboys
We feel no compulsion for Arabic prayers
Consider yourself Muslim if you wish, or whatever
To belittle the human is your biggest blasphemy
We are not unbelievers, we believe in this

İbreti, he grieves for humankind at this time
Crude fanatics will be encouraged by these words
The one who is unaware of his true self will take offence
We feel no compulsion to delude or amuse them

If we accept the broad conceptualisation of the *deyiş* as capable of expressing a wide range of sentiment and subjects, what is it then that characterises the lyric as an Alevi *deyiş*? I would suggest that certain elements must be present but also that there are gradations in respect to such inclusiveness and this naturally involves how the lyric is received and understood. Such elements include the attribution to aşık-s who identify as Alevi, the language used and associative expressive qualities. İbreti’s *deyiş* is an example of a song of social comment that falls well within the conception of Alevi song while demonstrating the extension of expressive comment. Its expression as an Alevi statement (Alevi *deyiş*) not merely as a socio-political one perhaps, is established by the fact that İbreti composed his song using musical material that is strongly associated with Alevi ritual. The musical structure of the song (notated below) as performed by İbreti\(^{135}\) is the same as that of the long and masterful devriye – a nefes sung in the cem dealing with cycle of existence – of Şiri beginning Cihan var olmadan ketmi ademde\(^{136}\).

\(^{135}\) I am grateful to İbreti’s grandson İrfan Gürel for providing me with a copy of a home recording of İbreti performing this *deyiş*.

\(^{136}\) The text and translation of this devriye can be found in Birge (1994, 122-125). There is some doubt about Şiri’s identity but he is believed to have been Bektas Çelebi (1710-1761); see Özmen (1998: 3, 183f). The devriye can be heard in the performance context of the cem on recording made by Tsutomu
3.2.7  *Deyiş – viewing expressive context in textual variants*

Many *deyiş* appear in variant forms, as might be expected for lyrics in an oral tradition. These variations in text are often minor but are revealing of expressive context and interpretation – perhaps all the more so because they are minor since we can see how predominant thematic material is nuanced. It is certainly the case that *deyiş* attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal appear with these small variations and I will look at two examples more closely.

The following *deyiş* attributed to Pir Sultan, *Gel benim sari tanburam* (Come my yellow lute), appears with slight but indicative variations in the earliest publications of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics, those of Atalay (1991)\(^{137}\), Ergun (1929) and Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943). Indeed it is the slightness of the variations that are indicative because in this we can witness a certain finessing or clarifying of associative Alevi aspects while retaining a text that is more general in its subject and overt meaning. The lyric does not have elements that typically demonstrate the themes and subjects central to the Pir Sultan Abdal such as devotion to the Shah, to the Imam Ali or his

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\(^{137}\) Original publication in Ottoman text in 1924 (Atalay 1340 (1924)).
life story or the landscape of land around Yıldız Dağı. Nevertheless, Aslanoğlu includes it as an accepted lyric to be attributed to the principal identity of his six Pir Sultan Abdals, the Banazlı Pir Sultan, ostensibly on the principal evidence of the mahlas form and the fact that it does not display any internal evidence that would discount it for inclusion (Aslanoğlu 1984, 206-207)\(^\text{138}\). The issue is not about authenticity but, rather, that within the tradition Pir Sultan is understood to have been the author or authentic voice of what is expressed in the \textit{deyiş} even though it does not necessarily profess the themes at the centre of our understanding of his identity. In other words, we see the possibility of expanding the expressive dimension, albeit subtly, within the traditional expressive structures.

The text of the \textit{deyiş} presented here is from Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 99-100) and would appear to be a composite or standardised text drawn from three (or more) sources. Gölpınarlı and Boratav indicate the sources as Ergun (1929) and Atalay (1991) and (presumably more than one) çönk and mecmua in the possession of Gölpınarlı\(^\text{139}\). I have indicated lines with verbal (but not morphological) variants in square brackets, ‘BA’ referring to Besim Atalay, ‘SNE’ referring to Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun and ‘ABGe’ referring to a variant in a çönk or mecmua as indicated by Gölpınarlı.

\begin{quote}
\textit{Gel benim sarı tanburam}

[\textit{Ey benim sarı tanburam} – SNE]

\textit{Sen ne için inilersin}

\textit{İçim oyuk derdim büyük}
\end{quote}

\(^\text{138}\) Unfortunately Aslanoğlu does not provide any detail about the reasons for the association of individual lyrics with the six Pir Sultan Abdals he proposes.

\(^\text{139}\) Reference to the çönk and mecmua are noted by the abbreviation “A.B.G, c.” which is described simply as referring to “Abdülbâkî‘daki mecmua ve çönkler” with no indication of the specific nature, provenance nor number of the manuscripts consulted.
Ben anınçin inilerim

[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]

Koluma taktılar teli
Söyletirler bin bir dili
Oldum ayn-i cem bülbülü

[Olmuşam Şah’in bülbülü – SNE]

[Oldum muhabbet bülbüler – BA]

Ben anınçin inilerim

[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]

Koluma taktılar perde

[Başıma koydular perde – BA]

Uğrattılar bin bir derde

[Uğrattılar dertten derde – SNE]

[Uğrattılar türlü derde – BA]

Kim konar kin göçer burda

[Ayn-i cem gecesi nerde – ABGc]

Ben anınçin inilerim

[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]

Goğsümé tahta dösherler

[Goğsümé tahta dösherler – SNE]

Durmayıp beni oksarlar

Vurdukça başım dösherler

[Çaldıkça başım dösherler – BA]

Ben anınçin inilerim

[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]

Gel benim sarı tanburam

Dizler üstünde yatıram

Yine kırıldı háttram

Ben anınçin inilerim

[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]
Sarı tanburadır adım
[Bağlamadır benim adım – SNE]
Göklere ağar feryadım
[Arş’a çıkıyor feryadım – SNE]
[Arşa çıkıyor feryadım – BA]
Pir Sultan’ımdır üstadım
[Pirim Sultanıdır üstadım – BA]
Ben annuçin inilerim
[Ali deyu inilerim – BA]

Come my yellow lute
[Hey my yellow lute]
Why do you moan?
I am hollow within, my grief is great
This is the reason I moan
[I moan crying Ali]

They attached string to my arm
They made me speak countless languages
I was the nightingale in the ceremony
[I was the Shah’s nightingale]
[I became the nightingales of love]
This is the reason I moan
[I moan crying Ali]

They attached fretting to my arm
[They placed frets on me]
They had me meet with countless sorrows
[They had me meet sorrow from end to end]
[They had me meet all types of sorrow]
Who settles here and who departs
[Where is the night of the ceremony]
This is the reason I moan
I moan crying Ali

They lay my body on the seat
They scratched open my body on the seat
They stroked me without ceasing
They opened up my breast as they struck
They opened up my breast as they played
This is the reason I moan
[I moan crying Ali]

Come my yellow lute
I shall lay you on my knee
Again my heart is broken
This is the reason I moan
[I moan crying Ali]

May name it is yellow lute (i.e. tanbura)
My name it is bağlama
My cry rises to the sky
My cry rises to the nine heavens
I am Pir Sultan my master
My Pir is Sultan my master
This is the reason I moan
[I moan crying Ali]

İzmet Zeki Eyuboğlu notes the small variants in the versions as being the result of oral transmission, but declares the assumption that it originates from the hand of Pir Sultan Abdal – “Pir Sultan Abdal’ın elinden çıkmış” (Eyuboğlu 1991, 81) – and proposes the original form as being a lament (ağıt) for the Shah. Eyuboğlu relies on a text that includes another variant of the final, repeated line of the quatrain: Ben
Şah’ım deyü ağlarım (I weep for my Shah)\textsuperscript{140}. The variant in the line does not fundamentally alter the meaning from the version presented by Atalay as a lament for the Imam Ali, although the term şah can convey some ambiguity in the context of kızılbaş history since it may also suggest the temporal Safavid monarchs to which the kızılbaş like Pir Sultan Abdal looked to in hope and expectation. As Eyuboğlu notes, other version(s) are expressed as a lament for someone unknown (or at least is unknown to whom it is addressed) (Eyuboğlu 1991, 81).

In the small but telling changes that the variants illuminate we can see how a text may be expressed in different circumstances. That is, we can see certain meanings shaded in different ways to reveal, more or less strongly, associations with kızılbaş contexts – the devotion to Ali or the şah and the reference to ayin-ı cem or muhabbet. Certainly formulaic constructions typical of oral traditions should not be rejected nor discounted in this process; nevertheless such choices must be made by the performer or source and the choices revealed in the variants suggest performative control over the gradation of meaning. Importantly it suggests the deyiş as a vehicle for such finesse and interpretation by the performer. A text such as this, even without consideration of specific performance contexts, offers the prospect of interpretation as a general lament through the anthropomorphic symbol of the lute voicing the inner pain of the poet-singer to an esoteric Sufistic interpretation to expression of the socio-political connotations of kızılbaş terminology.

\textsuperscript{140} Bezirci provides this text beginning ―Ey benim sari tanburam‖, originally from Öztelli, as a separate text from Atalay’s text beginning ―Gel benim sari tanburam‖ despite its very close and obvious similarity. The notable variation in the text is the absence of the penultimate verse of the Atalay version and the rearrangement of the three internal verses. The last line of each verse is the refrain ―Ben Şah’ım deyü ağlarım‖ (I weep crying out my Shah) and the first line of the mahlas verse is different, replacing ―Sari tanburam benim adım‖ (my name is yellow tanbura) to the more modern sounding ―Bağlamadır benim adım‖(My name is bağlama) (Bezirci 1994, 235).
The most significant associative attribute of the *deyiş* is the mahlas for even with the nuances of expression in respect to Alevi (*kızılbaş*) terminology, the attribution to Pir Sultan Abdal establishes an authority for the expressed sentiment. Indeed Eyuboğlu’s acceptance of the reported attribution to Pir Sultan Abdal appears to lead him to the assertion of the original form of the lyric was that specifying the object of the lament as the *şah* (Eyuboğlu 1991, 81). We can accept the sentiment of this *deyiş* as authentic for the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal because it can be related to fundamental metonyms of that persona – devotion to Ali and the *kızılbaş* community and identity. So the sentiment becomes authoritative through its perceived (and accepted) authenticity – and this is the intrinsic mechanism for our understanding of how the *deyiş* means.

The following *deyiş* is one of the most popular songs attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal among contemporary (late twentieth and early twenty-first century) performers. The source of the text cited by Gölpınarlı and Boratav (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 123), the first to print it, is Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan. Gölpınarlı and Boratav include it among the texts considered to be of doubtful Pir Sultan provenance.

Songs concerning the nightingale (*bülbül*) in Turkish folklore are common, usually containing the injunction to cease singing since the bird’s song is incompatible with the state of the singer. This injunction commonly appears in formulaic expressions such as ötme bülbül ötme (don’t sing nightingale don’t sing) or ötme garip bülbül (don’t sing strange nightingale) and completed with *gönül şen değil* (my heart is not happy) or *bağrı m deldin* (you pierce my heart). The popularity of the theme of the

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141 Examples can be found in Öztelli’s large published collection of folksongs titled Evlerinin önü: türküler (Öztelli 2002, 279, 317, 320, 326). In some cases the bird is the turna (red crane) rather than
nightingale’s song revealing and accentuating the pain of the poet-singer cannot of itself determine the authenticity of the text in regards to authorial provenance – but then this is not the sole characteristic of authenticity that is pertinent to the functioning of the deyiş. Why this particular lyric functions effectively and could be said to inherit vocative authenticity (if not necessarily authorial provenance) is the use of the thematic and formulaic content related to the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal. The deyiş relates the suffering of the persona at the centre of the lyric to a signal event in the Pir Sultan Abdal legend, the public failure of support (if not exactly betrayal) by his friend (dost), Ali Baba (though not stated by name in the text but entextualised as reference to the episode in which Ali Baba effectively denies Pir Sultan in his final moments), as emphasised by the refrain line: Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana (Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you). The authoritative function of the lyric is sealed with the expression of Pir Sultan Abdal’s commitment to Truth\(^\text{142}\), even at the expense of his life as stated in the final quatrain. Thus a common theme found in Turkish folklore of the beautiful voiced nightingale revealing the pain of the disconsolate lover is transformed to a central theme of the Pir Sultan Abdal legend: the value of constancy and commitment to the true way and one’s people as represented by the personal relations of friendship. In this manner the lyric is – or is made – authentic and authoritative by, and in respect to, the attribution to Pir Sultan Abdal.

\begin{verbatim}
Ötme bülbül ötme şen değil bağım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
Tükendi fitilim eridi yağım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
\end{verbatim}

the nightingale and while the symbolic character may be different the same formulaic expressions are used.
\(^{142}\) Hak which may also mean ‘Right’ or ‘God’. In some versions Hak is altered to Halk (people).
Deryada bölünmüş sellere döndüm
Vakitız açılmış güllere döndüm
Ateşi kararmış küllere döndüm
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana

Haberim duyarsın peyikler ile
Yarmı sararsın şehitler ile
Kırk yıl dağda gezdim geyikler ile
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım doldum eksildim
Yemekten içmekten sudan kesildim
Hakka pek sevdiğim için astıdım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana

(Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 123)

Don’t sing nightingale don’t sing, my garden is cheerless
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you
My wick is extinguished and my oil used up
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you

I have turned to turbid torrents in the sea
I have turned to roses opened before their time
I have turned to ashes of an extinguished fire
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you

You will get news of me with the brave ones
You will swaddle my wound with the martyred ones
I have roved forty years with the deer on the mountain
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you

I am Pir Sultan Abdal finished and gone
I was sapped at once without appetite
I was hung because I loved the Truth too much
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you

Finally, as a lyric form the *deyiş* does not depend upon narrative coherence but is concerned rather with the expression or condition of the lyric voice. This means that verses may be built upon what may be characterised as paratactic momentum. The suggestion of the immanent world is able to be concisely expressed within lines; and frequent shifts in the voice perspective, case and tense contribute to the energy and thrall of the lyric often climaxing in the mahlas verse. This can only be fully appreciated by reading or hearing many *deyiş*, so two examples must suffice here.

*Abdal Pir Sultan’ı çektiler dâra*
*Düşmüşüm aşkına yanarım nâra*
*Bakın hey erenler şu giden yâra*
*Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni*

They drew Abdal Pir Sultan to the gallows place
I fell down for your love and suffer for you
Dervishes, behold that one on the way to the beloved
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

…

*Pir Sultan Abdal’ım deftere yazar*
*Hîlebaz yâr ile olur mu Pazar*
*Pir merhem çalmazsa yaralar azar*
*Serversen Ali’ye değme yarama*

I am Pir Sultan Abdal and so it is recorded
Is it a marketplace to be a swindler with the beloved?

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143 In my English versions in the Translations chapter I have sought to retain these shifts as much as possible to retain this characteristic.
Wounds become infected if the master cannot give salve
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

3.3 Mahlas

In the previous section I suggested that the mahlas is a critical textual integer that characterises the lyric form deyiş. In this chapter I intend looking more closely at the mahlas in the context of the Alevi lyric form. I will consider the terminology, how it is acquired and how it functions and suggests meaning.

The mahlas taking tradition (mahlas alma gelenek) is often dealt with, rather cursorily, as simply a ‘tradition’ – an assertion that is of course not without meaning though limited in its lack of specificity – or simply as the signature of ownership, implying the creator of the lyric (if not the melody or performance). It is not my contention that these descriptions are incorrect; and certainly they do identify significant, if obvious, aspects of the ontology of the mahlas. However, these summations of the mahlas do not adequately explain the persistence and functional importance of the mahlas tradition.

It is my contention that the mahlas functions as a pivotal structural element that permits associative meaning in respect to authority and community identification in a concise manner within the short lyric form central to Alevi expressive culture, the deyiş. Its ubiquity and persistence in the lyric form itself attests to its perception as merely ‘tradition’. But this does not explain why or how this is so. The vague or general commentary encountered in respect to the mahlas in fact hints at what I interpret to be the essential ontological quality of the mahlas in Alevi deyiş and
which gives it (the deyiş lyric form) its great potential for expressive power and creativity. I will argue that is it the relative freedom with which it may appear and be used in the deyiş and manifested over its foundation of intrinsic meanings, authoritative capacities and immanent references, that makes the mahlas so resilient and functional.

3.3.1 Terminology

In Turkish the word mahlas has a common meaning of pseudonym, pen name or even surname (Redhouse yeni Türkçe-İngilizce sözlük = New Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary 1983; Hony and İz 1992). The latter may better be understood, as defined by Redhouse, as a “second name given at birth” rather than as the hereditary family name (soyadı) as mandated by the Turkish Republic Surname Law (Soyadı Kanunu) of June 1934\textsuperscript{144}. In other words it is a name used in addition to or instead the principal, real (asıl) or given (isim) name. Given the adoption of surnames with the founding of the Turkish Republic the term’s meaning as a pen name or pseudonym is now prevalent.

The term mahlas (or makhlas in its Persian form) is synonymous with the term takhallus (in Turkish tahallus) (de Bruijn 1999, 49-50) and has the literal meaning of freeing oneself or escaping from something, as derived from the Arabic\textsuperscript{145}. For its usage as a pen name or pseudonym mahlas is more commonly encountered than

\textsuperscript{144} For details about the enforced adoption and registration of hereditary surnames see Türköz’s article on the 1934 law (Türköz 2007).

\textsuperscript{145} See de Bruijn’s article on “Takhallus” in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (de Bruijn 1995) and Yıldırım’s work on the mahlas in Ottoman Divan literature (Yıldırım 2006).
tahallus in the Turkish context; however reference to studies of the pen name in Persian literature (and sometimes Ottoman literature\textsuperscript{146}) use the term takhallus.

In the Turkish context other terms are also encountered which may be considered synonymous or near-synonymous, although some writers have suggested different terms to distinguish the use in respective folk (halk) and classical (divan) literature contexts. Such terms include \textit{tapşırma}, takma ad and lâkap. The term lâkap may be dispensed with for our purposes as it is little used in respect to poetry. In Turkish it refers to a ‘nickname’ or by-name (Redhouse yeni Türkçe-İngilizce sözlük = New Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary 1983) but also carries the sense of a formal ‘title’ (unvan) or honorific granted by a patron associated with family position (de Bruijn 1999, 46). Semih suggests that some poets in divan and popular (halk) writings are, nevertheless, known by their lâkap (Semih 1993, 15). Takma ad literally means ‘attached’ or ‘appended’ name and may also mean a ‘nickname’. It is generally not preferred as a technical term in respect to the poetic identity as it is more properly understood as a description of the more specific terms mahlas and \textit{tapşırma}\textsuperscript{147}.

\textit{Tapşırma} is a verbal noun derived from the verb \textit{tapşırmak} (or \textit{tapşurmak}) meaning to deliver or give up to another; or to recommend or commit to the care of another.

Redhouse includes the verb as being of archaic usage while the Oxford Turkish-English dictionary does not include the verb at all. Neither Redhouse nor the Oxford

\textsuperscript{146} Walter Andrews for example employs the term tahallus in his study of Ottoman lyric poetry (Andrews 1985).

\textsuperscript{147} This distinction was made clear to me by the performer and scholar Neşe Ayişç Onaçça in a personal communication. Onaçça indicated to me that takma ad is not generally encountered because “mahlas ya da tapşırma teriminin anlatırken yani açıklama amacıyla kullanılan bir ifade” (it is an expression used to explain or comment upon the mahlas or \textit{tapşırma}). (Personal communication 16 May 2009). In fact the single definition of mahlas in the Türk Dil Kurumu dictionary is “takma ad” and no definition of \textit{tapşırma} is included at all (Türkçe sözlük 2009).
dictionary include a definition of the gerund form (Redhouse yeni Türkçe-İngilizce sözlük = New Redhouse Turkish-English dictionary 1983; Hony and İz 1992). The preferred use of *tapşırma* to refer to the poetic signature in Turkish folk literature by some writers may be for the purpose of distinguishing the use of the signing convention by folk poets (ozan) from that of the divan (Ottoman classical) poetry.¹⁴⁸

Doğan Kaya who provides the most substantial consideration of the tradition of taking a mahlas (mahlas *alma geleneği*) in his book on the *aşık* tradition in the Sivas region states that the name for mahlas in the language of the *aşık* is *tapşırma* and that it has the meaning of introducing or making oneself known (*kendini tanıtma, bildirme, arz etme*) (Kaya 1998, 92).¹⁴⁹ The preference of some writers, including notable folklorists¹⁵⁰, for *tapşırma* may also be a remnant of Turkish language reforms that have at least attempted to privilege words of Turkish origin over those of, specifically, Arabic and Persian origin.¹⁵¹

Birdoğan is rather more direct in his assignment of different terminologies to different traditions. Birdoğan says that in Alevi tradition the final quatrain or distich is referred to as the “Şah beyit” (Shah verse) and the name sung is called the Şahadi (literally the ‘shah name’) or Hatayı; while the Bektaşi call this mahlas and Sunni halk ozanları call it *tapşırma*. He says that he learned of the use of the term Hatayı in

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¹⁴⁸ This is a distinction that Semih specifically makes (Semih 1993).
¹⁴⁹ Kaya however uses the term mahlas in his book.
¹⁵⁰ İlhan Başgöz is perhaps the most notable example (Başgöz 1986). Interestingly in his major work on the Turkish hikâye (folk tale/romance) in discussing and analysing the lives of a number of aşık-s Başgöz gives no consideration whatsoever to the mahlas/tapşırma of the minstrel poets (Başgöz 2008). The Sivas folklorist İbrahim Aslanoğlu is another who favours the term *tapşırma* as in his major works on Pir Sultan Abdal and Shah Hatayi (Aslanoğlu 1984, 1992). Şükrü Elçin in his important article on the mahlas in Turkish folk poetry uses both terms, however in a number of other articles favours the term mahlas (Elçin 1997c).
¹⁵¹ Geoffrey Lewis’s book on the Turkish language reform gives an excellent sense of how attempts to fulfil this ambition were, and are, played out; though he does not specifically refer to *tapşırma* in his discussion of technical terms. Öztürkmen gives a fascinating account of the major individuals and institutions involved in the establishment of folklore studies in Turkey and its relationship to Turkish national identity (Öztürkmen 1992).
Malatya but is unclear as to why this term is used. It is clearly a reference to the
mahlas Hatâyi (or Hatai) used by Shah Ismail and Birdoğan notes that the use of the
name Şah İsmail Hatai is widespread in this region (Birdoğan 1995, 408). Gölpınarlı
also notes that the mahlas of Hatayi is treated with such exception that whenever a
poet recites a poem he is asked who is the poem’s Hatayi\(^{152}\). What is interesting and
instructive for this study is that this may be a remnant of an earlier use of the mahlas.
In what Gallagher notes is the earliest known account of the inclusion of Shah
Ismail’s poetry in \(\text{kızılbaş}\) ritual\(^{153}\), that of the Venetian envoy Michele Membré to
the court of Shah Tahmasp between 1539 and 1542, we learn that they (the
\(\text{kızılbaş}\)\(^{154}\)) “begin to sing certain songs in praise of the Shah, composed by Şâh
Ismâ‘ı̄l and the said Ţâhmâsp, called кърмег, that is \(khaṭā‘ī\)” (Membré 1999, 42). This,
albeit brief but tantalising, reference from the early sixteenth century suggests that
the specific name presented as the mahlas had, in its seminal use in \(\text{kızılbaş}\) (Alevi)
ritual culture, a function that above all connected the poetry to the authority of the
great Sophy (Shah). The inference of the reference is that the poems whether
composed by Shah Ismail or Shah Ţâhmâsp (or others?) carried the mahlas form
\(khaṭā‘ī\) (Hatayi) or at least the poetry with this mahlas already established immanent
qualities of authority and tradition that prevailed over the identification of individual
authorship\(^{155}\).

\(^{152}\) Gölpınarlı is quoted by Amelia Gallagher (2004, 165-166).
\(^{153}\) Which we can understand as proto-Alevi ritual.
\(^{154}\) Membré refers to them as Sophians “men of the Sophy [who] wear the red cap, with twelve
sections” (Membré 1999, 26) and elsewhere describes them coming “from the villages on foot with
their instruments and Khalîfa [i.e. followers]” (Membré 1999, 32).
\(^{155}\) While Gallagher does not assert that Shah Ismail ‘invented’ the Alevi rituals still practiced today,
she does argue that the poetry attributed to him (that is, to his mahlas) serves a pivotal ritual function,
contributing to the meaning of such ritual by, for example, commemorating sacred presences
(Gallagher 2004).
I have used the term mahlas in this thesis, rather than the (perhaps) more specialised *tapşırma*, or indeed for the possibly more specifically Alevi term, *şahadı*, for reasons of clarity, to assist in comparative understandings and because it is the term most widely and commonly understood and used. It is commonly understood in its specific meaning of pen name or pseudonym, and there seems little justification to try and distinguish its use from other poetic cultures by the use of a term alone. In fact, the relationship of mahlas to takhallus for example may facilitate our consideration of the use of the mahlas in the Alevi-Bektaşi tradition in comparison with the use of self-naming (takhallus, makhlas) conventions elsewhere. Perhaps most importantly however, folk poets (*aşık*), both Alevi and Sunni, use the term themselves, the assertions of Kaya and Birdoğan above notwithstanding. In explaining how he received his mystical poetic name the Alevi *aşık* and dede Dertli Divani uses the term mahlas to describe the name given to him (Atılgan 1992, 77-78). In the orally recorded autobiography of Aşık Sabit Müdami (Ataman) – an *aşık* from the Ardahan-Kars region of north-eastern Turkey, and not an Alevi – recorded by İlhan Başgöz and reproduced in transcript by Natalie Kononenko Moyle, he also uses the term mahlas in describing how he acquired the name Müdami (Moyle 1990, 203).

It is a common practice for the poet to acknowledge his mahlas explicitly distinguishing it from his actual name or referring to the circumstances of his acquiring the mahlas. The mention of the mahlas name is commonly made while identifying an original name suggesting the mahlas reveals an identity that may be either concomitant with or transcendent of the poet’s actual or original (or even
former poetic) identity. The seventeenth century Bektaşı from Diyarbakır known as Āhû\(^{156}\) mentions his mahlas specifically along with his given name (isim):

\[
\text{Mahlâsum Āhû’dur ismim Ali’dir}
\]

\[
\text{Sanma derûnumda dünya mâlidir}
\]

\[
\text{Şükür kalbim îman ile doludur}
\]

\[
\text{Kendi noksânımı belelden beri}
\]

(Koca 1990, 237)

My mahlas is Āhû my name is Ali
Don’t believe worldly goods are in my heart
My grateful heart is filled with conviction
Since splendour filled my deficiency

Kul Nesîmî, who Öztelli claims was a seventeenth century Bektaşı and Hurufi, also says:

\[
\text{Mahlâsum Nesîmî ismim Ali’dir}
\]

(Öztelli 1969, 28)

My mahlas is Nesimi my name is Ali

Aşık Ruhsati (1856-1899) from the Sivas region states that his real (öz) name is Mustafa and that he settled on his mahlas Ruhsatı:

\[
\text{Mustafa’dır öz adın}
\]

\[
\text{Mahlâsim Ruhsat koydum}
\]

(Elçin 1997a, 48)

My true name is Mustafa
I settled my mahlas as Ruhsat[i]\(^{157}\)

\(^{156}\) He is said to have had a fine voice and to have played the saz (Koca 1990, 234).
The renowned and influential Alevi baba and poet Aşık Sıdkı (1865-1928) begins a deyiş concerning his acquisition of the name ‘Sıdkı’ to replace a former mahlas, ‘Pervane’, with the lines:

_Mahlâsım Pervane gezdim bir zaman
Sıdkî mahlâsını verdi bir üstad_

(Gül 1984, 57)

For a time I went around having the mahlas Pervane
A master gave [me] the mahlas Sıdkı

The contemporary Alevi poet Adil Ali Atalay (Vaktidolu), born in 1936 in Kemaliye in the province of Erzincan, writes:

_Adil Ali mâhlas Vaktidolu’dur
Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş Veli uludur._

Sevenlerin dili ezber okunur
_Hünkâr Hacı Bektaş Veli ’sin veli_

(Koca 1990, 836)

Adil Ali his mahlas is Vaktidolu
Sovereign Hacı Bektaş Veli is great
The language of the loving, the heart, is proclaimed
You are saint and sovereign Hacı Bektaş Veli

157 Ruhsati leaves off the final “i” in his mahlas to conform to the eight syllable requirement for this form of koşma. These lines, while instructive for our purposes, could not lay claim to any great eloquence.

158 Sıdkı (or Sıtkı) Baba’s real name was Abidin and he was born near the southern Turkish town of Tarsus. He lived for some time in the dergah in Hacıbektaş, was involved in the Turkish struggle for independence following the First World War and ended his days in Harız in the region of Merzifon. On Sıdkı Baba see Gül (1984) and İvgin (1976).

159 ‗Pervane’ means a moth (that hovers around a candle); it also has a meaning of ‘guide’ or ‘escort’.

160 ‗Vaktidolu’ literally means ‘his time is full up’. The mahlas, self assigned although based on how he is perceived by others, refers to his identity as a very busy person (personal communications, Istanbul, June 2002). Adil Ali runs the major Alevi printing house Can Yayınları and is a prolific writer and editor. He also uses his real name ‘Adil Ali’, as an alternative mahlas.
3.3.2 The signature verse convention in other traditions

Paul Losensky, one of the few scholars to take an interest in the signature verse convention, summarises the prospects for comparative study:

From a comparative perspective we seldom find final signature verses outside Persian literature or the literatures historically related to it, such as Ottoman Turkish or Urdu. Among Western literatures, only Provençal poetry of the 12th century offers anything similar. The poet occasionally names himself when he sends his poem out into the world in the final stanzas of the poem in the section known as the envoi. Even here, however, a final signature was by no means obligatory. Nor can this Persian convention be found in Arabic literature: the Arabic poet only rarely mentions himself by name in the course of the poem. (Losensky 1998a, 243)

I have quoted Losensky at some length because his comments identify a number of relevant issues. Firstly, that the possibilities for comparative study seem relatively limited and that the subject has lacked the attention of scholars. Again in Losensky’s words: “one of the most striking, but least discussed conventions of the genre [referring to the Persian ghazal] – [is] the final signature verse or takhallus” (Losensky 1998a, 240). Secondly, Persian literature is a principal focus of interest in respect to the signature verse convention and that there are relevant historical relationships to Ottoman courtly literature. Thirdly, that the troubadour songs of medieval Europe provide some opportunity to look beyond the Persian-Ottoman literary tradition for a broader comparative perspective. Finally, that the interest in

161 The point is also made by de Bruijn that very little attention has been given to the use of pen names in other genres of Persian literature beside the ghazal (such as the qasida and masnavi) “in spite of the fact that instances of this device can be found in almost every kind of poem current in the Persian tradition” (de Bruijn 1999: 48). Meisami also noted the lack of any comprehensive study of the takhallus (Meisami 1990) which has only partly been addressed by Losensky’s work (Losensky 1998a, 1998b).
the signature verse or self-naming conventions emphasise courtly or ‘high’ literary traditions.

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to undertake a comparative study of self-naming, signature verse conventions, it does aim to provide a broader perspective and opportunity for such comparative studies by focusing on this convention in an oral, folk literature and expressive culture. My aim here is to give only brief consideration to the Persian, Provençal and medieval French self-naming conventions in order to provide a point of departure for a more detailed analysis of the mahlas in Alevi lyric song.

3.3.3 Comparative perspectives briefly considered

It is through the Persian lyric, ghazel, that the function of the takhallus (mahlas) as a pen name is developed. Prior to its development of this function, the takhallus was an established technical device in the polythematic Arabic qasida (ode) where it served as a transition to subsequent themes, especially to panegyric sections (de Bruijn 1995) and as such generally incorporates the patron’s name (Meisami 2003, 108). There is general agreement that the takhallus as a conventional pseudonymous device in the Persian ghazal appears to have developed over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Meisami suggests it may have been introduced by the poet Sanā‘ī (d. 1131) (Meisami 2003, 108) though it is not always present in his ghazals and is still more common in his qasidas (de Bruijn 1999, 52; 1995). Losensky notes that in the lyrics of Anvarī (d. 1189-90) the poet’s pen name occurs in about one third of his poems, found somewhere within the last three verses (Losensky 1998a, 244) suggesting still a connection to its transitioning function. However, a century
later in nearly all of the ghazals of the poet Sa‘dī (d. 1292) his name is included in the penultimate or final verse and thereafter the signature verse is invariably the last verse of every ghazal (Losensky 1998a, 244). In this we see the significant move within the lyric form to the use of the takhallus as a device of closure rather than thematic transition within the work. This is what Arberry in discussing the Shīrāzī Turk poem of Hafiz, vividly referred to as the “clasp” theme, in the sense of a clasp closing a beaded necklace, to conclude a polythematic poem (Arberry 1946; de Bruijn 1999). While closure within the lyric can occur independently of the takhallus, Meisami notes that it ensures closure and functions as an “additional sentential or epigrammatic cap” (Meisami 2003: 109).

Auto-citation, or self-naming also appears in the troubadour poetry of twelfth century Provence, for example in the poetry of Marcabru, and in the French lyrics of the twelfth and thirteenth century trouvères such as Gace Brulé and Blondel de Nesle. Auto-citation among the troubadours and trouvères is certainly not pervasive and could not be considered a traditional convention like the mahlas taking tradition or indeed the convention in Persian lyric. Rather than suggesting a convention that connects to a tradition, self-naming in this courtly context displays a stylized self-conscious sensibility in which it is possible to detect the overt self-promotion of the artist or even a nascent modern literary persona (Kimmelman 1999). In the case of the trouvère Blondel de Nesle, Rosenberg identifies a notable insistence on self-naming that even suggests self-centredness (Rosenberg 2004, 66). Rosenberg places the introduction of the poet’s signature in the lyrics of trouvère Gace Brulé in the context of the prosodic and semantic function of closure and summation of the envoi (or envoy) – a partial stanza announcing the song’s conclusion and rhetorically
sending it forth to an explicit recipient or an audience more generally – suggesting that it also marks the limit of the performer’s assumption of the poem’s first person voice and a rupture of the fusion of poetic persona and performer (Rosenberg 2004, 57-58).

Andrews (1985, 170) referring to Ottoman lyric song (gazel) is right to discourage a simple dismissal of a practice that is so common and suggests that the tahallus (mahlas) is a “forceful reminder of the dramatic situation” in which the named poet is addressing another or being addressed; and which may include the indulgence of self-praise and the assertion of competitive superiority by the poet. The contextual activity for the Ottoman lyric song is a gathering for entertainment (Andrews 1985, 146) in which the poet is a participant who in poetic persona aims to epitomise the “proper sensibilities, willingness to be open to emotion, participation in emotional (party) ritual, and understanding of proper (mystical) interpretation of emotional behavior” (Andrews 1985, 172). This is a cultured and idealised context although Andrew’s purpose is to recognise Ottoman lyric as expressive of the “real world of Turkish life and culture” (Andrews 1985, 183), as much as folk poetry, not as an isolate “free-floating abstraction” (Andrews 1985, 180). Andrews suggest the roles of the gazel poet and the folk poet are more alike than disparate although this would seem to impose upon the folk poet the purpose and character of the high-culture poet as performing the role of an aşık (dervish/lover) working over common themes in the rarified and indulgent environment of the entertainment. Andrews (2002, 36) proposes that “we will never really understand the Ottoman poetry of the elites until we understand the Ottoman poetry of the masses and the reverse”162, and certainly

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162 The subtle, even covert, relationship between high Ottoman poetic culture and traditional expressive culture, as exemplified by the Alevis, in sustaining an Ottoman ideological ethos of
the common ubiquity of the mahlas/tahallus and the socio-political world these poetic traditions share suggests serious grounds for comparative study particularly in respect to its function in the respective traditions. I would suggest however that it is the process of the mahlas taking in the oral tradition, that I will discuss next, that demonstrates the divergence of purpose in these lyric traditions.

### 3.3.4 Types of mahlas naming

While Kaya provides the most detailed treatment of the mahlas in the *aşık* tradition, he devotes most of his analysis to the types of mahlas adopted by the poets. What Kaya’s analysis of the naming types (or manner of naming) found in the mahlas would suggest is that the nature of the mahlas, or how it was adopted, is not the defining property for a mahlas per se, though as we will see such considerations are significant in the Alevi context. Put another way, there is considerable freedom and personal choice in the type of mahlas adopted.

Kaya gives four broad categories for the ways the *aşık* takes or adopts his mahlas and then analyses these broad categories in more detail. What follows summarises Kaya’s analysis (Kaya 1998, 93-102).

1. Those using a mahlas connected with their name (isim) or family name (soyisim or soyadi)
2. Those using a mahlas not connected to their name or family name
3. Those who do not take a mahlas
4. Those who change their mahlas or use more than one mahlas
I will address the third category in Kaya’s analysis first since it obviously stands out as somewhat incongruous or indeed irrelevant. The point being made is that there are aşık-s (ozan-s) who compose within the tradition that do not adopt or use a mahlas as a matter of course. Kaya suggests that this may demonstrate that such poets do not accept their position of aşık as a career or profession (meslek) or that they may only rarely engage in writing poems; or that they may wish to conceal themselves from society and he notes three examples drawing attention to the fact that they are female aşık-s (Kaya 1998, 100). There may be other reasons for some folk poets not systematically employing a mahlas. For example the renowned Abdal singer and saz virtuoso from Kırşehir Neşet Ertaş says that he made a point of not including his name in the songs (türkü) he wrote and sang as they are things made for all humanity, “hep insanlık içindir yapılan şeyler” (Özcan 2001, 109). He implies this is a somewhat unusual approach “Babam da her ozan gibi aşık, fakat hiçbir zaman ozan gibi türkülerinin içinde adını anıp söylmedi” (My father too was an aşık like every ozan, but he never sang and made mention of his name in his songs like an ozan). Kaya identifies eight sub-categories of the aşık-s who use their own name as their mahlas:

163 The famous bozak singer Muharrem Ertaş.
164 In fact Neşet Ertaş often used a suggestion of a mahlas, ‘Garip’, in many of his verses or wrote on the theme of ‘garip’ (estrangement). For examples see Özcan (2001) and Tokel (Tokel 2000). Mehmet Özbek however suggests that although Ertaş is a great artist he is not a poet and does not use a mahlas because the poems are not in fact his creations (personal communication, July 2002).
1. Those using their given name (isim). This may be just the one given name (e.g. Veysel\textsuperscript{165}); two given names (e.g. Ali İzzet\textsuperscript{166}); a given name or names with the addition of a prefix or suffix (e.g. Ali İzzeti).

2. Those using their given name or names with the addition of an epithet (sifat) in front of the name (e.g. Derviş Ali).

3. Those using their given name or names with the addition of an epithet after their name (e.g. Veysel Kemter).

4. Those using their given name and family name (soyadı) (e.g. Mahmut Erdal, Muhlis Akarsu).

5. Those using their given and family names with the addition of an epithet (e.g. Veysel Kut Kemter).

6. Those using just their family name (e.g. Akarsu, Kızıltuğ\textsuperscript{167}).

7. Those using their family name with the addition of an epithet in front of the name (e.g. Sefil Özer).

8. Those using their family name with the addition of an epithet after their name (e.g. Erdem Can).

Kaya analyses the types of mahlas that do not employ the actual name of the aşık as follows:

1. Those that are given by someone
   a. Received in a dream (e.g. Deryanî).
   b. Received in real life (e.g. Mehmet Köşe known as Kaptanî because he worked as a driver; Ali Metin, Metini, Vaktidolu).
   c. Given to a child in swaddling (kundaktaki çocuğa)

2. Those adopted by the aşık themself
   a. Those influenced by the surroundings (çevrenin etkisiyle) (e.g. Ali İzzet Savaş who was from the same village as Ali İzzet Özkan and so in order to avoid confusion the people called him Aziyet and he adopted this as his mahlas).

\textsuperscript{165} Veysel Şatiroğlu
\textsuperscript{166} Ali İzzet Özkan
\textsuperscript{167} Muhlis Akarsu and Ali Kızıltuğ
b. Those employing a word that the aşık found fitting, appropriate or auspicious (âşığın uygun bulduğunu) (Kul Himmet Üstadiım, if we accept the claim that Aşık İbrahim and Hacık Kız adopted that mahlas, would be an example of this.)

3. Those that it is not possible to determine how they were adopted (e.g. those who generally lived before the twentieth century and for which we have no sources for how they adopted their mahlas).

The fourth category of mahlas types in Kaya’s analysis relates to those changing their mahlas or using more than one.

1. Those who give up their first mahlas.
2. Those not satisfied with a single mahlas and use various ones.
3. Those who change mahlas because of it appearing too common.

It is evident from Kaya’s analysis – based on the mahlas taking tradition in the Sivas area168 – that there is little constraint upon the possibilities for the manner of acquiring a mahlas and for the form it may take. It may be conferred, personally adopted or (literally) dreamed up. It may be changed or multiple mahlas may be used. Actual personal and family names can be used with or without descriptive epithets; or imaginatively constructed mahlas derived from circumstances or personal perceptions may be used. Indeed Kaya’s inclusion of a category of those who do not take a mahlas implies the expectation that any poem composed by an aşık would be expected to present a mahlas identity. We may say then that the inclusion of a name in the lyric, whether actual or descriptive, that in some manner makes known or introduces an aşık may be considered the mahlas. Kaya principally looks at the manner of acquiring a mahlas and at the nature of the mahlas names,

168 Kaya’s analysis is not restricted to Alevi aşık-s however the Sivas region has a strong association with Alevi culture.
however, and does not relate the mahlas or its manner of adoption to the specific function of the lyric.

3.3.5 Dertli Divani and the tradition of spiritual authority

Dertli Divani is one of the most active and highly respected contemporary Alevi aşıks. He was born Veli Aykut in 1962 in Kısas near Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey, is university educated and resides and works in Ankara. He maintains a busy schedule of performances and appearances within and outside Turkey and released five commercial recordings between 1989 and 2005. He is also an Alevi dede and conducts cem services in Turkey and elsewhere.

The following is my translation of Dertli Divani’s explanation of how he received his mahlas as recorded by Halil Atılgan (1992, 77-78).

The 21st of February 1978 on a Monday night. (On the Sunday evening) Emrullah Efendi a descendent of Hacı Bektaş Veli came to us. When he arrived all the folk of the village gathered with us. The aşık-s played saz and sang deyiş and duaz. At that time I was 16 years old. Hacı Bektaş Veli’s descendent Emrullah Efendi said ‘Come on give the saz to Veli’. I had only just started to play the bağlama. They gave me my father’s cura. Obtaining permission I sang three improvised [irtical] deyiş. He called me to his side. I bowed. ‘After this let your name (your mahlas) be Dertli, and use this mahlas in your deyişler’ he said. The aşık-s continued with their muhabbet. The next day Emrullah Efendi returned to Hacıbektaş. After another two and half months had passed (7 May 1978) this time Bektaş Efendi was a guest. (Bektaş Efendi was a descendent of Hacı Bektaş Veli and the son of Muhammet Feyzullah Efendi). So that day they again gave the bağlama to

169 I have attended cem-s conducted by Divani baba in Banaz (Turkey) and Sydney (Australia), both in 2007.
me. I played and sang. Afterwards he also played and sang. When he returned the saz to me this time I sang a few improvised deyiş. He said to me ‘I will give you a mahlas’. This person gave me the Divani mahlas ‘You can use both the mahlas in your deyişler’. Thus is was that my mahlas is Dertli Divani. Then I sang one more extemporised deyiş. The last quatrain ends this way:

\[
\begin{align*}
&Hakkın aşıklara çevi üz cefası \\
&Aşık olan neyler dünya sefası \\
&Dinle canım cananımın sevdası \\
&Dertli’yi eyledi Divane gönül
\end{align*}
\]

God’s torment for the aşık-s
What worldly pleasure is there being an aşık
Hear my soul of the beloved’s love
The crazy [Divane] heart caused the pain [Dertli]

Divani’s account of receiving his mahlas highlights the significance of receiving a mahlas from a person of authority, here descendents of the eponymous Bektaşi saint Hacı Bektaş Veli, in an appropriate ritualised or semi-ritualised setting, here the gathering for a muhabbet. In Divani’s case it is clearly a proceeding that is witnessed and includes a test of worthiness in Divani’s demonstration of inspiration by improvising deyiş. There is a ritualised process of bestowal, testing, receiving and sealing that solemises and authorises the taking the mahlas.

Divani says that the tradition is such that someone does not choose their mahlas and that it is usually given by a superior, a master. Indeed Divani says that some poets give themselves names but this is not the tradition. It is given to you like a newborn
child and you do not get the chance to chose the name\textsuperscript{170}. Clearly in reality this is not always the case. We have seen that it is common for poets to chose their own mahlas. The point made by Divani’s experience is that the bestowal of his mahlas by two descendents of Hacı Bektaş Veli assigns considerable and particular authority to his mahlas and so to the poetry composed under that name. Also significant in Divani’s account is that fact that the young Veli proved his worthiness of the bestowal of the mahlas. Prior to receiving his two name mahlas he sang improvised (irtical) 
\textit{deyiş} thus demonstrating not only his abilities but his genuine inspiration – the transcendent qualities that would put Divani in the front rank of Alevi aşık-s. Divani’s final extemporised song provides a seal on this process by including the two names of his mahlas in a deft and inventive manner that indicates his acceptance of the role of the aşık and seals the meanings of the names to his very nature (persona).

Dertli Divani comes from the village of Kısıas in the Harran district approximately twelve kilometres from the major city of Şanlıurfa in Turkey’s southeast. It is a Turkmen village of around 700 households and 5,400 people, four-fifths of whom are Alevi. It has a particularly rich and increasingly well exposed Alevi expressive ritual and aşık culture, due in large part to the energetic efforts of Dertli Divani\textsuperscript{171}. Dertli Divani and his father, Aşık Büryani, are the most renowned aşık from Kısıas\textsuperscript{172} though Atlıgan and Acet document forty-six aşık-s from the early twentieth century until today (Atlıgan and Acet 2001).

\textsuperscript{170} Personal interview, Ankara, 2 July 2002.
\textsuperscript{171} Kısıas has been the focus of particular interest to the prolific folklorist and musicologist Halil Atlıgan who has produced books on Kısıslı aşıklar (Atlıgan 1992) and a more broad survey of the culture of the village (Atlıgan and Acet 2001).
\textsuperscript{172} Dertli Divani’s younger brother Ahmet Aşıkut (Aşık Kul Ahmet) is also an aşık, though less prominent than Divani, who lives in Şanlıurfa but does perform outside his native area. Kul Ahmet joined Dertli Divani’s performing group, \textit{Hasbihâl}, for a tour of performances, seminars and cem in Australia in September 2007.
Other prominent Kısaslı aşık-s were given their mahlas by descendents of Hacı Bektaş Veli including Aşık Sefai whose real name is Mehmet Acet (b. 1954) and who received his mahlas from Feyzullah Ulusoy, Aşık Meftuni whose real name is Mehmet Bakındı, (b. 1964) who received his mahlas from Cevat Ulusoy; and Dertli Divani’s father Aşık Büryani (Atılgan 1992). Büryani whose real name was Hamdullah Aykut (1926-1990) was given this mahlas in 1977, in his fiftieth year173, by a descendent of Hacı Bektaş Veli, Muharrem Sefa Efendi, with, it is noted, the additional presence of two dede, Ali Dede from Haral village and Mürteza Dede from Adana. The process as reported has a similar theme to that of Divani’s. During a muhabbet Hamdullah Aykut performed three extemporised deyiş which pleased those present. One of the deyiş ended with the line “Hamdullah ciğerim olmuştur büryan” (Hamdullah my heart has become dry roasted174) upon which Muharrem Sefa Efendi declares his mahlas should be ‘Büryani’ (Atılgan 1992: 24). The implication of Büryani’s verse is that he is ready, matured, ‘properly cooked’, to receive this significant witness affirmation of his inspiration – and this is acknowledged by those of authority present.

Dertli Divani’s mahlas taking is a formalised ascension to a strong tradition into which he was born. His birthplace has a particularly strong and active tradition of aşık-s, acknowledged by the visits of descendents of Hacı Bektaş Veli and other dede-s; his father was a dede and significant aşık, and his brother Ahmet is also an aşık. The presence of Alevi community, lineage and authority is evident in Divani’s mahlas taking. The bestowal of the mahlas is an exalted privilege that gives the

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173 Prior to this he had used two mahlas, Hamdullah (his birth name) and Kemteri (Atılgan 1992, 23).
174 The play on words is mostly lost in translation. Ciğer literally means ‘liver’ (or some other offal) but figuratively, especially in folk poetry, means ‘heart’; while büryan, from the Farsi biryân means a type of kebab cooked dry in a tandor clay pot (Özbek 2009).
recipient particular authority. Nevertheless, as is demonstrated by his Divani’s father’s receiving of the mahlas Büryanı late in life while using other adopted mahlas previously; and his brother’s use of a mahlas of his own taking, the creative activity of the aşıklı is not dependent upon the bestowal of the mahlas even within a community where there is a prominent tradition of the bestowal of a mahlas by an authority of spiritual lineage. Not all aşıklı-s can aspire to receive such authority in the bestowal of their mahlas, however perhaps as an ideal – and this may be what Divani refers to when he says the tradition is that a mahlas is given by a superior or master – it contributes to the mahlas tradition more generally the aura of lineage and spiritual authority.

3.3.6 Aşık Zakiri and the master-pupil tradition

Divani received his mahlas from those with authority of spiritual lineage and he has said that the mahlas should be given by a superior or master. This, however, need not be spiritually based but may also be seen in the relationship of master and pupil or apprentice.

İbrahim Aslanoğlu recounts the story of how Aşık Zakiri obtained his mahlas, Noksani, and the reason for changing it to Zakiri. Aşık Zakiri is not among the first rank of aşıklı-s, nor is he overtly Alevi, though being from the Sivas region he clearly engaged with Alevis. His real name was Ahmet Kaynar and he was born in Kangal in 1899 and died in 1972. He employed three mahlas firstly using his given name Ahmet, then Noksani and finally Zakiri. Following is my translation of Aslanoğlu’s account (1985, 198-199) of how Zakiri obtained and changed his mahlas.

175 Personal communication with Ahmet Aykut, Sydney, September 2007.
He sang his first poems always with the name Ahmet. In 1919 he opened a shop. One day he went to the shop early but he closed the shutters. Inside he sat and sang with a loud voice poems that he had written. Anyway, Aşık Mesleki was apparently outside leaning on the shutters listening to him. When he had finished singing he went inside and they talked. He [Mesleki] asked what his mahlas was. He said ‘I don’t have a mahlas!’ At this Mesleki said ‘It is impossible for a poet to be without a mahlas [mahlassiz şair olmaz]. Wait, I’ll give you a mahlas’. And after staring at his feet for a long time he sang this deyiş:

I opened your shop and I went inside  
In the morning I met you in person  
Asiks don’t lose honour and shame  
In the morning I plunged with a boat on the ocean  

Like a nightingale you sing with every tongue  
You add your pain to this sorrowful heart of mine  
You sell all sorts of goods  
Again in the morning I was tossed on wave and swell  

Why do you keep this friendship [muhabbet] from me?  
Are you offended and sulk at such a little thing?  
You neglect your measure from the heavens  
In the morning I smiled at your dry strings  

My mahlas is Mesleki my name is Bekir  
My pleasure and relish is in every gathering  
Now I have said Noksani for your mahlas  
In the morning I know you a man of wisdom  

Finishing the poem he asked ‘I wonder if you didn’t like it?’ What is not to like? See, it was born defective [noksan]. Whether they reproach me or not,
does it actually change anything? He took up the name Noksani and he [Mesleki] went.

In 1925 while in an Alevi village they were having a rambling conversation. Meanwhile the gathering moved on to singing [saza ve söze]. Noksani sang a few of his own deyîşler. Those listening said ‘These are not yours they are our Noksani’s’. Saying ‘our’ they meant the Alevi poet from Erzurum who lived last century [i.e. nineteenth century]. It was not easy to convince the men but because of the resemblance of the names it was certain that his deyîş would always get mixed up. For this reason there and then he changed his name. Then he said ‘I shall from now be called Zakiri’.

This quite detailed account of the mahlas taking highlights a number of important aspects of the process. Firstly, there is a sense of a fated encounter, in itself confirming the worth of the poet as destined. Zakiri happens to get to his shop early one morning and decides to sing; and the aşık Mesleki happens to be passing and hears him. The question Mesleki asks concerns the mahlas and his response when Zakiri says he does not have one is that a poet (şair) must have a mahlas. Interestingly Zakiri did not consider his given name, Ahmet, as a mahlas. Then we see the process by which Mesleki assigns the mahlas of Noksani. There is deliberation, then an extemporised poem. This demonstrates the mastery of Mesleki, and his worthiness as a master to assign the mahlas, but also the makes the process one of some transcendence, not merely prosaic, through the creative process of the poet – the seal of the master upon the pupil. Zakiri’s reaction to receiving the mahlas is curious in that he accepts it but, it seems, with a certain resignation as if this appellation, meaning ‘defective’, is something he must resign to.
The postscript to the story is also instructive. In an Alevi village Zakiri (using the mahlas Noksani) sings his deyiş which the villagers insist are the work of “their Noksani” an Alevi aşık from Erzurum\textsuperscript{176}. The manner in which the story is presented suggests that the mahlas was the point of confusion. It also seems that Zakiri was unaware of such confusion until this incident and so presumably unaware of Erzurumlu Noksani, also suggesting that it was not the content of the deyiş that suggested to the villagers that this was the work of the Alevi aşık. That is, there is clearly great store placed in the integrity of the mahlas – that the mahlas has a role in determining the perception of the content and social connections, both individual and communal. Zakiri’s reaction, to immediately change his mahlas, is also interesting since rather than appear to be a singer of Erzurumlu Noksani’s deyiş he changes his mahlas to distinguish his own identity, presumably an ambition greater, or at the very least more apt, than remaining with the mahlas bestowed by the master Mesleki\textsuperscript{177}.

Although adopting the name Zakiri, Aslanoğlu notes that the name Noksani seems to have persisted and in Eflatun Cem Güney’s book on Mesleki published in 1953 there are included poems under the name of Noksani that belong to Zakiri (Aslanoğlu 1985, 199). Özmen in introducing the work of the nineteenth century Noksani (İsmail) begins with a paragraph about Ahmet Kaynar (Noksani-Zakiri) to dispel any confusion, also stating that he was given his mahlas by the major Sivas aşık known as Ruhsati (Özmen 1998: 3, 231). This is impossible given that Ruhsati died in 1899 according to Özmen himself (Özmen 1998: 4, 641). However, Mesleki was the pupil

\textsuperscript{176} Curiously Erzurumlu Noksani (whose real name was İsmail) died exactly 100 years earlier than Zakiri (Noksani) in 1872. Also, curiously, Erzurumlu Noksani was a shopkeeper. He is believed to have obtained his mahlas Noksani (defective, missing) while a mürid (disciple) of Sadık Dede because he fell into distraction at the aspect of his wife’s face (Özmen 1998: 3, 231). Such concordance may hint at the conflation or confusion of such personal stories in the process of transmission.

\textsuperscript{177} And, it might be added, a quite different reaction to that implied by the conflation of Kul Himmet and Kul Himmet Üstadım discussed above in which the unity identity would seems to be an objective.
(çırak) of Ruhsati and so Zakiri (as Noksani) was part of what Kaya (following Eflatun Cem Güney) calls the Ruhsati branch (Ruhsati kolu) of the aşık tradition (Kaya 1998, 35-39). So, despite the complexities and confusions, we can see here that the process of assigning the mahlas through master-pupil relationships, and using it, is another means of establishing and maintaining these lineages, lines of authority and perceptions of community.

3.3.7 Dreams

İlhan Başgöz has highlighted the importance of the dream experience as the source of inspiration and initiation for the Turkish minstrel aşık-s – those aşık-s mostly originating in the predominantly Sunni areas of eastern Turkey such as Kars and Erzurum, who perform hikâye, a folk romance, or cantefable, combining epic storytelling and lyric song. This is not an Alevi tradition though Alevi aşık-s including Ali İzzet Özkan, Davut Sulari and Dursun Cevlani have been notable participants in this tradition. The dream motif as Başgöz observes involves a holy person, or indeed sometimes a beautiful women, who offers a cup of wine (bade, dolu) to the young man (or boy, as the initiate is usually young and male) which he drinks, often resulting in a dramatic reaction such as a faint, a fall or frothing at the mouth. Upon waking from the dream he is inspired with the talent to compose poetry and perform on the saz (bağlama) and is now a God-inspired aşık (hak aşığı) (Başgöz 2008, 110; 1967). In the dream the aşık may also be given his mahlas by the holy person.

See especially Başgöz’s major work, the monograph Hikâye: Turkish folk romance as performance art (Başgöz 2008) and his articles on folk stories about the lives of minstrels and the dream motif in Turkish folk stories (Başgöz 1952, 1967).
Aşık Daimi (real name İsmail Aydın, 1932-1983), one of the most respected and influential Alevi poets and musicians of the mid-twentieth century is said to have obtained his mahlas through a dream experience. Daimi’s family was from the Erzincan region though they spent time living in Kangal (Sivas) and Tercan (Erzincan) and Istanbul before the Second World War. Daimi lived most of his life in Istanbul after the family settled there during the War. Daimi’s paternal and maternal grandfathers were of dede lineage and it was from them that he began to learn bağlama from the age of seven. One night, it is reported, the young İsmail (he was probably around sixteen years of age) was made to take a drink of wine (some reports say bade, some dolu) from the hand of the Pir (Saint) and was told that after this his name would be Aşık Daimi and that he had now joined the caravan of the Seven Great Alevi Ozan-s (“Aşık Daimi olduğu ve Alevi Yedi Ulu Ozan kervanına katıldığı söylenir”). After this, in 194κ, he wrote his first work ‘Bir seher vaktinde indim bağlara’ (Orhan 1999, 7).

Müslüm Seyrani, another aşık from the Erzincan region and from a dede lineage, reports that he saw the Prophet Muhammad in a dream. In the dream the Prophet appearing in an endless green and forested place handed him ‘something’ (bir şey) that he said would be useful and beneficial. Seyrani says he woke in teror and weeping but feeling fortunate. From that day he says he was inspired by a spiritual love (“o günden bana manevi bir aşık ilham geldi”) and that poems come one after the other (“şiirler de bugünden sonra bir bir geldi”). The first verse he noted down was:

Ne gezersin bu alemi virani
Devri daim Seyraniyim Seyrani
Hak olmayan akibete hüsrani

Şah Hüseynin hayranıyım hayrnı

Why do you go around this world, this ruin
I am the excursion of perpetual motion, Seyrani
To an end with no God and its disappointment
I am the admiration of Shah Husayn, his marvel

In playing on his name in this verse, Seyrani – seyran meaning an excursion or pleasure outing – Seyrani took the inspiration to assume his mahlas – perhaps the beneficial ‘something’ that the Prophet had extended to him (Aydın 2004, 466).

However, another Alevi aşık, Kul Hasan (real name Hasan Gören from the Karamanmaraş region, born in 1933), can say that such notions as becoming an ozan after drinking such a libation from a beloved’s hand – “dost elinden bade” – are merely superstitions (hurafedir) (Aydın 2004, 235). Since the dream can only be witnessed by the dreamer it does provide the possibility for the aşık to claim on their own behalf the spiritual warrant for their life as an aşık and they may go to some lengths to achieve this. İlhan Başgöz reports that (the Alevi) Aşık Nesimi (Çimen) even tried methods like drinking salty water to induce such a dream that would make him good aşık (Başgöz 2008, 111).\(^{179}\)

### 3.3.8 Sefil Selimi and the mahlas as a point of commitment

The taking of a mahlas is, when ritualised or dreamed, a transcendent process. As we have seen, the assumption of a significant mahlas is not necessarily the beginning of

\(^{179}\) Nesimi was undoubtedly one of the finest modern aşık and was one of the major contemporary aşık-s killed in the burning of the Madımak hotel (along with Muhlis Akarsu and the young prodigy Hasret Gültekin) on 2 July 1993. Başgöz gives the date of this event and Nesimi’s death erroneously as 1997.
the aşık’s creative life, though it may seem to be represented that way. Zakiri took his ‘first’ mahlas when given it by Mesleki, but we also learn that up until that time he sang under his own name – though he apparently did not consider that to be a mahlas. Daimi has his dream but is already an accomplished performer and Bürüyani received his authoritative mahlas late in life. However the ritualised taking of a mahlas provides the point at which commitment and recognition may be confirmed.

Aşık Sefil Selimi was from Şarkışla in the province of Sivas, a region with a strong aşık tradition\(^\text{180}\). His real name was Ahmet Günbulut and he was born in 1933 and died in 2003. Sefil Selimi presents a particularly interesting example because he was, in his own words, a Sunni aşık (Selimî 1996, 24) yet many of his poems reflect heterodox Alevi themes and he is readily perceived as an Alevi aşık. In fact Selimi declares “şîir söylerken ‘Şu Alevi’ye yarar, şu Sünni’ye yarar, Bektaşi’ye yarar’ diye düşünmem” (While reciting a poem I don’t think on this being suitable for Alevi or Sunni or Bektaşi) and sees his work as being directed towards a more common understanding (Selimî 1996, 24)\(^\text{181}\). Selimi learned his aşık craft in the 1960s from an illiterate and charismatic aşık from the Sarkışla region called Çoban Mehmet (‘Shepherd’ Mehmet, real name Mehmet Can, born 1931). It was Çoban Mehmet who gave Sefil Selimi his mahlas with the words, as reported by Selimi: “aşık olacaksan adın Sefil Selimi olacak” (if you will become an aşık your name will be Sefil Selimi) (Öz 1995, 40). The literal meaning of the name Sefil Selimi is the ‘poor’ or ‘destitute’ one (sefil) of ‘sound’ or ‘honest’ character (selim) and Selimi himself interprets its meaning as “coşkun” (Öz 1995, 40) meaning ‘exuberant’ or

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\(^\text{180}\) Two of the greatest twentieth century Alevi aşık-s are from villages in the Sarkışla region, Aşık Veyesel and Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan.

\(^\text{181}\) This dilemma of perception and the heterodox expression of belief is a common subject of a number many of Sefil Selimi’s lyrics which are best represented in the book he published titled Çobanın can pınarı (Selimî 1996) but see also Kaya (2001).
‘ardent’. Selimi says this name was given to him for the purpose of serving the tradition ("bu isim geleneğe hizmet etmesi için verilir") as a necessary requirement of the tradition ("bu geleneğin icabı") and that our aşık-s give a name to the aşık that has reached this state ("aşıklarımız yetiştirdiği aşığa bir isim verir") (Öz 1995, 40).

Sefil Selimi gives the best account of the implications of taking his mahlas as a Sunni expressing heterodox themes in what is perhaps his most famous deyîş called İnsana muhabbet duymadı duyalı (Since I felt love for humankind).

Kimse bana yaren olmaz, yar olmaz
Mertlik hırkasını giydim giyeli
Dünya bomboş olsa bana yer kalmaz
İnsana muhabbet duymadı duyalı

İmanım hükümdar, benliğim esir
Ehl-i Bey‘i sevdim dediler kusur
Kimisi korkak der, kimisi cesur
Kurt ile koyunu yaydim yayalı

Ardımdan vuranlar, yüzüme gider
Kestiği az gibi parçalar böler
Herkes kılıçını boynumda biler
Başımı meydana koydum koyalı

‘Bu Kızılbaş olmuş, yunmaz’ diyorlar
‘Kestiği haramdır, yenmez’ diyorlar
‘Camiye mescide konmaz’ diyorlar
İmam Şah Hüseyin uydum uyaldı

Çoğu, bende kağıt hücçet artıyor
Hâl bilmeyen, dip dedemi soruyor
Dostlar, ölümüme karar veriyor 
‘Sefil Selimi’yem’ dedim diyeli 
(Kaya 2001, 130)

I have no friends nor any to help me 
Since I dressed in the cloak of bravery 
If the world were devoid no place is left for me 
Since I felt love for humankind

My belief is monarch, my conceit is captive 
I loved the Sacred Lineage and they call me at fault 
Some speak cowardly, some bravely 
Since I pastured the sheep with the wolf

Those striking my back smile to my face 
They scarcely share the butchered morsels 
Everyone whets their knife on my neck 
Since I declared my mind openly

‘These are kazılbâş, unwashed’ they say 
‘Their sacrifice is forbidden, inedible’ they say 
‘They don’t halt at a mosque, great or small’ they say 
Since I set to follow Imam Shah Husayn

Mostly they seek written proof on me 
Not knowing the state of things, ask about my forbears 
Friends, they decide upon my death 
Since I said I am Sefil Selimi

In this değiş Selimi expresses how his very place in the world and his relationship to those around him has shifted since he took up the responsibility of the aşık. His is necessarily a brave pursuit in which the personal ego is suppressed and which brings
with it the calumny of those who do not understand. The summation of this service is in speaking the words of his mahlas – this is the act of commitment in which the persona of Sefil Selimi and what that represents as a seal on the expression of faith, or truth, rises above the ego. The mahlas functions as both a symbolic and actual representation of the aşık’s transcendence, so the poet himself serves his mahlas identity as an objective persona. In fact in the interview with Gülağ Öz in the journal Halk ozanları nun sesi Selimi refers to Sefil Selimi consistently in the third person, for example “şimdi Sefil Selimi gerçekleri anlatan bir halk ozandır” (“now Sefil Selimi is a folk bard who expounds true things”) (Öz 1995a, 42).

3.3.9 Edip Harabi and Melûli – the transcendent life and the mahlas as rhetorical perspective

Edip Harabi (1853-1917) whose original name was Ahmet Edip was an Istanbul Bektaşî whose remarkable works expressing divine and human qualities centred on the beauty of the beloved have begun to receive greater appreciation in recent times (Ferraro and Bolat 2007, 98). Harabi originally used the mahlas Edip, simply using his name. However at the age of seventeen under the influence of Mehmet Ali Hilmî Dede Baba (1842-1907) he assumes a new transcendent persona sealed by the adoption of the mahlas Harabi (which has a meaning of ‘ruin’, ‘misery’ or

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182 His twenty-eight verse masterwork, the Vahdetname (Message of oneness), a striking cosmology of Alevi-Bektaşî belief, was a centre piece of the collective recording expressing kızılbaş identity produced by Kalan Müzik in 1999 (Various 2009). A selection of eight verses from the Vahdetname appear in translation in Ferraro and Bolat (2007, 29-30); their translation of the opening and final verses are:

“Long before Allah and the universe existed
We created both and announced it to all beings—
When there was no appropriate dwelling place for the Truth
We invited him into our house and nurtured him

…
For those who enter this sublime place [literally, the palace of oneness]
For those who see Truth within the truth
For those in this gathering of Sufis who can handle it—
Harabi is letting the cat out of the bag”[literally, circulated the secret in the place of unity]

183 Baba of the Merdivenköy tekke in Istanbul.
'poverty'). At the age of forty-nine he committed to a manuscript\(^\text{184}\) a brief *deyiş* in which he is explicit about his physical birth, citing the actual year and also the almost cosmic wonder of the unity of his parents. But in the same breath he almost dismisses this as merely an outward appearance or show (zâhiren). His self is realised in the retreat from the outer (the world) which is encapsulated in the taking of the mahlas Harabi. It is a transition, a transcendent journey that acknowledges the progress from the worldly identity to the persona that is the revelation of the inner truths, here stated as the open book that reveals the proclamations of the mysteries of love of the enlightened (eren-s). The experience of the transition from the identity of the birth name to the initiate withdrawn in pursuit of the inner truth is sealed, signed and represented in the persona of the mahlas. Harabi’s concise and explicit lyric together with his notes recording the detail of dates and time and age suggest the critical significance of this event (mahlas taking) symbolically and in the reality of the poet’s life.

Peder ve vâlidem oldu bahâne
*Merêc-el-bâhreynî yeltekîyâne*
*Bin iki yüz altmış dokuza kâne*
*Eriştim zâhiren geldim cihâne*

*Berzahtan kurtuldum çıktı aradan*
*On yedi yaşında doğдум anadan*
*Mehmed Ali Hilmi Dede Baba’dan*
*Çok şükür hamd olsun geldim imkâne*

*Nâmım Edip idi Harâbî oldum*

\(^{184}\) Ergun (1956, 255) includes notes from Harabi’s manuscript in which the poet details his birth date, the year he wrote the verse and his age at the time, his age at initiation and how many years had passed since his initiation: “Sene 1318: Bu nutku söylediküm / Sene 1269: tarih-i mevlûdüm / Şimdiki halde kirk dokuz yaşındayım / Nasib aldığım zaman on yedi yaşında idim / Nasib alâti tamam otuz iki sene olmuştur.”
Erenlerin ayak türâbı oldum
Anınçün herkesin kitâbı oldum
Aşk olsun okuyan ehl-i irfâne
(Ergun 1956, 254-255)

My father and mother were the root
The restlessness of two oceans meeting
In one thousand two hundred and sixty-nine
I arrived it seems and came into the world

I was freed from this world and I withdrew
At seventeen years of age from my birth
From Mehmed Ali Hilmi Dede Baba
I came to the possibility, let there be great thanks

My name was Edip and I became Harabi
I become the dust of the Eren's feet
I was an open book for them
One who proclaims ‘let there be love’

Harabi’s awareness of the symbolic power of the mahlas is further revealed by his sometime composition of deviş in the persona of a female using two mahlas, Zehra and Lûtfiye. In one lyric attributed to the persona of Zehra he asserts the equality, indeed the pre-eminent integrity and life-giving of women and challenges the courage of those (men) who would assert otherwise:

O Muhammad, they say we are inferior—
Where is it men gøy this mistaken idea?

185 Examples are found in Ergun (1956), Koca (1990) and Özmen (1998:4). Birge writing in the 1930s notes that Edip Harabi is one of the most renowned Bektaşi poets of the nineteenth and (early) twentieth century and includes translations of two lyrics, one a “light-hearted criticism of the Sunni ideas, coupled with quiet confidence in a better way of thinking” the other a famous lyric among Bektaşi-s, a devriye on the cycle of existence (Birge 1994, 81, 90-91, 120-121).
They disgrace the Prophet’s family [ehlibeyt]
With their false claims and blasphemy.

…
God didn’t do something absurd in creating us.
We don’t accept being seen as somehow less.
Women raised every saint who has walked the earth—
I dare you to accept this.
(Translation by Ferraro and Bolat (2007, 58-59))

The challenge to “listen well to the words of Zahra” is emphatic and emphasised by the female mahlas voice “Zehrâ‘nun nutkunu güzel dinleyin” (Koca 1990, 667).

Given his renown and status, he could have presented the same view with the authority of his Harabi (or Edip Harabi) mahlas but instead he uses the mahlas in a way that reveals a rhetorical and didactic function beyond the simple concept of authorship or even attribution.

Like Harabi, Aşık Melûli (1892-1989) also on occasions used a female mahlas persona, Latife. Melûli whose real name was Karaca was educated both by an Arab hoca (teacher) and for a decade in an Armenian school in Afşin. As well as Turkish he spoke Arabic, Armenian, Farsi and Ottoman Turkish. Along with those of Aşık İbreti the deyîş of Melûli are some of the most forthright expressions of Alevi thought and belief in the twentieth century. Like Harabi he challenges belief, and is also both sardonic and playful. In the persona of Latife, Melûli challenges the ‘barking guard dogs’ of morality and belief by the very construction and expression of the lyric in the female voice. As with Harabi, the use of the female persona mahlas rhetorically accentuates the sardonic nature and the confronting challenge of the lyric.

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186 See Özpolat and Erbil (2006) for Melûli’s collected lyrics together with substantial essays on his life and work.
with its exuberance and human and life asserting force of the female perspective.

This simple and fine lyric is worth quoting in full:

*Mey içtim sarhoşum bugün*
Tutamam dilim vallahi
*Pir’imle çok hoşuma bugün*
Unuttum ölüm vallahi

*Dünya tümden boş geliyor*
*Pir’im bana hoş geliyor*
*Her sevdikçe cüş geliyor*
*Severim Pir’im vallahi*

*Helal bana Pir lokması*
Hacc-ı käbem meyhanesi
Kelb rakibin ürûmesi
Kesemez yolum vallahi

*Varsın banan Pir darılsın*
*Kolum boynuna sarılsın*
*Çözülen kollar karılsın*
Çözemem kolum vallahi

Girsem koynuna gömleksiz
Uyusa ben sevsen sessiz
Uyansa dese edepsiz
Çekemem elim vallahi

*Latife’ım çok hayâszım*
Çok severim çok yüzüsüzüm
Ar namus yok habersizim
*Çalarım güüm vallahi*
(Özpolat and Erbil 2006, 274)
Today I drank wine and was drunk
I swear, I cannot hold my tongue
Today I was so pleased with my Dervish
I swear, I forgot all about death

The world appears completely empty
My Dervish brings me pleasure
He is exuberant whenever he loves
I swear, I love my Dervish

The morsel the Dervish proffers is permitted for me
The tavern is my pilgrim’s kabaa
The barking of the patrolling hounds
I swear, does not block my way

Let the Dervish come and be cross with me
Let my arm embrace his neck
Let the arms that are drawn away be broken
I swear, I cannot withdraw my arm

If I enter his embrace uncovered
If he sleeps and I love silently
If he awakens and he speaks rudely
I swear, I cannot withdraw my hand

I am Latife I am so shameless
I love greatly and I am so brazen
I know nothing of shame and honour
I swear, I will pluck my rose

While Melûli uses Alevi mystical language (mey, lokma, mehhanı, edep) and refers repeatedly to his/her ‘Pir’ (spiritual guide or master) more ambiguous even worldly – and certainly contemporary – interpretations are possible with such a lyric as in the performance of the singer Aynur Haşhaş who replaces ‘Pir’ with ‘canım’ (my dear) and ‘yar’ (beloved) while still using a melody in 10/8 rhythm (related to the renowned deviş of Şah Hatayi Ezel bahar olmayınca) strongly connected to and
3.3.10 Appropriating the mahlas – Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan

Başgöz in his monograph on the renowned Sivas aşık Ali İzzet Özkan observed that the aşık at various times ascribed deyiş to different poets, for example giving a song as ascribed to Karacaoğlan on one occasion and to Pir Sultan Abdal on another occasion. Perhaps even more remarkably Ali İzzet appears to add his own mahlas to the poems of others. Başgöz notes that it can be seen in Ali İzzet’s notebooks that he crossed out mahlas lines and changed them to include his own mahlas or indeed crossed out his own mahlas indicating that he had recorded it incorrectly (Başgöz 1994, 52f). Indeed Ali İzzet being a principal informant for Boratav in his collecting trips in Sivas is probably responsible for the attribution of a number of deyiş to Pir Sultan Abdal that are disputed by scholars, such as the famous Gelin canlar bir olalım, songs that are now so fundamentally associated with Pir Sultan Abdal. In respect to such attributions to Pir Sultan Abdal Başgöz (Başgöz 1994, 57) reports Ali İzzet’s comments: “Hakikatte Pir Sultan şiir yazmamıştır. Onun şiirlerini başkaları yazmıştır. Kızı, yahut onu sevenler Pir Sultan asıldıktan sonra yazmıştır bunları. O bir şeyhtir, bir devrimcidir” (In truth Pir Sultan did not write poems. Other people wrote his poems. His daughter or those who loved him wrote these after Pir Sultan was hanged. He was a sheik, a revolutionary). Ali İzzet’s comment seems to challenge the whole idea of the mahlas as signature as he suggests that Pir Sultan did not compose lyrics at all. Of course, the mahlas is, at its most basic and fundamental level a signature of the composer, but Ali İzzet suggests that it is not in fact that straightforward, that there are other important factors involved including the

associated with Alevi tradition. Aynur Haşhaş’s version is available on CD (Haşhaş n.d.) and she can be seen performing the deyiş on video on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueMC_QM89XA&feature=frwrel (viewed February 2011).
position, perception and interpretation of those engaging with the lyrics. On the same matter Başgöz (Başgöz 1994, 57) also reports these words of Ali İzzet,

\[\text{başkalarının şiirlerinin Pir Sultan'a geçtiğini ben çok bilirim. Benim 'Pir Sultan'ındır' diye derleyip, yayınıldığım şiirlerin içinde de Pir Sultan'ın olmayan çok şiir vardır. Bunu bilerek yapmadım, adamın edasına, asılmasına uygun şiirlere Pir Sultan'ındır dedim.}\]

I know very well that the poems of others have been passed off to Pir Sultan. There are many poems that are not Pir Sultan’s among the poems I collected and published as Pir Sultan’s. I didn’t do this consciously [knowingly], I said they are Pir Sultan’s to the poems that were appropriate to his style and his hanging.

Ali İzzet is suggesting a more subtle use of the mahlas here than attribution of authorship and suggests a certain ‘matter-of-factness’ about the process that neither compromises the persona or Pir Sultan – indeed the attribution of suitable poems develops and enhances the persona in the way it is perceived and the meaning it conveys – nor diminishes the traditional performer or poet who transmits them. Ali İzzet appears to have appropriated and mixed up poems at times but we should not think of this as a practice particular to him – though he is perhaps the most open about it. Eberhard reports a minstrel originally from Yozgat called Mustafa Kılıç who had been a pupil of Aşık Veysel and who “showed versatility in taking songs composed by the minstrel Veysel and others and adding a final stanza, so that he could regard them as his own” (Eberhard 1955, 10).

Of course what is a traditional process in the conceptualisation of the function of the mahlas may sit with some discomfort with the element of proprietary ownership
suggested by attribution, certainly when the poems become published works. In fact Ali İzzet did not publish the poems he knew to be the compositions of others under his name. As he explains to Başgöz,

&iigrave;iirlerime ba&iigrave;ka &iigrave;niklars&igrave;ninkiler kar&iigrave;miş&ograve; olabilir. &iigrave;iirlerini çok serverim, ezberimdedir. Kendi &iigrave;iirlerimi yazarken çok defa akla&uml;ma gelen bir &iigrave;ir ben mi buldum, yoksa onlardan biri mi yazmış ayıramıyorum. Bunun için &iigrave;iirlerin bazı yerleri birbirine karşııyor. Hatta, baan bütün bir &iigrave;irin benim tarafta atladığı bile olmuştur. Ama, kitap yay&iuml;nland&iuml;ken bunlar&igrave;n yeniden elden geç&iuml;rir, benim olmayanlar&igrave;i ayıklarım.

It's possible the works of other &ograve;&igrave;ik-s were mixed with my poems. I love their poems greatly and I know them by heart. While writing my own poems would I not find a poem coming to mind, or not be able to separate what is written from one of them. For this reason in some places poems are mixed with one another. So much so that sometimes I’ve mistaken an entire poem for my own. But, when publishing a book I go through them afresh and I sort out those that are not mine.

Ali İzzet’s matter-of-fact comments do not suggest dissembling or insidious activity but do suggest the trace of how the creation, re-invention and interpretation of the lyrics functions in the oral tradition, in contrast to the proprietary world of publishing and the presentation of deyiş as a textualised form. The identities associated with songs through mahlas attribution engender respect and inspiration and the poet engages freely and meaningfully with the songs, reinforcing the expressive qualities while adding his persona into the community of &ograve;ik-s.

This is not to suggest that poets are free to merely appropriate poems, indeed accurate and declared attribution is fundamental – though this does not, necessarily,
equate with indisputable authorship. In the context of Ali İzzet’s comments Başgöz also reports an anecdote about Aşık Veysel who confronted a young aşık at a concert who had presented one of Ali İzzet’s poems as his own. The young aşık replied that he thought it was Ruhsati’s, to which Veysel replied “why didn’t you say it was Ruhsati’s then?” (Başgöz 1994, 56). The anecdote suggests the critical matter was the importance of having an honesty and genuine understanding of the tradition, and not indulge in flagrant acts of appropriation. It also suggest that such acts would not survive in the tradition; the acts of Ali İzzet were much more deep rooted in the creative and interpretive process and reflect how the mahlas is at the centre of how the voices and personas that speak for the community through the lyric song are dynamically and creatively maintained.

3.3.11 Finding meaning in the mahlas taking tradition

It is evident that there are historically constructed processes for taking (or being given) a mahlas in the Alevi tradition. These processes involve the demonstration of readiness on the part of the aşık to assume the role of the inspired poet. It is also notable that such demonstrations either take place or give rise to the ability to express the poetry through performance\(^\text{188}\). In the case of real world encounters the aşık demonstrates his skill in a formal (or semi-formal) setting in which deyiş are sung, the muhabbet, and extemporises to demonstrate his inner inspirational qualities. In response the master or person of authority declares the mahlas the aşık will adopt. In the Alevi experience authority is linked to lineage, descendents of Hacı Bektaş Veli or ocak dede lineage. The conferring of the mahlas by lineage authorities connects the aşık to the spiritual and sacred (as well as creative) tradition and thus

\(^{188}\) Though it is certainly the case that there are aşık-s who do not play the saz/bağlama – this is not the case with most major aşiks. Vaktidolu is an example of the non-performing aşık.
sustains the maintenance of the tradition, at least so long as such authority remains active and recognised. Commonly aşık-s come from dede lineage (as for example we have noted in the case of Dertli Divani, Aşık Daimi and Seyrani) but similarly in the case of the master to pupil conferring of the mahlas, the process establishes and maintains lineages, as we have seen in the case of Aşık Zakiri who by being given his mahlas by Mesleki is so connected to the Ruhsati line of aşık-s.

We have also seen how dream experiences can provide an authoritative basis for the taking of a mahlas and assuming the role of an inspired aşık, as in the case of Aşık Daimi (though we also observe that he had learned his skill more functionally from his grandparents); and rather dramatically in the case of Seyrani who claims his dream experience to be the point from which his inspiration really commenced. The dream experience evokes, perhaps, shamanistic roots and Sufi influence and offers the accepted possibility for the aşık to achieve legitimacy from the lineage authority when it may not be to hand otherwise. It may be aspirational (as much as inspirational) or it may provide affirmation for talented abilities already developed.

It is clear that these are powerful processes demonstrating the application of authority and the building of linkages through mahlas taking; however, it is also evident that they are not in fact a requirement for the aşık. The aşık can determine his own mahlas; and, as we have seen in the case of Zakiri, may even relinquish the mahlas given him by a master for one of his own choosing, for quite pragmatic reasons. While the manner of acquiring the mahlas does have meaning in the nature of the authority by which it was bestowed, the more important point is the plain fact of taking a mahlas. As Mesleki tells Zakiri, it is impossible that an aşık not have a
mahlas. By taking a mahlas, by whatever means, the aşık not only serves to maintain the tradition but also contributes to the construction of the community of aşık-s and claims or asserts a place in that community. That fact provides the authority for his role as an aşık, though ultimately the quality of the aşık will be determined by his work and how it received by the audience and whether it is perpetuated as expressive culture.

3.3.12 Finding meaning in the structure and form of the mahlas

As previously noted, the mahlas appears in the final verse of the deyiş. In this position it functions as a climactic devise and in that respect also announces the completion of the lyric, which may also herald the transition to a subsequent deyiş in a performance context. In this respect it fulfils a similar function to the takhallus in the Persian ghazal or the invocation of auto-citation in troubadour song or the envoi in the trouvère lyric. That is, it does signal the completion of the lyric and a seal of authority stamped upon the statement it contains; and also, being ‘signed and sealed’ a relinquishing of the lyric to the community. But the signal fact of attribution, the lyric being ‘signed, sealed and delivered’, is that it demands attention of (and to) the lyric – it demands a position in respect to the attribution and both its overt and immanent meanings. While in the context of textualisation this may be directed towards canonical collections of implied authorship, in the oral tradition, as we have seen with Aşık Ali İzzet, such attention is directed toward acts of appropriation and interpretation.

189 In the performance of deyiş in ritual contexts, the cem, the mahlas is acknowledged and honoured by the participant congregation by bringing the hand to the breast or kissing the right hand and then touching it to the forehead (Birdoğan 1995, 408). I have witness this practice also in more informal gatherings where deyiş are performed.
Although the mahlas may appear anywhere in the final quatrain of the *deyiş*, most typically it appears in the first line. Here it achieves the most resonance, especially when understood with musical performance. Between verses the *aşık* may play a short repetitive motif on the *bağlama* and melodic structures typically have a descending movement\(^{190}\), so the mahlas will achieve greatest and most memorable effect as the opening phrase of the verse. One example will suffice here, however more examples demonstrating the placement of the mahlas can be seen in the selection of lyrics included in the Translations chapter below.

Pir Sultan Abdal’s renowned *deyiş* of defiance before his nemesis Hızır Pasha, *Kul olayım kalem tutan eline*, ends with the mahlas verse:

\begin{quote}
*Pir Sultan Abdal’ım ey Hızır Paşa*  
*Gör ki neler gelir sağ olan başa*  
*Hasret koydu bizi kavim kardaşa*  
*Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz*
\end{quote}

Hey there Hızır Pasha, I am Pir Sultan Abdal  
See what things befall such a living soul  
It has left us longing for our kith and kin  
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah\(^{191}\)

This *deyiş* is closely associated with one melody in which the opening melodic line rises from the minor third to the fifth and the line continues moving from the minor sixth to the fifth. This is repeated for the following three lines before beginning a descent to the tonic after which the last two lines of the verse are repeated with the melodic line settling on the fourth before again descending to the tonic. The opening

\(^{190}\) Alevi music will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
\(^{191}\) The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.37.
line with its emphatic proclamation of identity ‘I am Pir Sultan Abdal’ and vocative calling on his adversary ‘hey Hızır Pasha’ conveys precisely the register of the lyric with its assertive declamation of the central persona and it has a stirring, climactic and memorable effect.

Not all deyiş of course seek such dramatic vocative effect. In one of the earliest deyiş recorded as being associated with Pir Sultan, Serseri girme meydana, the mahlas verse is:

\[ \text{Pir Sultan Abdal n’eylersin} \\
\text{Müşkil halledip söylersin} \\
\text{Arısın çiçek yaylarsın} \\
\text{Yarın senden bal isterler} \]

Pir Sultan Abdal what do you do?  
You say you have done the hard yards  
You are a bee working over the flower  
Tomorrow they will require honey from you^{192}

The preceding verses, addressed in the opening line to a ‘vagrant’ (serseri) seemingly not ready to enter upon the spiritual way, recount the requirements of vows (ikrar) and demonstration of the inner qualities with no dissembling. The poetic voice seems to be addressing an ‘other’, much of it in the third person until the mahlas verse where the mahlas persona, Pir Sultan Abdal, is addressed in the second

^{192} The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.42.
person ‘what do you do?’ Such change (or ambiguity) in person and tense is a common device in the deyiş. Here, perhaps, it memorably highlights the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal by suggesting through the surprise change of address in the mahlas line that the poet has all along been addressing his admonitions to himself.

In another early recorded deyiş of Pir Sultan from the Menâkıbu ‘l-esrar behcetü’l-ahrâr the mahlas appears in the very last line of the lyric as: Pir Sultanım gecdi bir gün sabahdan (I am Pir Sultan, he passed by one day in the morning). Here the mahlas almost seems an afterthought though it is connected to the lyric through the repetition of ‘in the morning’ (sabahdan) that occurs at the end of each verse. This lyric opens with the poetic voice speaking in the first person: ‘my master’, ‘I am a seeker’, ‘I pray to the master’. The second verse moves to the third person and the third, fourth and fifth verses to the first person plural: ‘in our land’, ‘we have refuge’. In the mahlas verse there is a return to the first person with ‘I am Pir Sultan’ followed by a sudden shift to the third person ‘he passed by one day in the morning’. While it is possible to read this line as ‘I am Pir Sultan the one who passed by one day in the morning’ neither is it necessary to read it other than in the way it is presented and the shift in tense does produce dramatic effect. It may also hint at a formulaic use of the form ‘Pir Sultan’im’, that is the incorporation of the first person verb to-be suffix. While that form is pervasive both in respect to the deyiş of Pir Sultan Abdal (in all forms of his mahlas) and indeed among aşık-s generally, it is by no means universal and a variety of grammatical positions are used.

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193 The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.4.
This point need not be laboured, though the flexibility of grammatical position of the mahlas is suggestive of a function of the mahlas that is not strictly concerned with authorship. For example in *Gelmiş iken bir habercik sorayım* the mahlas appears in the genitive case in the final verse:

Ben de bildim şu dağların şahısı
Gerçek Erenlerin nazargâhısı
Abdal Pir Sultan’ın seyrangâhısı
Niçin gitmez Yıldız-Daği dumanın

I know that you are the mightiest of mountains
You are the vantage point of the true dervishes
You are Abdal Pir Sultan’s place of pleasure
Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?\(^{194}\)

If the mahlas is considered simply as a signature, a statement of authorship, verses such as this appear at least awkward or perhaps not even a mahlas at all. Yet they exist within the tradition and modern aşık-s continue to incorporate the mahlas with grammatical flexibility. Aşık Daimi for example commonly used the mahlas forms Daimi and Daimi’yim and Muhlis Akarsu commonly used Akarsu and Akarsu’yum. But both aşık-s but also often employed their mahlas in the dative, genitive and accusative cases\(^ {195}\).

Losensky identifies what he calls ‘shiftless’ and ‘shifty’ lyrics among the Persian ghazal referring to the presence or otherwise of deictic movement within a given lyric. That is, whether the grammatical markers such as demonstratives or tense

\(^{194}\) The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.24.
\(^{195}\) Many examples can be found in collections of Daimi’s *deyiş* (Orhan 1999) and Akarsu (Zaman 2006).
which relate to the spacio-temporal co-ordinates of the lyric expression are consistent or ‘shift’ (Losensky 1998a). As Losensky notes, no obvious change in the dramatic setting accounts for a shift where, for example, the speaker becomes the addressee; and he suggests that “in the very act of naming himself, of asserting his public identity, the poet separates himself from the poem’s lyric voice” (Losensky 1998a, 242-243). For Losensky this suggests the lyric voice is “fractured along with the speaker’s personality” and the task becomes to identify the “implicit speaker” which may be one of three voices defined broadly as “the heart and its passions, society and its constraints of ethics or common sense, and the mind or wisdom that attempts to mediate between these two” (Losensky 1998a, 252). This approach depends on the certain and rhetorically performed relationship of the author and the lyric ‘I’ – the relationship that can fracture, separate or speak from implicit perspectives. Like the Persian ghazal, in the mahlas persona of the Alevi deyiş we find a range of lyrics with different degrees of deictic shifts – some are internally consistent some not. Thus when we look at the range of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics – those identified by the incorporation of his mahlas – there is no consistent perspective; sometimes Pir Sultan is clearly speaking, sometimes he seems the subject spoken of, sometimes he seems to appear only as a persona evoked in the actual mahlas. The coherence is provided by the orality of the lyrics’ in which the assertion of authorship, ignited in the incorporation of the mahlas, becomes the property of the community with an investment in maintaining the lyric persona and its immanent associations. In other words, the authorial identity bound to the lyric by the mahlas is subject to the function and interpretation of the oral tradition and community that sustains that tradition. In this process the authorial aspect of the mahlas becomes more nuanced, ambiguous and flexible. While the personas of the aşık-s remembered in the mahlas
are esteemed and valued as authoritative and expressive (even sacred) voices, and as such many lyrics must retain considerable authorial authenticity; they also form the substance for the creative expression of the community over time and so reflect the perspective of that process of transmission and social purpose. A critical function of the mahlas, when viewed from the perspective of the oral tradition and the social maintenance of that tradition, becomes rather less to retain distinct authorial proprietorship – though that may certainly persist and be present – than to build and strengthen the essential networks of lineage, cultural connection and the expression of communal identity.

3.4 Summary: the deyiş and mahlas from explications to experiences

In this chapter I have looked at the definitions, structure and form of the deyiş and identified it as the principal vehicle for Alevi expressive culture that encompasses not only ritual belief and function but statements of social identity more generally. Using the structural form of the common folk lyric form koşma, the deyiş remains unconstrained in its thematic and subject matter thus permitting nuance and subtlety in the degree of shading of Alevi meaning and expression and consequently scope for creative and interpretive statement.

I have proposed that the principal defining textual integer of the deyiş is the mahlas, the attribution of the lyric to an authoritative persona. While the mahlas is ubiquitous in the deyiş form and thus in Alevi expressive culture, and in the context of orally transmitted lyric certainly suggests a degree of formulaic use, the acquisition of the mahlas by the folk poet (aşık or ozan) is imbued with the qualities of authority, warrant, lineage, transcendence, inspiration and community and artistic participation.
While the creative processes of the aşı̈k undoubtedly involves, and is perhaps even inspired by, the act of using the mahlas as a signature – and at its most basic the mahlas is certainly a signature device – by adding the voice of the aşı̈k through his/her mahlas persona to the community of voices, the mahlas forms the nodes in a complex network of associative and meaningful expression. Ontologically the mahlas is not fixed in its role as signature but takes on the potential of interpretation through the performative and receptive appropriation and transmission of the oral lyric. For this reason the mahlas should be seen as a critical integer with considerable immanent potential and force around which Alevi oral expressive culture is created, maintained, interpreted and experienced.
4. EXPERIENCES: INTERPRETING THE ALEVI 
DEYİŞ 
AND THE MAHLAS IN EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider ways of experiencing the Alevi deyiş as expressive culture with particular attention to the interpretive possibilities of the mahlas. So far I have not dealt in any detail with the musical aspects of the deyiş. In part this has been to emphasise the significant textual characteristics that define the deyiş. However, I have also sought to emphasise the fundamental orality of the deyiş lyric form – and that orality in realised in the performance of the deyiş as ‘song’: that is, music and text in performance. I began my thesis with a encounter with textualised world of Pir Sultan Abdal as historically constructed and interpreted in major part from deyiş texts; and I have suggested that in phenomenological terms this brings us only as far as ‘pre-understandings’. Through an examination of the terminology, structure and function of the deyiş and what I argue is its core element, the mahlas, I have revealed the interpretive potential of the deyiş form that provides the possibilities for developing and maintaining a social and cultural context through the suggestion of linkages and authority. I now wish to look at the deyiş as it may be experienced as a public performance. In order to do so I will firstly look at how we may usefully characterise Alevi music and whether it is a distinct musical genre – an issue that remains unresolved in the literature – and I will argue that, as we have seen in respect to the deyiş and mahlas, it is the spaces of ambiguity that coalesce around the foundations of ritual culture that provide scope for creativity and interpretation in public spaces. In order to bring this thesis to its interpretive objective having dealt with pre-understandings (as embodied in the phenomenology of Pir Sultan Abdal)
and in explanation of the structure of the deyiş and the mahlas, I now propose to
analyse the deyiş from three expressive perspectives:

1. As performances and interpretive acts contextualised in the production of
cultural artefacts in the form of commercial recordings produced by Arif Sağ,
culminating in a series of recordings produced in the middle of the 1980s
under the title Muhabbet;

2. As a public festival performance – specifically a performance by Tolga Sağ at
the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival in 2002; and,

3. As a personal response to the experiencing and interpreting of the Alevi deyiş
through my own learning experience and public performances.

4.2 Alevi music

Gloria Clarke noted in 2001 that “the whole question as to whether ‘Alevi music’
exists or how it can be classified” had only just begun to be explored (Clarke 2001,
154-163). As Clarke asserted in her 1999 monograph on Alevi culture, “one cannot
say that Alevi or even Turkish music is a well-studied sound” (Clarke 1999, 140) and
while there is a wealth of material available most of the work has been in the
collecting and preserving of materials. It was and remains an area that has received
relatively little attention, particularly, as Clarke suggests, in respect to music as
sound. As Clarke observes in her useful survey of the research, consideration of
Alevi music is mostly limited to brief or incidental consideration in short articles or
as part of works of a broader scope.

Canadian ethnomusicologist Irene Markoff has done the most significant work in
analysing Alevi music as expressive culture. Markoff’s focus is the performance
context and gives an emphasis to the musical qualities – not just the textual qualities – of Alevi music. While her doctoral thesis considered the performance practice of the Turkish bağlama specialists and was not specifically a study of Alevi music, the fact that many if not most of these specialists were Alevi, and because her research was conducted at a significant time in the development of Alevi expressive culture, her study remains perhaps the most valuable contribution to any consideration of Alevi music\(^{196}\). Since completing her thesis Markoff has produced a number of articles examining Alevi musical culture and its place in expressing Alevi cultural identity\(^{197}\). Martin Stokes in his ethnographic study of music and musicians in Turkey focuses on the popular music genre of arabesk although he does briefly touch on some specific characteristic of Alevi bağlama technique (Stokes 1992, 78-80) and more recently has also written of the iconic status of a particular recording of Aşık Daimi’s deyiş Ne ağlarsın benim zülfü siyahım by the Turkish pop diva Sezen Aksu (Stokes 2010). Bate’s short study on music in Turkey identifies Alevi music as a distinct genre and notes the contexts and social nature of music making among Alevis including the ritual cem, but also in the gatherings referred to as muhabbet and hasbihâl (Bates 2011, 8-13). He also notes the appearance of Alevi deyiş in more public and popular contexts such as the türkü bars of Istanbul and in rock and fusion recordings, although he says “Alevi music is not clearly known as art or popular music” (Bates 2011, 13). Bate’s also stresses the authored aspect of Alevi music: “the culture takes pride in its poets and in the attribution of songs to the original poet” something that is “simply not found in the world of türkü singing” (Bates 2011).

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196 Markoff's thesis is titled: Musical theory, performance and the contemporary bağlama specialist in Turkey (Markoff 1986a).
4.2.1 Sound characteristics

In terms of what constitutes Alevi music from the perspective of sound characteristics we must first accept that, as Markoff says, “Alevi music genres can be characterised by their richness of regional stylistic diversity” (Markoff 1994a, 103). Such regional characteristics are not therefore confined to Alevi music but may be characteristic of the musical culture of the region more broadly. However, as Markoff again suggests there are features that bind such regional characteristics together and imbue them with and Alevi identity (Markoff 1994a, 103). As Yürür notes in speaking of the ritual purpose of Alevi music, there are “expressive parameters” that bring out the Alevi-ness of the sound texture that are “easy to identify instantly for an acquainted listener, but impossible to communicate verbally” (Yürür 1989, 13). The task of verbally describing this Alevi-ness suggested by Yürür may not be impossible but it is certainly complicated by the limits of a clear definition of Alevi music in respect to sound alone. Alevi music is essentially a song form and the textual content cannot altogether be disassociated from the musical aspects. Some melodies associated with Alevi deyiş may also be used for songs that do not carry Alevi texts.198

To approach a characterisation of the sound aspects of Alevi music as a distinct genre we need to identify expressive elements that associate the music to the

198 As an example the song Bugün yarında haber geldi may be cited. A version of this song collected in the Malatya Arapkir region from Süleyman Elver has a text attributed to Karacoğlan (Turhan and Çam 2010, 46). With the same text it is sometimes attributed to Pir Sultan as in Tanses’s collection where the source is given as Aşık Daimi (Tanses 1997, 154-155) though the lyric content and theme seems rather more suited to that associated with Karacoğlan than Pir Sultan. However the same melody is associated with a semah attributed to Hatayi beginning Cekip bizi bırdęgah (Sağ et al. 2009c). The melody of the well know Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş Kul olayım kalem tutan eline is associated with the singing of the Sivas Alevi Aşık Veysel, and appears in a collection of melodies published by Gölpınarlı, collected from Çarşılı Hafiz Hüseyin Tolan, (Gölpınarlı 1963, 282) but is also played as a davul (drum) and zurna (shawm) dance tune (Şahin and Şahin n.d.).
fundamental expression of Alevi culture – that is Alevi ritual culture. Such elements include the use of the bağlama, particular tuning, the predominant scales used, the rhythmic quality of the music, and characteristic cadential and melodic phrases.

4.2.2 The bağlama

Only one instrument can be said to be fundamental to the sound of Alevi music, the bağlama, also referred to, less commonly in recent times, as saz. The bağlama is so fundamental to Alevi music, particularly ritual music, that Alevi music without the sound of the bağlama is practically inconceivable.

Alevi beliefs are symbolically present in the structural form of the bağlama. The lute bowl body known as the tekne is the ‘ilim şehri’, the ‘city of knowledge’, a storehouse in which to find secret knowledge and God. The soundboard, göğüş (literally, ‘breast’) without which no sound emerges is the ‘gate’ (‘kapı’) preventing this knowledge from being corrupted and escaping. The bridge over which the strings pass is called the ‘threshold’ (esik,) and requires sacred respect in the manner that Alevis consider a door threshold sacred and avoid stepping on it. The neck (‘sap’) in the form of the Arabic letter ‘elif’ (Arabic alif) derives its sacred character from its connection to Allah (and by association Ali) (Birdoğan 1995, 431).

The symbolic connection to the Imam Ali may also be understood as more thoroughly embodied in the bağlama with the resonator representing his body and
the neck his sword Zülfikâr (Markoff 1986b, 48). This connection is made overt on an instrument in my possession made by the master luthier Mustafa Gök in Istanbul in the early 1990s which includes inlay work emerging from the neck onto the soundboard representing Zülfikâr the two-pointed sword of Ali. Such is the sacred quality attributed to the bağlama and its central role in the expression of Alevi belief that it is sometimes referred to as the ‘telli Kuran’, the stringed Quran. Zelyut explains this as the belief that a song (nağme) presented on the saz (i.e. bağlama) becomes itself sacred (kutsal) (Zelyut 1998, 168).

For Alevi music, the bağlama is tuned in bağlama düzeni (tuning), sometimes known as aşık düzeni or Veysel düzeni (after Aşık Veysel). The instrument has three paired or triple courses of strings using a tuning that is re-entrant (from lowest sounding string to highest A-G-d) which facilitates playing in the first position – and is therefore quite different from the performance technique applied to the standard bozuk or kara düzeni which requires melodies to be performed mostly on the top string using the full length of the neck. As Markoff explains, the bağlama düzeni facilitates “the crossing of strings and the creation of an intricate texture featuring the movement of two instrumental voices in parallel fourths and fifths” (Markoff 2002b, 796). On the smaller dede bağlama often employed in ritual settings the stringing is generally in unison (and may even be single stringing); however on the instrument most commonly used for the Alevi repertoire, the short-necked (kısa sap) bağlama octave stringing is employed, most commonly on the two outside courses. Perhaps

199 While there is no alif in the name Ali, as this instrument shows the connection of the neck of the instrument to Ali is implied and suggests the common practice in Bektâşi writing of terminating the trailing letter in name Ali with a representations of the Zülfikâr (Birge 1994, 233).

200 The Alevi researcher Nejat Birdoğan, using the mahlas Cevri includes a deyiş in his book on Alevi culture that describes the symbolic qualities of the bağlama concluding with the lines: Elimizde telli Kuran / Yürürüz Hakk’ in izinden (The stringed Quran in our hand / We follow in the footsteps of God) (Birdoğan 1995, 431-432).
counter-intuitively the ostensibly lowest sounding course of strings, the middle course, does not employ octave stringing. The effect of this stringing is to fill-out the sound generally and also adds to the complexity of the harmonic textures with the ‘top’ course actually sounding lower than the ‘low’ middle course. This tuning and stringing effectively supports the strumming across all strings and production of chordal effects and the cadential phrases used in performance (see the following section). The typical tuning of the bağlama with seven strings in courses, from lowest to highest sounding, of two, two and three strings showing the complex re-entrant nature of the tuning is represented below.

![Diagram of bağlama tuning]

While the use of the plectrum (tezene) when playing the bağlama to perform Alevi music is common, the style of strumming using the fingers called şelpe or pençe typical of ritual performance style has “deeper symbolic association [in connection to the] drawing in the form of a hand, known as pençe-i Āl-i ābā ‘family of the mantle’, in which the names of the Prophet’s family members is written” (Markoff 2002b, 796). Since the mid-1990s the şelpe technique has become more widespread, initially developed to a virtuosic level of technique by the Alevi bağlama prodigy Hasret Gültekin (1971-1993) in the late 1980s and early 1990s and then by Arif Sağ, Erol Parlak and Erdal Erzincan. From the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century

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201 Performances of the young virtuoso Gültekin can be viewed on YouTube. Sağ was performing şelpe in a highly developed style by the early 1990s, for example in a performance at the Anadolu Alevi Kültür Haftası in Berlin in March 1991 (viewed on a video of the performance in my personal collection) and in his 1993 live recording Direniş (Sağ 1993). The high water mark of this virtuosic take on şelpe performance is the Concerto for Bağlama composed by Cengiz Özdemir and performed by Sağ, Parlak and Erzincan with the Istanbul State Symphony Orchestra in 1998 (Sağ and Trio...
performers such as Ulaş Özdemir, Gani Pekşen and Muharrem Temiz have used şelpe technique in a manner that uses a simpler strumming technique suggestive of ritual performance style rather than a virtuosic technique combining strumming, finger picking and hammering on strings of the earlier popularisers of this style.

As Markoff reminds us, Alevi music can be characterised by a richness of regional and rural musical style and diversity, like Turkish folk music more generally, including a range of metres in which compound, or asymmetric, rhythms such as 5/8, 7/8, 9/8 and 10/8 commonly feature (Markoff 1994a, 103). However, there are features that suggest Alevi identity, including the most common scale used which equates to the scale of the Turkish makam hüseyni also known in folk music as kerem dizi which is characterised by a partially flattened second degree. Markoff notes the use of the term “Hüseyni çalıyor” (he/she plays Hüseyni) to describe the nature of Alevi melodies implying a strong link to the martyr figure of Imam Husayn and that “it suggests the exclusive quality of in-group tradition, and the intimacy shared by group members upon hearing the music” (Markoff 1994a, 103). In the practice of Alevi music, however, the scale is more usefully understood as compounds of tetrachords, as the melodic themes are commonly developed over short ranges and the upper tetrachord of the scale especially is rather more changeable. The following examples indicate these variations on the upper tetrachord of the kerem dizi.

1998b). Erzincan remains, perhaps, the most committed performer of this style and his virtuosity can be heard on his recording Anadolu (Erzincan 2000).


This is commonly represented in musical notation by a ‘2’ following the flat symbol suggesting the note is flattened by two ninths of a tone, following the Turkish comma system of dividing a tone into nine. The classical hüseyni makam employs a scale with a second degree flattened by only one comma and so is not strictly comparable with the kerem dizi of folk music. As the frets are moveable on the bağlama the actual degree to which this note is flattened, while stable in performance, may vary among performers and contexts, though it may be understood, generally, to equate to a quarter-tone.

See Markoff (1986a) for the most detailed and useful discussion of bağlama tunings and their relationship to the scales used in folk music.
In practice melodic themes are not restricted to the lower or upper tetrachords of the scale but may range across the two, particularly utilising the range of a fifth from the third note of the scale (C) in the example above to seventh note (G). While this may be understood as a melodic key or scale (for example a major scale based on C) the tonal characteristics of the bağlama continue to suggest the root scale (the kerem dizı) of the instrument. This modality is characteristic of what is known as yanık kerem, meaning ‘inflamed’ or ‘burning’\(^{205}\). Performers, when playing themes and melodies apparently based on tonics above the root note of the bağlama frequently resolve to the root with the completion of the melody. The following is an indicative example of the short melodic themes that characterise much of Alevi ritual music\(^{206}\).

Typically the A section might be repeated many times while the B section is introduces a variation on the theme that occurs periodically during the performance.

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\(^{205}\) See Markoff (1986a, 99) and Sipahi and Aydın (2005, 120).

\(^{206}\) It should be emphasised that this example is not meant to suggest all Alevi music, even all ritual music, follows these themes, which it certainly does not. Rather that this example represents typical characteristics. A variety of metres and even scales are encountered, for example the duaz of Kul Himmet Her sabah her sabah ötüşür kuşlar which is sung to melodic themes in 10/8 rhythm that is based on a garip/hicaz tetrachord on the bağlama root note that alternates with a kerem tetrachord. See also below in my discussion of the duaz-i imam form.
of a long text\textsuperscript{207}. At less frequent intervals the melody rises to the fifth as in the C section which is naturally accommodated on the \textit{bağlama} as the main theme pivots around the lowest string which is fretted by the thumb – which is a naturally more comfortable and sustainable position for holding the instrument – and so to reach the highest note of the C section only requires the small finger to rest across the upper two strings to form a chord of tonic and fifth. Finally, in some cases, the performer may resolve the melodic themes to the \textit{bağlama} root as in section D\textsuperscript{208}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{music_diagram.png}
\caption{Musical diagram of characteristic themes over small ranges that are repeated, sometimes with the introduction of variations, which fit comfortably and naturally on the \textit{bağlama}, particularly the smaller instruments in which the thumb does not need to move from its position fretting the lowest string on the third above the root note.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{207} This structure can be heard on the recording of a cem service recorded in Istanbul in 1996 (performed by a dede and others from the Malatya region) of \textit{deyiş} (cem nefes) of Kul Himmet and Virani (Turquie: cérémonie du djem Alevi 1998).

\textsuperscript{208} As, for example, Tolga Sağ does in his performance of Medet ya Muhammed medet ya Ali in his performance at the Pir Sultan Abdal festival which I will discuss later.
When we consider Alevi music more broadly, especially given our understanding
that the textual nature of the song is a substantively defining aspect of Alevi song,
deyiş, clearly the musical range and possibilities are extended well beyond the
repetitive short themes found in the music of ritual. However, musical characteristics
that are strongly suggestive of the essence of Alevi music appear in the broader
repertoire by the reference to such thematic models, the prominent use of the
bağlama and the incorporation and repetition of certain cadential phrases. As
Markoff writes, “the broader Alevi minstrel style can always be identified by short
melodic motifs that introduce and end repertoire, or are used as markers throughout a
performance, appearing as cadences that end musical phrases” (Markoff 1994a, 103-
104).

4.2.3 Cadential phrases

Performers of Alevi deyiş typically include short cadential phrases played on the
bağlama between the sung verses emphasising the sixth, seventh and eighth degrees
of the kerem dizi (Markoff 1994a, 103-104). Duygulu (1997, 29) says that these are
popularly known by the names hayal or arenleme. They are perhaps particularly
characteristic of Alevi music because although they can be executed using the
popular karadüzen tuning, using bağlama düzeni they produce a particular harmonic
quality, essentially dropping to the tone below the tonic, sounded on the middle
string (while the tonic may also still be sounded on the lowest string) with the
movement of leading notes alternating between the sixth and seventh degrees
resolving again at the tonic and fifth. This device falls naturally and easily under the
fingerling for the bağlama düzeni (tuning). The basic pattern and harmonic structure
of this type of cadential phrase can be seen in the following examples.
Played at intervals throughout the song they can produce a rhythmic ostinato effect that supports the expression of the textual content of the deyiş. Its simple motif and repetitiveness ensures the performance is focused on the textual content without the distraction of flourish or hesitation and provides a rhythmic and therefore physical engagement with the performance.

Simple repetitive musical phrases and cadential interludes serve to focus the music on the service of the text. As Duygulu states: “ayrica deyişlerin en önemli
(furthermore, the melody is of great importance in its service presenting the message that is one of the most important characteristics of the deyiş) (Duygulu 1997, 23).

The repetition of cadential phrases also functions to re-iterate resolution to the main melody and consequently the musical performance; and further serves to emphasise the completeness and unity of the song. And more than this, it connects the song and performance to the larger repertoire through its associative qualities since these cadential phrases appear, with subtle variation, throughout the repertoire.

4.3 **Duaz-ı imam as a referential and defining musical form**

In Alevi ritual expression there are a number of specific forms of deyiş that are identified by their function and (or) thematic content, such as the tevhid, miraçlama, mersiye and semah. If one form could be posited as the central defining form in Alevi expressive culture it would be the duaz-ı imam. The name duaz-ı imam is from the Farsi and refers to the Twelve Imams of Shi’a tradition. It is alternatively referred to as duazdeh imam, düaz imam or simply duaz or düaz. As Zelyut (1998, 174) states “bu şiir-müzik türü de cemlerin en temel muziklerindendir” (this poetic-musical type is among the cem’s most fundamental music) expressing as it does a potent recitation of the foundational identities of Alevi belief, Ali, Husayn, Hasan and the Prophet’s family, the ehlibeyt. In keeping with the invocation of seminal identities the duaz-ı imam may also include mention of other significant identities among or apart from the ehlibeyt such as Hacı Bektaş Veli, Abdal Musa and Fatma Ana (Birdoğan 1995, 404).
While duaz-i imam commonly use the syllabic metre typical of other deyish there are also many that use longer syllabic lines (such as 14 or 15 syllables) or the aruz (weighted) metre of classical divan poetry which may suggest a possible origin of this form among the masters such as Hatayi and Virani\textsuperscript{209} who also use these forms. Yusuf Ziya Yörükân travelling among Alevi and Tahtacı villages in Anatolian Turkey in the 1920s found Hatayi’s poems among the most popular (Birge 1994, 68) and he proposes the origin of the duaz-i imam as (Shah Ismail) Hatayi’s response to his action in disturbing the tomb of a former partisan of the Umayyads who had turned his loyalty to Husayn\textsuperscript{210} which, legend has it, is the origin of his mahlas (Yörükân 1998, 52-53)\textsuperscript{211}.

\begin{verbatim}
Bilirim günahım hadden aşıkdir
Eşiğinde geda için başışla
Tamam oldu Oniki İmam nur oldu
Şah Hataî hata için başışla
\end{verbatim}

I know my sin is that of the excessive lover
Forgive the beggar on the threshold
It is done the Twelve Imam are the light
Forgive Shah Hatayi for the offence

It is perhaps not surprising the the duaz-i imam has attracted less interest in respect to music than the musically complex semah or in respect to text than those deyis that suggest social comment, legends or esoteric endeavours. The thematic limits of the duaz-i imam suggests a more formulaic lyric than the semah or tevhid and certainly the deyis as more broadly understood. It also means they are unambiguously Alevi in

\textsuperscript{209} The commemoration or names and the duaz-i imam are principal themes in particular of the poetry of Virani as can be seen in the numerous examples collated by Adil Ali Atalay (1998).
\textsuperscript{210} See Gallagher (2004, 152).
\textsuperscript{211} The legend recounts that a mysterious voice spoke ‘hata ettin’ (you have committed an error) from which Shah Ismail took the mahlas Hatayi.
their character – perhaps the essence of Alevi expressive culture in their esoteric, associative and communicative economy, being fundamentally the invocation of lineage, names and epithets. While the duaz-ı imam should be deserving of more systematic scholarly attention, I will give one example here to illustrate the textual characteristics. This is one of the most widely known examples of the duaz-ı imam thanks to recordings by Arif Sağ (n.d. (b)), Livaneli (1995) and performances of the peripatetic Dertli Divani. This duaz-ı imam is from the Kıtas in southeastern Turkey and the text here is taken from the version printed by Atılgan and Acet (2001, 252).

Medet Allah ya Muhammed ya Ali
Bizi dergâhından mahrum eyleme
Pirim Hünkâr Hacı Bektaşı Veli
Bizi dergâhından mahrum eyleme

Adem’i Safiyullah Adem hakkıyçun
Muhammed Mustafa hatem hakkıyçun
Eyyub’a verdiğin sitem hakkıyçun
Bizi dergâhından mahrum eyleme

Hasan’in aşkına kılalım zarı
Şah Hüseyin dinimizin serveri
Alemin carısın cenab-ül bari
Bizi dergâhından mahrum eyleme

Zeynel’in canına kıldılar ceza

Help us, Allah, Muhammed, Ali
Do not deprive us of the dervish lodge
My saint Sovereign Hacı Bektaş Veli
Do not deprive us of the dervish lodge
For the sake of Adam of Adam’s race
Muhammad Mustafa for the sake of the seal
For the sake of your reproach to Job
Do not deprive us of the dervish lodge
Let us weep bitterly for the love of Hasan
Shah Husayn is the prince of our faith
You are the means of the world revered creator
Do not deprive us of the dervish lodge
They rendered punishment on the life of Zeynel

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212 Another duaz-ı imam under the title Her sabah her sabah ötüşür kuşlar attributed to Kul Himmet is included in the Translations chapter (5.8.1).
213 The cassette release Muhabbet’e devam has no publishing date but was released sometime between 1988 and 1990.
214 The opening line as performed by Sağ and Livaneli is Medet Allah medet medet ya Ali thus excluding ‘Muhammed’. Dertli Divani includes ‘Muhammed’ in the opening line (as I witnessed and recorded during his performance at the Şahkulu Dergahı in Istanbul in July 2002).
215 In some versions this may be ‘Adem’i Seyfullah’, thus ‘For the sake of Adam soldier of God’.
In the cem ritual the duaz-i imam takes on the place of a prayer and is generally sung in the sections that carry religious weight and influence, for example following confessions of commitment to the way, following prayers and when the unity of the cem is expressed – “canların yola kabulüinden hemen sonra, namazların bitiminde, cem birlemede” (Birdoğan 1995, 407). The duaz-i imam are commonly sung in groups of three, either three duaz back to back or a duaz may follow two or three nefes (deyiş with a measured and sober devotional character) which in turn may be followed by cuş havaları, rhythmically exuberant deiş with a devotional or mystical theme (Ulusoy 2010, 47, 67; Birdoğlu 1995, 407; Onatça 2007, 51; Mélikoff 1993, 47).

This is the mahlas, not a reference to the Prophet Muhammad.  

A very fine demonstration of this can be viewed on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fenigYjEq6A. This video recorded in the presence of Veliyettin Ulusoy the Hacı Bektaş Veli Dergahı Postınısını at the Şahkulu Sultan Dergahı on 4 March 2011 shows Dertli Divani, Tolga Sağ and Erdal Erzincan performing three nefes (deyiş) and one duaz-i imam. The songs performed are Ateş-i aynına yaklaştım özmü (Nesimi), Gel ey zahid bizim ile ceşişme (Pir Sultan), Dün gece seyrim içinde (Kul Himmet) and the duaz Ayrıma bizi (Sıtkı Baba). The three nefes had been recorded by Tolga Sağ and Erdal Erzincan as a sequence on their 2005 recording Türküler sevdamız 3 ( Sağ et al. 2005). The duaz, sourced from Dertli Divani, has been recorded by Divani (1995) and Sağ (1999). The video shows an intense and focused performance combined with Dertli Divani discreetly directing the attention of those around the performers. It is also possible to see how the bağlama in bağlama düzeni accommodates the playing of the short repetitive motifs of the melodies as the musicians perform strumming in şelpe style.
The duaz-i imam with its recitation of names, often reiterated through the singing of two or three duaz in succession, has the power of repetition and incantation. While the commemoration of the names may appear in various contexts in individual duaz, they also reveal formulaic iterations of names. For example, the names of the ninth, tenth and eleventh Imams Taki, Naki and (Hasan el) Askeri are commonly grouped together in an alliterative formula. The re-iterative and invocative nature of the duaz is often highlighted by the repeated interjection of the mystical name of God, Hu, at the end of lines or half line phrases or by the repetition of ‘Allah, Allah’.

The music of the duaz-i imam also suggests the importance of repetition and rhythm in reinforcing the commemoration and memory of significant identities. The music of duaz-i imam commonly consists of short repeated phrases melodically within tetrachords set to a strong rhymic accompaniment on the bağlama, often (though not always) in complex or compound metre. While the melody repeats, for the most part, a simply structured phrase over a small range, at certain points during the song the melody rises, briefly, above the fundamental range. In some cases subtle rhythmic changes may also occur. These small dynamic changes in the song appear to add a compelling and dynamic structure – something that may help to sustain engagement with the audience – to the fundamental repetitive quality of the music.

The following example is an outline of the melodic structure of the duaz-i imam quoted above. It comes from the Kisas tradition as is associated particularly with the performance of Dertli Divani.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{218} Dertli Divani is the popular source of this duaz however published transcriptions credit another aşık from Kisas Aşık Sefai (Mehmet Acet) as the source. Notations, forming part of the sequence of deyiş constituting the ‘Kisas semahi’ have been done by Mehmet Özbet (Atılgan 1992) and Halil Atılgan (Atılgan and Acet 2001). These transcriptions differ slightly from each other – particularly in
the pitch of the notes sung – and from the my transcription given here. My transcription aims to illustrate the structure of the popularly performed and record versions.
In the context of regional qualities that appear in the music it is useful to look at another example of a duaz-i imam from the Kı̇sas tradition. It is interesting because again we can see short repetitive melodic themes that subtly alter during the song, in this case involving subtle rhythmic changes as well. This duaz, ‘Ayırma bizi’²¹⁹ by Sıdkı Baba (1865-1928) like the previous example, has three sections following a generally step-wise descent in the tonal centre of each melodic phrase. In this case however these sections (A, C and E in the notation) also involve changes of metre or beat, beginning in 7/8 for the first section, changing to 8/8 for the second section with a beat pattern alternating between 2+3+3 and 3+2+3, and in the third section with a regular beat pattern to 3+2+3 in 8/8 metre. In fact the final section uses the same melodic motif as previous duaz example. The changes from first to second and second to third sections are heralded by vocal sections (B and D in the notation) that rise above the repeated melodic themes and descend to the tonic before picking up the new melodic phrase. While very similar to the previous example, this duaz shows even greater sophistication and complexity in its structure with its dynamic interpolations and rhythmic variation, its seemingly simple step-wise descent, its melodic emphasis on the small range of a minor third ranging between both the lower and upper tetrachords, and its repeated resolution on the third above the bağlama root note while acknowledging this implied root of the scale in the descending lines that separate the main melodic phrases.

²¹⁹ The duaz can be heard on recordings by Divani (1995) and Tolga Sağ (1999) and on the YouTube video of Divani, Sağ and Erdal Erzincan mentioned above in footnote 217.
4.4 Commercial recordings and Alevi expression

It has often been noted that the mid-1980s saw the explosion of public expression by Alevis, what Reha Çamuroğlu describes as a “dazzling process of rediscovery” (Çamuroğlu 1998, 79). This was particularly evident in the publication of books expressing views on the nature of Alevilik which I have noted previously may be understood to represent important primary sources. In addition to the explosion of publications on Alevi issues, commercial musical recordings expressing interpretations of Alevi identity in the context of Turkish culture also began to appear. Particularly instrumental in this were a quartet of Alevi performers led by Arif Sağ and including Muhlis Akarsu, Musa Eroğlu and Yavuz Top. They were certainly not the first to perform and record Alevi deyiş in commercial or public contexts. However, as with the expression of Alevi identity appearing in print from the early and mid-1980s, the recordings of Alevi expressive culture from this period reveal a new interest in discourse about Alevi identity that was not constrained by the external agendas of political sectarianism. The new discourse appears more internally searching rather than a matter of political propaganda. The military coup of 12
September 1980 was the culmination of a decade or more of political and sectarian violence including attacks against Alevis, generally seen as supporters of the political left, by right-wing groups, in Malatya, Sivas and Kahramanmaraş in 1978 and Çorum in 1980. The complex character of the period following the coup in respect to the cultural climate is finely described by Nurdan Gürbilek and worth quoting at length.

In order to periodize the Turkish 1980s, one must be able to distinguish these two fundamental, at first contradictory, characteristics. On the one hand, the period was framed by repression; state violence made itself nakedly felt, a great many people were put in prison; social opposition was suppressed by force, the 1970s radical left was wiped out and prohibition left its stamp on cultural life. But on the other hand, the 1980s were years when another strategy of power went into effect, if not for the first time, then for the first time in such a way that it pressed its imprint into the culture as a whole; one less familiar to Turkey, a more liberal, more comprehensive, more inclusive strategy of power, aiming to encircle by speech rather than silence, to transform rather than prohibit, internalize rather than destroy, tame rather than suppress … From the point of view of institutional, political and humanitarian ends, it was one of the most severe periods in Turkey’s recent history, but at the same time a softer, freer era of cultural pluralism when people were relieved of their political responsibilities and began for the first time to speak in the cultural marketplace for their own selves, rather than in the name of some political mission. (Gürbilek 2011, 6)

4.4.1 Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in the 1960s and 1970s

Music and songs from the Alevi tradition had by the mid-1980s appeared in commercial recordings, however with the impetus of a growing and broader public expression of Alevilik, the circumstances were opportune for Alevi music to find a more strategic and considered expression. By the 1970s there were numerous
recordings by notable Alevi performers such as Aşık Veysel, Aşık Ali İzzet, Aşık Daimi, Kul Ahmet, Davut Sulari, Feyzullah Çınar, Muhlis Akarsu, Emekçi, Mehmet Koç, Ali Ekber Çiçek, Aşık Mahzuni Şerif, Turan Engin and others. European researchers had been active to some degree in recording performances that sought to document either the Anatolian village culture or regional music while the French specialist in Alevi-Bektaşi culture Irene Melikoff sponsored Feyzullah Çınar’s sojourn to Europe in 1971 for performances and recording. Earlier in 1957 Alain Gheerbrant recorded Aşık Veysel in his village resulting in some of the most interesting and engaging recordings of the great aşık since they include rare examples of his playing more overtly Alevi ritual material. However, these recordings were not released commercially until 1985 after Veysel’s death, the reasons for which as stated by Gheerbrant included maintaining some discretion in identifying Veysel and the other musicians recorded so overtly with Alevi culture.

The period from 1960 until the 1980 coup was a time of conflict between the political right and left in Turkey and the association of Alevi identity with the left saw the figure of Pir Sultan Abdal become a political identity and the radicalisation of aşık poetry generally with aşık-s seen as “torchbearers of the fighting spirit” (Başgöz 1998c, 345-346).

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220 See for example the field recordings of Tewari (1972b) Bhattacharya (1968), Dietrich (n.d.; 1977) and Kurt and Ursula Reinhard and Wolf Dietrich from the 1960s and later (Reinhard, Reinhard, and Dietrich 1994).

221 These recordings made for Radio France were released commercially by the Ocora label in 1977 and are available on CD with additional material recorded during the same period in Strasbourg (Çınar 1995).

222 This sort of material may be seen in the example of the pocket sized collection of folksong lyrics, marches and songs of halk ozan-s including Pir Sultan Abdal, Aşık İhsani, Aşık Mahzuni Şerif and Aşık Nesimi Çimen titled Deyişler published by İşçi-Köylü (Workers-Villagers) publications in 1970 (Deyişler 1970).
While Alevi artists were engaged as performers and source musicians for the influential Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), there were restrictions around what could be expressed and how. As Arif Sağ has said, for Alevis Alevi symbolism is its words ‘Alevi için Aleviliğin simgesel sözleri vardı’ (Poyraz 2007, p. 165). Words such as şah and pir which bear specific meaning in the Alevi context can be readily replaced by ‘dost’ or ‘yar’ introducing ambiguity and dissembling such that the Alevi-ness of a song is diluted for public performances. Alevis themselves have participated in this form of dissembling. Aşık Veysel’s commercial recording of Kul olayım kalem tutan ellere (Şatiroğlu 2001) uses yar rather than şah and omits the mahlas verse altogether diminishing its character as a statement (deyiş) to more a general folk song (türkü). Mahmut Erdal for example reports that he altered a Pir Sultan Abdal text for a famous version of the Turna semahi to a somewhat garbled Karacaoğlan text when informed that the Pir Sultan Abdal text could not be sung on the radio (Erdal 1999, p. 136). The text of the Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş is remarkably innocuous itself and hardly alters the textual meaning of the version that was authorised as TRT repertoire. The significant factor seems only to have been the attribution to Pir Sultan Abdal, since such identification itself was presumably enough to politicise the deyiş. Erdal noted that Nida Tüfekçi was most excited about the music for the semah, being the first he had recorded with so much rhythmic and tempo variation. The decision to replace the mahlas of Pir Sultan Abdal with a text and mahlas from Karacaoğlan may, perhaps, be explained by a desire on Tüfekçi’s part not to distract from the focus on the remarkable musical qualities of the work,

223 Both dost and yar have meanings encompassing, friend, lover or beloved.
224 Arif Sağ (who was the student of Nida Tüfekçi who collected the semah from Erdal), affirms Erdal’s representation of this circumstance (Poyraz 2007, 172). However Mehmet Özbek expressed some surprise that this would be the case when I raised it with him, noting correctly that there are many Pir Sultan Abdal songs in the TRT repertoire. Özbek suggested that perhaps Erdal could not remember the words and took lines from various poems (personal communication, Ankara, July 2002).
225 The original text of the semah is included in Erdal (1999, 369-370).
since the immanent associations of Karacaoğlan are more straightforward and less politically distracting – presenting the persona of a crazy, love-struck wanderer from the Taurus Mountains – than Pir Sultan Abdal, the Alevi martyr and symbol for leftist expression and aspiration.

The recording of Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş by Ruhi Su is particularly significant. Su is not an Alevi although his political convictions and recordings of Alevi deyiş has left something of an Alevi imprint on his identity. He was a renowned opera singer before running foul of the government for his leftist sympathies. After spending five years in prison during the 1950s his position in the State Opera was no longer tenable and he devoted himself to Turkish folksong. In the early 1970s he released long play recordings devoted to major identities and themes in Turkish folk culture: the Seferbelik, Yunus Emre, Pir Sultan Abdal and Karacaoğlan. Ruhi Su’s approach was intellectual and highly refined, but it was not the voice of the Anatolian aşk. An important aspect of Su’s recordings, however, is their conception and themed approach.

226 Social anthropologist David Shankland in this book The Alevis in Turkey refers to him, strangely and incorrectly, as “one of the most talented and brilliant of Alevi minstrels to have emerged within the Republic” (Shankland 2003a, 166). On the other hand, it is possible to detect in Sıdıka Su’s liner notes for the 1990 release of archival recordings from 1970-1972 of her late husband performing Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş, a note of frustration at a declining recognition of Su’s part in spreading Alevi culture stating that Su was at least as instrumental as Alevi minstrels for the spread of Alevi music and Alevis well know this: “Alevi müziğinin yaygınlaşmasında, en az alevi ozanları kadar, Ruhi Su’nun da emeği geçmiştir. Bunu alevi halkı çok iyi bilir” (Su 1990).

227 On Ruhi Su see Dinçer (1986) and Akatlı (2001).

228 That is, song related to mobilisation for the struggle for Turkish independence after the First World War.

229 Ruhi Su recounts a meeting with Aşık Veysel in 1941 when he was asked to sing for the aşk. When Veysel was asked of his opinion he replied “dağlarda bir çiçek olur, onu alır şehre getirirsin, güzel saksılarda, güzel topraklar içinde yetiştirir, geliştirirsin. Belki, daha güzel bir çiçek, ama o eski kokusunu belkibulamayız” (There is a flower on the mountains, you pick it and take it to the city, raising it in fine earth and beautiful flowerpots, you develop it. Perhaps it becomes a more beautiful flower, but perhaps we can’t find that old scent” (Öz 1994, 69).
In the 1970s the songs of Pir Sultan Abdal were encountered in the public space through popular commercial recordings of artists associated with the political left. As well as the recording by Ruhi Su in 1972 (Su 1993), others including Rahmi Saltuk in 1975 (Saltuk 1992) and Sadık Gürbüz in 1977 (Gürbüz 2007) released long-play recordings devoted entirely to Pir Sultan\textsuperscript{230}. Also notable was (Ömer) Zülfü Livaneli who recorded Alevi songs (while living in Sweden in the early 1970s) including those of Pir Sultan Abdal (Livaneli n.d.) performed in a style that adopted regional Alevi aşık tuning on the bağlama\textsuperscript{231} distinguishing them from the stylistically urbane performances of Su, Saltuk and Gürbüz and pointing to the direction that popular Alevi performers such as Arif Sağ would pursue most creatively and influentially in the 1980s. Among those Alevi musicians who began to be heard in the 1960s and 1970s, Feyzullah Çınar (1937-1983) from the Divriği region, who recorded deyiş from many of the Alevi master poets, made a recording, produced by Livaneli, devoted entirely to Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş called *Pir Sultan Abdal yeryüzü şarkılar* in the 1970s\textsuperscript{232}.

\textbf{4.5 Arif Sağ ‘ölür dirilir’ – strategic death and renewal and the pathway to Muhabbet}

With considerable justification Arif Sağ can be considered the most influential performer of Turkish folk music in the last two decades of the twentieth century and his is certainly one of the most documented musical careers. Two book length works

\textsuperscript{230} These recordings do not necessarily represent the earliest popular commercial recordings of Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş however. For example, Muazzez Türüng recorded *Geçti dost kervanı* for Odeon in 1962 (Harman 2007).

\textsuperscript{231} Livaneli writes about the profound affect on him when as a young boy visiting the Çorum region he heard a dede playing the cura in the Alevi style and how he later sought out an instrument maker and teacher in Ankara to learn this style (Livaneli 2007, 52f).

\textsuperscript{232} Curiously, Çınar’s recording is the only one of the 1970s recordings mentioned that has not been re-issued on CD as at 2011.
on his life and career, in the form of interviews, have been published, the first, in
1993, being interviews with Rıza Yürükoğlu (Sağ 1993) and the second published in
2004 from interviews with Şenay Kalkan (Sağ 2004). A substantial interview with
Sağ also forms a major part of Bedriye Poyraz’s 2007 book on Alevilik and Alevi
music (Poyraz 2007); and further substantial interviews appear in Gerçek (1995),
Zenger (2000) and in the journal Nefes (Sağ 1995). Irene Markoff, a student of Sağ in
the early 1980s, has helped to highlight Sağ’s importance in a number of her
scholarly works, most notably in her 1986 thesis (Markoff 1986a) and in a feature
article on Sağ in the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music (Markoff 2002a).

Sağ was a well established musician and recording artist before his most important
contributions in the 1980s, making his first recording around 1963\(^{233}\) in his late
teens\(^{234}\). Sağ himself says at this time he could not even distinguish the differences
between türkü and deyiş (Sağ 1993, 25-26), a rather remarkable and perhaps
exaggerated claim. While beginning his musical career with folksongs (türkü) he
then established himself as a major arabesk\(^{235}\) recording star between 1968 and 1975.
After writing and recording many arabesk songs he abandoned this career in 1975; in
his own words he came to his senses, killed off and buried the old Arif Sağ,
“kendime geldim ve eski Arif Sağ’ı 1975’te öldürdüm, mezara gömdüm” (Sağ 2004,

\(^{233}\) Sağ remembers this recording as Gafıl gezme şaşkı'n, bir gün ölürsün (Sağ 1993, 25) although in
the 2004 interviews with Şenay Kalkan he is uncertain of the date and gives Köprüden geçti gelin as
his first recording.

\(^{234}\) Sağ was born in the village of Dallı near the town of Aşkale in the province of Erzurum most
probably in 1945. This is the date given by Markoff (2002a) and in Zenger (2000) and on the liner
notes of recordings (Sağ 1998a; Sağ and Trio 1998b). However determining certain dates, even from
the recorded interviews, can be confusing. In the interviews with Kalkan, Sağ is recorded as giving his
year of birth as 1947 saying that the date is uncertain though he and his mother understand it to be that
year (Sağ 2004, 9). In another interview he states his birth year as 1946 (Koçak 2004). Uncertainty
over dates extends to the date of his first recording which Markoff gives as 1962 and the liner notes
for the Concerto for Bağlama recording gives 1964 (and see previous note).

\(^{235}\) On the phenomenon of arabesk music in Turkey see the works of Stokes (1992; 2010) and Markoff
(1994b).
In 1975 he joined the İstanbul Türk Müziği Devlet Konservatuarı, connected to the İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, as a bağlama teacher, a position he continued in until 1982. During this period he did not pursue a commercial recording career although he did perform as a feature artist with the folk music group of the State Conservatory.

4.5.1 ‘Was it I who created my exile?’ – Sağ’s rebirth as a recording artist

Sağ resigned from his teaching position at the İstanbul Türk Müziği Devlet Konservatuarı in 1982 because, he says, of the conservative reactionary nature (gericileşmişti) of its establishment which had continued after the 1980 coup (Sağ 1993, 32). He emerged again at the beginning of the 1980s in the age of the cheap cassette tape which represented a new beginning replacing the age of the ‘plak’ 45 rpm recordings – “şimdi plakçilik gitti, kasetçilik aldı” (Sağ 1993, 33) – with a recording called Gurbeti Ben Mi Yarattım. A cassette copy that I purchased in 1987 in Şanlıurfa in south-eastern Turkey (which is copyrighted 1986 to the Türküola company), and which to the best of my knowledge is a later printing of the original cassette, has a cover photograph that refers back to the ‘dead and buried’ Sağ of the arabesk days

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236 This era of Sağ’s career is indeed largely buried and his arabesk recordings have not as yet been re-released on CD. A cassette compilation titled Kötü Kader was available in the 1980s and 1990s (Sağ n.d.) which included his most famous compositions such as Gurbet treni, Alın yazım and the title song.

237 See Ataman (2009).

238 Exact dates can be somewhat elusive. Sağ says that he made no recordings between 1976 and 1982 though Gurbeti ben mi yarattım certainly preceded the 1983 İnsan Olmaya Geldim and, according to discographies, dates from 1981.
with his slicked hair, pencil moustache and yellow jumpsuit top (Sağ 1986). Despite the arabesk looking cover, this recording, with its sparse production, was an understated, focused, though perhaps slightly hesitant, recital of Alevi deyiş featuring works most prominently from Muhlis Akarsu (the first three tracks) and Davut Sulari along with three Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş – Gezdim şu alemi, Bülbül ne gezersin and Açıln kapılar – and one Şah Hatayi deyiş. Among the anonymous türkü included is the contentious Dersim dört dağ içinde which Sağ says after the 12 September 1980 coup was a song frequently not permitted to be performed in concert (Poyraz 2007, 140, 168).

In the album Gurbeti Ben Mi Yaratım we can see the nascent pathways that Sağ would develop most successfully (with collaborators) in the Muhabbet series of recordings. Here is an intimate recording with restrained and measured virtuosity on the bağlama particularly in the instrumental preludes and interludes. Here is the strong repertoire centred on deyiş from the seminal great Alevi guides and poets, Şah Hatayi and Pir Sultan Abdal – although, notably, performances of two of the three Pir Sultan deyiş do not include the mahlas verse – alongside anonymous türkü and more deyiş from twentieth century and contemporary aşık-s including Aşık Veysel, Davut Sulari and most prominently Muhlis Akarsu. All this seemingly constructed as a set in an organic, associative way.

He begins with three consecutive deyiş from Muhlis Akarsu which is followed by two deyiş of Pir Sultan (without mahlas) then one from Şah Hatayi before finishing what on the original cassette was the A side with the melodically soaring Dersim

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239 A version of the famous Ötme bülbül ötme with a more pensive melody and delivery. On the re-issued version of the recording by Kalan Müzik in 1998 this is renamed, more logically following the wording of the opening line Bülbül ne ötersin.
Side B returns to the twentieth century represented by Aşık Veysel and Muhlis Akarsu. The cassette ends by associating in one song the authoritative thrust of the cassette’s opening – the juxtaposition of the great seminal ozan, Pir Sultan, and the modern ozan, Akarsu – in the performance of the Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş Açılın kapılar, the words and music on the cassette being attributed to Akarsu who is the source of the song. The tentative character of the recording may perhaps be seen in the refrain line of this deyiş which Sağ sings as “açılm kapıl dosta gidelim” (may the doors open and let us go to the friend) and rather than the more logical and common (at least in terms of printed versions going back to earliest collections) “açılm kapıl şaha gidelim” (may the doors open and let us go the shah). Here Sağ appears to be applying the self-censoring (‘otokontrol’) strategy in substituting words full of Alevi political symbolism for less charged language of which he was himself critical of the establishment (Poyraz 2007, 165).

The performance and presentation of one deyiş, Aşık Veysel’s Beni hor görme, is particularly interesting for my purpose in looking for how the performances of deyiş suggest interpretive meaning. On the original cassette this is (like Açılın kapılar) credited as a composition (words and music) of Muhlis Akarsu. Again this seems to be recognition of the fact that Akarsu is the source of the song for Sağ. On the 1998 re-issue of the recording on CD the compositional credit is given to Aşık Veysel. However it may be wrong to consider the original cassette suffered from a simple ‘mis-crediting’. Sağ performs three verses, essentially the first, fourth and fifth

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240 Curiously on the re-issued CD version the deyiş Beni hor görme is transposed to the end of the recording.
241 Though it must be acknowledged that cassettes during this period, of which many are in my collection, often have such mistakes.
(final) verses of Veysel’s original\textsuperscript{242} with the ostensibly minor (at least in form) change of omitting Veysel’s mahlas, replacing it (‘Veysel’) with ‘insan’ (meaning ‘human’ or ‘man’). This follows Akarsu’s recorded version (Akarsu 2007)\textsuperscript{243} except that Akarsu transposes the last two verses, so that Veysel’s mahlas verse is sung second and Veysel’s fourth verse is sung last. Sağ follows Akarsu’s change from Veysel’s “\textit{tabiata Veysel aşık}” (Veysel is by nature a lover) to “\textit{tabiata insan aşık}” (man is by nature a lover) but places the mahlas verse back in its functional place as the final sung verse. The suggestion is that Sağ is fully aware of Veysel’s original and re-orders the verses as sung by Akarsu to follow Veysel but retains the interpretation that stresses a universal human focus\textsuperscript{244}. Aşık Veysel is the most renowned aşık of the twentieth century and Sağ the most skilled and strategic performer and we can assume that both Sağ and the audience would know Veysel’s original and be surprised and respond to this reworking given the overt change to the mahlas. This does not essentially negate nor assume Veysel’s identity, since through his renown in the Turkish Republic his presence remains immanent in the substance of the song which is otherwise unaltered; but the fact of re-interpreting the very mahlas makes this small change, particularly pointed. This was less evident, perhaps, in Akarsu’s version, but Sağ’s retention of Veysel’s mahlas verse in its place without the actual mahlas, highlights with a subtle drama the interpretive position of the performer.

\textsuperscript{242} See Alptekin (Alptekin 2004, 172) for the text which I have used for the basis of my translation which can be found along with the original text in the Translating chapter, section 5.9.1. There are many CDs of Veysel’s recordings available and this song can be heard on Aşık Veysel klasikleri (Şatıroğlu n.d.).

\textsuperscript{243} The recording I refer to is a CD re-issue. I have not established the original date of the recording although from the sound it appears to be late 1970s or early 1980s.

\textsuperscript{244} A decade after this recording Sağ would direct and produce the most innovative recording of the singer and bağlama player Nuray Hafıftaş called \textit{Şimdi oldu} (1994) which includes Beni hor görmə. In this version the three verses as performed by Akarsu and Sağ are retained but the ‘Veysel’ mahlas is included in place of ‘insan’ suggesting a different interpretive response to different contexts, times or purposes.
Sağ’s Gurbeti Ben Mi Yarattım shows the direction of the ‘reborn’ artist having abandoned arabesk, skilled in folk music and bağlama playing but freed from the state conservatory structure. It is focused around the intimacy of the singer and single bağlama with a repertoire that seems intuitively constructed and associative through the singer’s understanding of the sources. It presents a move towards an expressive Alevi identity in the heavily weighted authority presented by the deyış of Pir Sultan, Hatayi and Muhlis Akarsu while tentative and tempered by the omission or alteration of mahlas verses and words like şah that are loaded with Alevi associations. While the recording is intended to present Alevi music in an original form – original both in terms of being closer to its original style and original in the virtuosity of the performance – it also reveals an intention not to be narrowly focused on the expression of Alevi identity to the extent of consciously marginalising the music. In this way we can understand the significance of the inclusion of türkü and the deyış of Aşık Veysel, an Alevi whose identity is even more strongly associated with Republican and humanistic values. This is an approach that Sağ would continue to develop later in the Muhabbet series of recordings.

4.5.2 The Şan Tiyatrasu concert and the commencement of a new era

As Markoff (2002a) has noted, Sağ is an artist who is strategic in his planning and the next two projects show more clearly and successfully his expressive intent in the early 1980s. The first of these, his bağlama recital at the Şan Tiyatrosu (Theatre) in Istanbul in 1982, looking back more than two decades later Sağ still considered his most satisfying musical achievement (Sağ 2004, 213). Markoff, who attended this signal event, notes that that Sağ’s performance included “masterful renditions and
arrangements” of Alevi *deyişler* and “other selections performed from the repertoire in the *bağlama* tuning” and “pan-Turkish selections executed in the bozuk tuning” including an “unconventional, fantasy-like” treatment with “sequential chromatic variations” of the Ankara dance tune *Yandım şeker oğlan*. (Markoff 2002a). Four years after the concert Markoff observed that students of Sağ had adopted this innovation as a chromatic exercise; and, indeed, when Sağ’s own *bağlama* method (written in conjunction with Erdal Erzincan) was finally published in 2009, this piece with its chromatic innovation forms no less than a ten page *bağlama* exercise (Sağ and Erzincan 2009: 1, 154-163).

When the Şan Tiyatrosu concert is raised in interviews Sağ is emphatic about this being an important, seminal event, not just for him but for Alevi music and indeed folk music (halk müziği). Reflecting on it some years later he identifies one of the reasons being that it brought a more genuine version of halk müziği into the homes of the intelligentsia and enlightened to go alongside – or indeed to replace – the interpretations of Ruhi Su they were familiar with (Poyraz 2007, 179; Sağ 2004, 183). In addition, according to Sağ it was the first time Alevi *deyiş* were performed in such a venue in an uncorrupted (“bozulmadan”) manner; and, moreover, they were performed alongside the real classics of Turkish folk music (Sağ 2004, 185). Finally, Sağ asserts that it was an important event on the way to making the *bağlama* a concert recital instrument, an instrument of the world, especially given that the second half of the concert was given over to a purely instrumental recital, a decision which apparently caused surprise and consternation for some (Sağ 2004, 185; Poyraz 2007, 183). For these reasons Sağ views the Şan Tiyatrosu concert as a successful beginning: “bence o başarı milat olarak geçti” as he told Bedriye Poyraz (2007, 183)
and used the same terminology in his earlier interview with Şenay Kalkan “Şan Tiyatrosu konserim bence bir milattı” (Sağ 2004, 183). In this we can see his satisfaction in the strategic and artistic risk of his venture. It was a motivation to achieve the aspiration provided by his father, to achieve that state of perfect grace (‘İnsan-ı Kâmil’) through courage, belief and intelligence and to use it. At the Şan Tiyatrosu he played this part “Kâmil İnsan-ı oynadım ben” (Sağ 2004, 183). This confidence would be expressed in his next venture, arguably his masterpiece, the album İnsan Olmaya Geldim released in 1983.

4.5.3 ‘I have come to be a human being’

The confidence and sure step of Sağ is evident immediately in the overall sound of İnsan Olmaya Geldim. It still represents an essentially intimate performance focused for a large part on the single bağlama but the sound of the instrument is given great clarity and presence and sometimes given an added shimmering quality by the overdubbing of a cura part. The instruments and voice appear to have been recorded with a closer microphone technique. Whereas Gurbeti Ben Mi Yarattım had a somewhat distant and hesitant quality, İnsan Olmaya Geldim confronts the listener and demands attention. The striking quality of the sound is heightened by the use of equalisation that almost, but not quite, goes beyond the judicious. This is not the cheap trick of ‘concert hall’ echo, but an enriching quality

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Figure 4: Arif Sağ’s cassette album İnsan Olmaya Geldim

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Sağ uses the evocative term ‘milat’ to characterise this new beginning. Idiomatically it can mean the commencement of any event, while specifically it refers to the birth of Christ or the Christian era.
given to the voice and instruments that ultimately serves to focus on the fundamental elements of \textit{bağlama}, the voice and the songs themselves\textsuperscript{246}.

Notable also is the judicial and effective use of additional instruments and voices on the recording that enhances rather than obscures the pre-eminent place of the \textit{bağlama}. As already mentioned, a cura is sometimes added to the principal solo \textit{bağlama}, the small high-toned instrument giving an added brightness to the sound.

At the other end of the tonal scale, on a number of tracks a bass instrument is added providing a dark, brooding and driving quality, particularly effective on the two well-known türkü included on the recording: the Ankara song Mavilim and the Erzincan song \textit{Kaşların ince mince}. These arrangements with the slow pace and brooding quality of the \textit{bağlama} and bass\textsuperscript{247}, and Sağ’s deep tessitura\textsuperscript{248} are very striking, especially when compared to earlier recordings of the same türkü, for example the recordings of \textit{Kaşların ince mince} by Zaralı Halil Söyler (2002) or Erzincanlı Hafiz Şerif (2004) with their quick paced, skipping metre and bright sound and instrumentation. Sağ’s versions of these türkü while acknowledging sources – as in his reworking of the instrumental bridge from Erzincanlı Hafiz’s version of \textit{Kaşların ince mince} – shows a studied and controlled focus on the sound that reveals the

\textsuperscript{246} Sağ was clearly ahead of many during the 1980s in focusing on the quality of the presented sound, particularly of the \textit{bağlama}. At a halk ozanları concert that I attended in Ankara in October 1987, performer after performer took the stage, including renowned musicians such as Ali Ekber Çiçek, and suffered from technical problems and poor or inadequate sound in the large echoing indoor sports arena that was the venue. The exception was Arif Sağ who took the stage at the end of the long evening and who used a \textit{bağlama} with acoustic pick-up that delivered a strong well tuned, clear and trouble-free sound that allowed his virtuosity and musical stature to be memorably demonstrated. My notes written at the time record how I was struck by the quality of the sound which diminished the earlier performers; and how Sağ performed with great animation, vigour and precision; and how the response of the crowd reached a new and climactic level.

\textsuperscript{247} The packaging for the cassette tape does not list the instruments played however the bass used is almost certainly a bass \textit{bağlama}, a single strung instrument resembling a bass guitar but with a \textit{bağlama} body and fretting and not to be confused with the larger varieties of saz such as divan and meydan saz. This bass instrument was certainly used by Sağ on later recordings.

\textsuperscript{248} See Stokes (1992, 136) on the favoured tessitura of both male and female Alevi singers. As Stokes notes the males such as Arif Sağ sing in a low baritone between AA and C. On \textit{İnsan Olmaya Geldim} the vocal key is B flat.
quality of the instrument, voice and song with a finely honed purity and sure-paced and serious expressive force.

The most remarkable work on the recording in terms of sound quality is the title track which is the one track given a substantially fuller arrangement. This deyiş of Nimri Dede is set to an original musical arrangement by Sağ that includes a time change with verses sung to alternating melodies in 7/8 and 4/4 time, perhaps hinting at, though not directly imitating, the rhythmic shifts in Alevi semah. This innovative arrangement, which opens the B side of the cassette, starts simply enough with solo bağlama in 4/4 time strumming a short phrase and moving from the third note of the scale to the end of a phrase resting on the second note which is repeated until finally completing a descent to the tonic. On the repeat of this opening phrase a surprisingly loud and sonorous percussion pounding on the beat joins in with a striking force which is shortly joined by bass and kabak kemane (small spike fiddle) creating a bold, rasping, earthy and dark rhythmic and melodic texture. There is a sudden change to a 7/8 rhythm before the deep vocal enters with the opening phrase based around the first three notes of the scale. After the opening line a short instrumental bridge includes a descending motif briefly appearing on kaval (end blown flute) after which the kabak kemane joins in with the vocal line, bağlama, bass and percussion. The melody then ascends to its highest point with a dramatic tension in the movement towards, but not attaining, the octave with a phrase that alternates between the seventh and flattened sixth notes before descending once again step-wise.

249 The recording was originally issued on Sembol Plak and, as of 2010, has not been officially re-issued on CD although Maksimum in Istanbul released a CD version in the late 2000s with all tracks from the original cassette included although the final track, Kaşların ince mince, is cut short. In addition, Türküola Germany released a CD under this name which omits the song Evrahı ezelden and includes additional tracks from other sources, although on my copy the additional tracks listed on the cover bear only limited resemblance to what is actually on the enclosed CD.
to the tonic. The final line of the verse is repeated with a chorus of voices joining in, increasing the fullness and lushness of the texture. As the song moves to the second verse the rhythmic metre switches back to 4/4 time and the musical phrase remains focused on the third and second notes of the scale with just voice, percussion and bass. When the verse is sung the last two lines are repeated and the vocal chorus rejoins rising to sing a fourth harmony over the top of the melody, a tonality that runs as a theme through the entire recording and provides a tonal coherence and colour to the work. This pattern of alternating verses is repeated for the rest of the song.

In his musical arrangement of İnsan olmaya geldim Sağ achieves an original musical sound that is coherent with the recording while extending the possibilities of sound he establishes around the prominence of the bağlama. In some respects this work was an epitome of such an arrangement and could not be repeated although Sağ seems to have attempted to try the formula once again, with some success, in his arrangement of Aşık Hüdai’s Duygular dönüştü söze on his 1989 recording of the same name (Sağ 1989).

Throughout the recording the virtuosity of the playing is measured and presented so that the qualities and characteristics of the bağlama düzeni (tuning) are to the fore. The tonalities of the bağlama in this tuning are explored with great clarity and attention showing the resonant tone of the open top string fourth when played over the tonic as sounded on the open lower string and the middle string fretted at a tone.

While this tonality is derived from the bağlama the harmony here is not exactly as might be expected from the chordal configurations played on the instrument during this phrase since the fourth does to appear in the chordal configuration which only includes the tonic and fifth (at this point it is the minor third and seventh notes of the scale). In fact this harmony can be effectively achieved on the bağlama as I witnessed a performer do at a Beyoğlu türkü bar in Istanbul in the early 1990s. Fretting the low string with the thumb to play the minor third, the top string with the first finger fretting the minor sixth and the middle string with the ring or little finger which doubles the minor third, a suitable chord can be formed.
Sometimes this forms part of the melodic phrase, as in the opening bars of the first song on the recording, *Ayrılık hastretlik*; and is emphasised in the free rhythm improvisation on the uzun hava (long air, i.e. in free rhythm) *Nazlı yardan*, the penultimate piece. In Sefil Selimi’s *İnsana muhabbet duyulmuş* the *bağlama* begins with a repeated striking of the open top string (the fourth) before descending with pauses on the third and second notes of the scale. Sağ colours the tone on the repeat of the phrase with a hammer-on technique that provides a dazzling complexity to the repetition of notes of the open top string. In the descending phrase through the third and second Sağ also demonstrates his effective use of a trill-like ornament, reputedly invented by Sağ and referred to as ‘ses vibratosu’, involving a rapid succession of hammer-ons after a slight delay to allow the plucked sound to be held initially and the ornamentation to resonate more fully (Markoff 1986a, 129). It is a technique that allows for sustain to be employed on the plucked instrument and an important effect on this recording with is generally restrained tempo and spacious technique. This is mostly used on the second and third degrees of the scale where the rapid trill is achieved on the quarter-tone above the sustained note (that is the next fretted tone on the *bağlama*), by the middle finger over the thumb on the low string when employed on the third or the ring finger over the middle finger on the middle string when employed on the second.

The sustained musical tone and mood of *İsan Olmaya Geldim* points to a deeply conceived concept for this work as an entity, not merely a collection of songs.\(^{251}\). Even the ‘stand out’ arrangement of the title track stands out on the platform raised by the whole work, not as a curiosity or oddity. This quality is perhaps the major

\(^{251}\) Though I certainly do not mean a ‘concept’ album as understood in western popular music.
difference between Sağ’s work and that of another creative and innovative musician, Yavuz Top, who produced his own groundbreaking album, *Devişler 1* (Top 2010), shortly after *İnsan Olmaya Geldim*\(^{252}\). Top’s recording seems aimed to dazzle in a ferocious way. He is renowned for his rapid tezene (plectrum) trilling style that fills out the sound-scape in contrast to Sağ’s more open and expansive style. Top’s recording is rightly renowned for the arrangement of the Pir Sultan Abdal *deviş* Ötme bülbül ötme which seemingly incorporates every device that can be mustered for impact including a driving rhythm provided by a large *baglama* group, orchestral instrumentation, tempo changes, a quodlibet of two different melodies associated with the song and even an interpolated ‘cameo’ of the Diyarbakır türkü singer İzzet Altınmeşe singing an uzun hava vocalisation\(^{253}\). In another Pir Sultan *deviş* on Top’s recording Gözleyi gözleyi the arrangement seems to reflect a remarkably similar approach to Sağ’s arrangement of *İnsan olmaya geldim* with its alternating timing of 4/4 and 7/8 along with the use of kaval and kabak kemane; however Top’s arrangement seems less convincing and naturally flowing than Sağ’s with its somewhat erratic approach to the rhythmic changes and less structured instrumental colouring. Remarkable and impressive though it is, what Top’s recording highlights is the interpretive structure and coherence of Sağ’s work that takes the essential elements of the source culture to build a sustained vision rather than dazzling pearls.

\(^{252}\) The significance and influence of this recording, particularly the arrangement of Ötme bülbül ötme, has been of ongoing interest to both Markoff (1990-91; 2002b) and Stokes (1992, 84; 2010, 128). The actual release date of the recording is, typically, somewhat vague. Stokes states it was 1985 while Markoff implies it was before the release of *İnsan Olmaya Geldim*. Information I received from a relation of Top suggests it was 1984. The important point is that both Sağ and Top were at this time both working through the creative possibilities in the performance and recording of Alevi *deviş*, probably with some good intentioned rivalry.

\(^{253}\) The influence (and spirit) of Top’s arrangement of Ötme bülbül ötme is evident in the version that formed the climax of the *Bin Yılın Türküsü* event in Cologne in May 2000 involving more than 1,200 baglama players, 83 piece orchestra and massed singers. For details on the artistic resources see Poyraz (2007, 143). My observation is based on viewing a VHS video of the event obtained from a Turkish video store rental store in Melbourne in 2001 although videos of the the performances from the event have subsequently appeared on YouTube.
Musically, İnsan Olmaya Geldim is creative and innovative but grounded in an assured and measured style that applies its innovation with a subtly by which the source culture is revealed rather than obscured. This is evident in another significant and bold inclusion and arrangement on this recording – the Alevi ritual tevhid (song of unity) Bugün bize pir geldi.

To include such a tevhid which is so central to the Alevi ritual and which represented the ‘gizli müziği’ (secret music) of the Alevi was in some respects audacious and another example of Sağ’s considered and creative risk-taking. Deyiş and semah had certainly appeared numerous times before on commercial recordings and could be generally presented as folksong (türkü) or folk dance (oyun havalari). Ruhi Su released a long-play recording called Semahlar in 1977 which included a number of semah, a gülbenk (prayer) and two songs designated as tevhid one of which was composed by him as a song of the unity of workers and humanity Benim Kâbem insandır (Su 1993b). Su’s view was that Alevi-Bektaşi music, especially semah, formed part of broader folk music genre having many non-religious characteristics while also having special characteristics in the content and music that made it a genre somewhat different from other folk music (Clarke 1999, 146-147). Sağ’s performance of the tevhid on İnsan Olmaya Geldim acknowledged more overtly those special characteristics.

Bugün bize pir geldi is the second song on the first side of İnsan Olmaya Geldim, so Sağ gives this Alevi ritual song prominence on the album. The song begins with solo bağlama playing a short phrase that is used as an interlude between verses, moving from the tonic to the fourth, third, fourth then second and tonic – again the tetrachord
from tonic to fourth is established and emphasised. On the third and second notes Sağ uses ses vibratosu (finger trill) to sustain the notes to hold the song at a moderate to slow tempo. On the repeat of this instrumental phrase the cura enters to provide its shimmering colouring over the bağlama line. When the vocal begins Sağ introduces a percussive element – a beating of hands on the body, not clapping – that imitates the beating on the knees that is done by the kneeling congregation in the cem ritual during the performance of the tevhid. To the casual listener this may appear to be a percussion device, perhaps a stamping of feet; but to an Alevi or aware audience this, along with its appropriate and measured rather than dance-like tempo, clearly proclaims this as Alevi music. Then Sağ introduces the bass instrument when the refrain is sung and then a vocal chorus on the repeat of the refrain. These sounds lift the song in its performative thrust, in its presentation as music outside its ritual context, but never to the degree of sublimating its association and reference to its source and purpose.

 Sağ includes only five verses (about one fifth of the full version) plus repeated refrain of the original text and so only a suggestion of the hypnotic quality of the cem performance is given. To have rendered a full performance would of course have given a whole different purpose to its inclusion and to the recording as a whole. Here

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254 Not all Alevis were entirely happy with the way this tevhid was presented. The late Alevi writer and scholar İsmail Onarlı claims that Sağ’s sources for the tevhid were Nimri Dede and Hızır Dede from the Malatya region, and it was unethical not to acknowledge this on the recording. Another handicap, according to Onarlı was turning the tevhid into a türkü form, presumably referring to the shortening of the text and the arrangement elements. Onarlı, who is from Onar village in the Malatya region and the region with which this tevhid is particularly associated, was concerned about a fundamental danger of eroding Alevi belief and culture. “Alevi etiğine uymayan bir davranış gösteren Arif Sağ: kaynak kişi olarak bu iki dedenin adını [Nimri Dede, Hızır Dede] vermez. Bir başka handicap da ‘Tevhid Duazı’ türkü şeklinde kabul edilip dönüştürülmesindir. Esas tehlike de burdadır. Alevi inanç ve kültürüne eriterek yok etmektedir” (Onarlı 2002, 140).

255 When I played the short version to Nimri Dede’s grandson, Sercihan Dehmen, in a musical instrument shop in Istanbul in 1993, he immediately wrote out from memory 23 verses of the text. A full text and translation is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.8.3.
Sağ is putting Alevi ritual music to the fore in a knowledgeable, purposeful, indeed respectful, and creative performance and in a recording that situates Alevi music in a context of inclusive values and accessible, refined and innovative musical sounds.

The name of the recording and stand-out arrangement means ‘I have come to become a human being’. It is actually a reworking of the refrain line in Nimri Dede’s original text which reads “sözde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim”256 (In the word I came to become Master). As with Aşık Veysel’s deyiş Beni hor görme Sağ substitutes the word ‘insan’ (human) in a principal point in the text though here it is even more evocative since the full text is about the Alevi pathway to spiritual development. Thus Sağ turns the focus of this text on the objective of humanity, which is a reading that aligns with Alevi belief but is a specific and strategic interpretation.

If there was some hesitation in the expression of the terminology of Alevi belief and symbolism on Gürbeti Ben Mi Yarattum, it is strongly present on this İnsan Olmaya Geldim, particularly on the first side and the opening of side B. In the tevhid Sağ sings of Ali ‘our Shah’ (“Ali bizim Şahımız”) and of the beautiful Shah (“güzel Şah”) and ‘my Ali, friend’ (“Ali’m dost”) in Şah Hatayi’s Gönül ne gezersin. This is tempered with the more orthodox religious tone of Canım kurban olsun with its refrain of “Adı güzel kendi güzel Muhammed dost” (“his name is beauty, he is beauty itself, friend Muhammad”) attributed to Teslim Abdal though with antecedents in the poetry of the earlier mystic Yunus Emre. More importantly it is absorbed into the theme of the human and the personal. This is particularly resonant in the deyiş of

256 Nimri Dede’s deyiş have been collected and published in book from by Ahmet Buran (2006). Nimri Dede’s original text and the text modified by Sağ are included in the Translations chapter, sections 5.10.1 and 5.10.2.
Sefil Selimi, İnşana muhabbet duyalsı with its expression of courage and conviction in recognising Alevi values and love for humanity in the face of derision\textsuperscript{257}.

\begin{quote}
Kimse bana yaren olmaz, yar olmaz
\textit{Mertlik hırkasını giydim giyeli}
\textit{Dünya bomboş olsan, bana yer kalmas}
İnşana muhabbet duydam duyalsı
\end{quote}

I have no friends nor any to help me
Since I dressed in the cloak of bravery
If the world were devoid no place is left for me
Since I felt love for humankind

This song perhaps most clearly expresses the theme of this recording. Sefil Selimi is not an Alevi yet many of his deyiş express empathy with Alevi concepts and expression towards a love of humanity. The singer takes up the mantle of bravery to do this. Sağ’s recording displays a purpose of establishing an authentic interpretation of Alevi culture, through the performance style and textual language, that is part of the broader culture of secular song (türkü) and even, perhaps, a nod to orthodoxy in the Teslim Abdal deyiş.

Like Gurbeti Ben Mi Yarattım, İnsan Olmaya Geldim includes a mix of deyiş from Alevi masters and more contemporary aşık-s. Notably absent, however, is the figure of Pir Sultan Abdal that featured prominently on the earlier recording. The persona of Pir Sultan Abdal is so charged and dominant that in fact by not including any Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş the theme and function of this recording is more clearly conveyed

\textsuperscript{257} In fact Sağ performs only three of the original five verses of Sefil Selimi omitting the most confronting verse that speaks directly of the kızılbaş. The full text and translation is included in the section concerning Sefil Selimi’s mahasil taking in the Explications chapter (3.3.8).
without the static of the politically suggestive persona\textsuperscript{258}. Nevertheless, Şah Hatayi and Kul Himmet (to whom the tevhid is attributed\textsuperscript{259} although Sağ does not include the mahlas verse) stand as representatives of the great Alevi master poets. There are \textit{deyiş} from late nineteenth and early twentieth century aşık-s, Aşık Sıdkı (Alevi) and Summanı (not Alevi) and later twentieth century aşık-s Mücrimi (Alevi) and Sefil Selimi (not Alevi). Sağ acknowledges his own influences and region of birth in türkü sourced from Davut Suları and the Erzincan region. Also notable in this recording and something that is a characteristic of the Muhabbet series, is the emphasis on songs derived from a concentration of sources. So, on İnsan Olmaya Geldim four of the seven tracks on side A were from the collecting of Aşık Nesimi Çimen and two of the most important songs, the title track and the tevhid, were from Nimri Dede. This obviously reflects particular circumstances, such as collecting trips, and acquaintances of Sağ at the time. It is also a reflection of the important linking connections that establish and help to reinforce and reiterate the authoritative and transmission structures and associations of the songs and their cultural context.

\section{4.5.4 Muhabbet series 1-5 (1984-1987)}

Sağ talks of the Muhabbet series of recordings continuing the ambition of the Şan Tiyatrosu concert, particularly in regards to presenting Alevi music in an earnest and genuine way and getting this into the homes of the intellectual class. He sees this project as representing a serious beginning for Alevi music at a time when the Alevi

\textsuperscript{258} Talking about the recording of his 1995 album Umut, Sağ stressed the importance, and his objective, of presenting a more complete view of Pir Sultan than the rebel (başkaldıran) and not just putting forward his slogan poems but also his mystical side. He was also conscious of the weight the inclusion of Pir Sultan \textit{deyiş} may bring to a recording referring to Umut as “Pir Sultan ağırlıklı bir çalışma” (Sağ 1995, 26).

\textsuperscript{259} The issues regarding attribution of this lyric have been considered earlier in this thesis.
movement itself (Alevi hareketi) was beginning to take shape and gain momentum.

As he reflected some years later to Bedriye Poyraz:

*Muhabbet Serisi’nin bir dolu özelliği var. Bunlardan birisi halk müziğinin entelektüellerin, aydınların evine ciddi anlamda soktuk ... Alevi müziği bu seri ile çok ciddi bir çıkış yaptı.*

...  

*Figure 5: Original cassette versions of the first three Muhabbet recordings.*  

*Another dimension was that the Alevi movement began at that time. People now, slowly, began to speak about the existence of Alevis.*

Whether or not the initial Muhabbet recording was intended as the first of a substantial series – the first cassette was numbered as such – looking back Sağ suggests it was a series with a purpose, though this may be understood in hindsight...

---

260 While it seems clear that Sağ was or became the force ultimately driving and directing this initiative, it may not have been his original idea. Erdoğan credits Muhlis Akarsu with the idea. Sağ and Akarsu had known each other since 1965 ( Sağ 1995, 26) and Erdoğan had more recently met Akarsu. Erdoğan says that Akarsu suggested the three of them make a cassette recording together; and he, Akarsu, took it to the record companies (*plakçilar*) although receiving little initial interest (Küçük 2006, 131-132).
or at least after the series was well in progress. Asked as to why he did not continue with the series he replied that the series had achieved its purpose and he thought it necessary to bring it to a conclusion: “‗Muhabbet’ serisinin amacına ulaştığını, bir nokta koymak gerektiğini düşünmemidir” (Sağ 2004, 188). It is its quality as a sustained, purposeful and intense recording project, with one recording being issued each year between 1984 and 1987, and its construction and presentation of a substantial body of Anatolian folksong, türkü, that the Muhabbet series provides its most useful insights into how this music finds meaning in expressive contexts that reach outside the Alevi community to the broader public.

An important factor in respect to the significance of the recordings and certainly in respect to their style, content and form is the personnel involved, initially Sağ, Muhlis Akarsu and Musa Eroğlu with Yavuz Top joining the ensemble for the third and subsequent recordings in the series. These musicians represented diverse regions that have a strong Alevi presence including Sivas (Akarsu, from Kangal), Erzincan-Erzurum (Sağ from the Aşkale region and Top from Tercan) and the Tahtacı communities of the Taurus (Toros) mountains (Eroğlu, from Mut).

With the Muhabbet recordings the strategic, creative and interpretive drive of Sağ is again in evidence. From the tentative but significant beginning of the ‘new Arif’ with Sağ directed and contributed to the first five recordings although two more in the series were produced by the other members of the ensemble. Sağ did produce subsequent related recordings including Muhabbet’a devam (Continuing muhabbet), Türkülere yalan söylemez and Bitmeyen türküler. While the first of these continues the style of the later Muhabbet recordings the later two did not have the ensemble qualities of the original series and were more typically ‘kolektif’ recordings being compilations of individually focused recordings by various performers.

The first five recordings amount to sixty-six individual tracks. Muhlis Akarsu does not appear on Muhabbet 4.

Information on the life and work of Muhlis Akarsu, including his collected lyrics, has been published in a monograph by Süleyman Zaman (2006). On Musa Eroğlu see the chapter titled ‘Musa Eroğlu ile “Kavimler Kapısı’nda: Toroslar’da Bir Alevî Köyü’ in Küçük (2006). On Yavuz Top see especially the work of Martin Stokes, a bağlama student of Top (Stokes 1992) and Özdemir (1998).
Gürbeti Ben Mi Yarattım and the assertive risk taking of the Şan Tiyatrosu concert to the assured and striking sound of the masterpiece İnsan Olmaya Geldim, Sağ now began a new approach that sought to interpret Alevi music, for a targeted market, the sophisticated urban intellectual society, in a style and format that at least acknowledged the music’s roots and Anatolian context. It was a conscious shift to move beyond the political, urban, western influenced interpretations of the 1970s as exemplified in the recordings of Ruhi Su. As Markoff has shown from her research conducted during this period, Sağ was an important creative and interpretive force exemplifying her conclusion that while elements of western and urbanised musical culture were adopted by profession folk musicians, particularly in respect to the interpretation performances outside traditional contexts, nevertheless a “distinct musical sound based on an older indigenous musical tradition” was maintained (Markoff 1986a, 312). The Muhabbet series of recordings takes this process beyond the performance stage to the reach of cassette culture. An important aspect of Sağ’s modus operandi has been to use means that broaden the reach of Alevi music in the contexts of Anatolian folk culture and Turkish popular culture. He is unapologetic in his work performing Alevi deyiş with popular and famous arabesk, Turkish pop and özgün singers such as İbrahim Tatlıses, Zülfü Livaneli and Sezen Aksu:


266 Referring to performers of ‘original’ songs, usually on social or political themes, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Notable artists in this genre besides Livaneli include Ahmet Kaya, Ferhat Tunç, Fatih Kısaparmak and Hasan Hüseyin Demirel.

267 In the mid-1990s Sağ worked with Ibrahim Tatlıses a very popular arabesk and türkü singer and television personality – whose variety show could be seen as something of a ‘weather-vane’ adapting its style and content to popular fashion and sentiment over the years – on the singer’s 1994 album Haydi Söyle (Tatlıses 1994). Though released as a CD at the time the album was formatted for the much more widely disseminated cassette market – I heard it in every bus and taxi during my travels in Turkey in early 1995 – with one side devoted to popular arabesk style songs and the ‘B’ side devoted to mostly türkü under the musical direction of Sağ. This side included a version of the tevhid Bugün bize pir geldi which begins with the percussive effect recalling Sağ’s version on İnsan Olmaya Geldim a decade earlier, then proceeds at a fast tempo and introduces an arabesk style string arrangement. In 1995 Sağ provided the bağlama on the ‘B’ side of musician, writer and liberal commentator Zülfü Livaneli’s album Neylersin (Livaneli 1995) which included an eleven minute ‘suite’ arrangement of four deyiş including a duaz-ı imam and part of the Urfa semahi from Dertli Divani. The performance

Television, newspapers, cassettes etc. are media vehicles for communication. If I seize on any of these I am working to spread Alevi culture. If one of these media vehicles is Ibrahim, I’ll use him. I’m using the important tools of media communication to spread Alevi culture. This is what I think. For their part, they can sing deyiş and earn the good will of Alevis. But perhaps I’m being a bit vague about this. I can transmit my culture to 60 million people instead of the five or ten thousand that I could reach. I am not uncomfortable about this.

The first Muhabbet recording begins with a version of the Erzincan türkü Küstürdüm barışamam, given the title Dert bende on the album, which points in the direction of the recording’s intimate, personal perspective. It is a sober, almost bleak rendering of the song compared with the recording of the source of the song, that of Erzincanlı Hafız Şerif268. This bleak quality is accentuated by the tonal quality of Sağ’s voice which is deep, dark and, while strong, also has an almost fragile or broken character. In opening with this folk song from Erzincan Sağ would seem to be establishing a

268 Available on Kalan Müzik’s archive series release of Erzincanlı Hafız’s recordings (Şerif 2004).
locus from which the recording emerges. The song represents a stark and harsh eastern Anatolian sensibility; it represents Sağ’s native region and his influences. Although the source is credited as Erzincanlı Hafız Şerif it was also part of Davut Sulari’s repertoire. Sağ (1995, 26) acknowledges Sulari being a significant influence for him: “Erzincan’da ilk kez bir plakta sesini duyduğum Davut Sulari beni çok etkinlemiştir. Müthiş bir şan tekniği geliştirmiştir kendiliğinden. Davut Sulari bugün de Alevi müziğinde çok etkindir” (Davut Sulari greatly affected me the first time I heard his voice on record in Erzincan. He developed his extraordinary technique by himself. Davut Sulari is a great influence on Alevi music today). Sağ, in the recording of Dert bende, connects to the central landscape, the common folk culture of eastern Turkey in the form of a türkü, and the aşık he considers most influential in the recording of Alevi music.

The opening song also sets the tonal style of the recording. It begins with Sağ playing a solo improvised prelude (açış) on the bağlama before being joined by the other members of the ensemble on bağlama-s. Sağ sings the verses and is joined, subtly, by other voices on the song’s refrain. The sound is clear but does not have the production presence, pronounced equalisation, overdubbing and instrumental colouring that features on İnsan Olmaya Geldim. This sound quality is maintained for the first three in the series, while in Muhabbet 4 and Muhabbet 5 the bass instrument is introduced and production quality enhanced which suggests a closer relationship to the sound that Sağ established on his solo masterpiece. The recordings consciously aim to present a sound that conveys the small ensemble – three performers bringing just their voices and bağlama – in a natural, live and almost informal manner. As Sağ describes the approach:
We entered the studio, played and sang. It developed naturally at that moment. We didn’t think about it or make a plan beforehand saying we would sing this duaz or that deyiş. The recordings were natural, you can even hear the sound of coughing during the singing of some deyiş. But it is very live and some beautiful playing emerged.

This natural approach to the recordings takes the form of the performers taking turns to lead songs; that is, taking the main vocal and generally leading the accompaniment with the other performers variously joining in with additional bağlama-s and vocal choruses. In this way the performers bring their own character and personalities to the recording. Where Sağ began with Dert bende that referenced central elements of his world, Akarsu performs the next song, an uzun hava titled Karlı dağlar (The snow covered mountains) from his hometown of Kangal for which he is noted in the repertoire as the source singer (Özgül, Turhan, and Dökmetaş 1996, 358). Akarsu’s uzun hava continues the chill, restrained opening of the recording performing it on the large, deep sounding divan saz. Eroğlu enters to lead the third song on the recording, the Tahtacı semahi (with words attributed to the nineteenth century Genç Abdal), the first overtly Alevi piece, and one that reflects Eroğlu’s Tahtacı identity. This semah with its slow to moderate paced 9/8 rhythm does not include a hızlı (fast) section so the mood of the recording remains restrained. Indeed the whole recording remains restrained and measured right through to the concluding piece, a cem duaz of Pir Sultan (Abdal Pir Sultan) – Medet ya Muhammed medet ya Ali – performed by
Sağ. In style the recording reflects the respectful and self-controlled nature of the muhabbet from which the concept of the recording emerged. As Sağ says, in Alevi culture muhabbet is born of worship or prayer and deyiş and folk songs are the works of muhabbet and for this reason it was considered a suitable name for the recordings:


In other terms, the purpose was not to present the specific context of ritual cem music, but to remain within the sphere of the formality and serious intent of the songs in their worshipful context. In this way the culture as performed is more broadly conceived than as functional music of the cem ritual. While the performance approach reflects an understanding of that function, the natural, muhabbet approach, permits the exploration of such music with ibadet (worshipful) qualities or intent within the context of the performers’ identities, influences and interpretive trails and associations.

The first Muhabbet recording sets up a template for the series of recordings which includes the ensemble playing, lead in turn by each member performing songs that reflect their identities and influences. The repertoire is a mixture of deyiş and anonymous türkü and uzun hava-s that allow, most particularly, for the exploration of bağlama improvisations. While this template stands, substantially, for all the recordings in the series, each of the recordings nevertheless bears its own identity supporting the modus operandi revealed by Sağ that the recordings were not necessarily thought through (at least thoroughly planned) in advance. It is certainly possible to perceive an organically associative quality about the recordings.
For example, Muhabbet 3 – the first in the series on which Yavuz Top performs – is a strong evocation of Pir Sultan Abdal. On each of the first two recordings in the series only one Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş appeared. On the third recording the first three songs performed are Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş and a fourth, the cem song, a cuş havası, is included later in the recording. The opening three tracks suggest a deliberate move to assert the persona of Pir Sultan Abdal upon this recording and the common understanding and relationship of the performers to the great master. The recording opens with the famous Sivas ellerinde sazım çalınır with the opening lines Kurban olam kalem tutan ellere / Katib azuhalim yaz yara böyle\(^{269}\) which, rather curiously, retains ‘yar’ rather than ‘Şah’, given Sağ’s views on the importance of performing the deyiş with the true words. It may perhaps be understood as a homage to Aşık Veysel (who is credited as the source) and a reluctance to assert an overly political reading of Pir Sultan Abdal in the early 1980s and thus compromise the more significant influence of the Muhabbet recordings in presenting Alevi expressive song in the context of Anatolian folk tradition. Nevertheless the deyiş is here asserted as a Pir Sultan Abdal lyric. While the performance retains Veysel’s opening lines it also includes the mahlas verse which Veysel’s performance does not. It also moves at a slow and sober pace unlike Veysel’s rather rapid and tripping metre\(^{270}\). Also of note, however, is that the opening three Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş express three different

\(^{269}\) Elsewhere, in other versions, these lines are Kul olayım kalem tutan eline / Kâtip ahvalımı Şah’a böyle yaz. The full text and translation can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.37.

\(^{270}\) Veysel’s recording is available on the archive series CDs released by Kalan Müzik (Şatrioğlu 2001). Interestingly, what Veysel actually sings on this recording is not the same as the version associated with the standard (Turkish Radio and Television) repertoire for which Veysel is given as the source. The opening line in the TRT repertoire version is Kul olayım kalen ellere and consists of two verses, the opening verse and the verse beginning Sivas ellerinde sazım çalınır (Atılgan 2003, 191; Bekki 2004, 270; Türk halk müziğinden seçmeler 3 2006, 335). On Veysel’s own recording he includes a verse not commonly associated with the Pir Sultan Abdal lyric:

Irakibin dediceği oluyor
Gül benzim de sararben soluyor
Al kanlarım tйт tйт geliyor
Kâtip arzuhâlim yaz yıare böyle

(Şatrioğlu 2001)
forms of the mahlas which is evidence of the singularity of the identity of Pir Sultan Abdal in the context of expressive culture being untroubled by the form of the mahlas. The mahlas lines of the three songs are:

Pir Sultan Abdalm ey Hızır Paşa
...
Pir Sultanım eydür dünyann fanidir
...
Abdal Pir Sultanım da kalbi zar olan

Muhabbet 2 is arguably the individual masterpiece in the series in the way in which it develops an apparently extemporised thematic coherences and performative unity. It reveals a strong theme based around songs expressing gurbet (the longing associated with estrangement) and dert (inner suffering) – recalling also the theme that opened the first Muhabbet recording in the song Dert bende – with deyiş on those themes specifically accounting for two thirds of the pieces. But these also suggest and lead to other concepts including estrangement (garip) which in turn is associated with the suffering nightingale (dertli bülbül); and this goes on to suggests longing (hasret) and sickness (hasta) and the cry to the healing physician (tabip), all themes picked up in the songs on this recording.

The development of such themes is not presented as necessarily paced or in a constructed way, but rather in a manner that suggests the evoking of associations and ideas. For example, the concept of gurbet is introduced in the second song by Muhlis Akarsu’s, Gurbet bana ben gurbete alıştım:

Ayri düştüm vatanımdan elimden
Gurbet bana ben gurbete alıştım
Taktır böyle imiş ne gelir elden
Gurbet bana ben gurbete alıştım

I became separated from my native country and land
Exile and I became accostomed to each other
What one can do is said to be decreed
Exile and I became accostomed to each other

Then in the fourth, fifth and sixth songs the theme of gurbet is reinforced with performances of *Gurbet elde bir hal geldi başına* (Pir Sultan Abdal), *Gurbet elde baş yastığı gelince* (Erzurumlu Emrah) and *Küçük yaşta gurbet elde* (also known as Divane by Seyit Meftuni) and is re-iterated in the closing *deyiş*, another composition of Akarsu, none other indeed than the titular song of Arif Sağ’s ‘re-birth’ recording as a singer of *deyiş, Gurbeti ben mi yarattım*. In the performance here the three singers take turns leading the vocal on the three verses of the lyric – an unusual approach for the Muhabbet series but one that seems to emphasise the mutual understanding of the thematic coherence that has emerged through the recording. The suggestion is that these master performers have the associative knowledge to engage together to bring forth common understandings and themes in an (ostensibly) extemporised and meaningful way – that there are immanent depths to which their performances are directed and that the great master poets, such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Erzurumlu Emrah, are set alongside the living creative master poet exemplified in Muḥlis Akarsu. An ageless, profound and connected world is evoked by the engagement of master performers.
What makes the Muhabbet series (numbers 1 to 5) particularly instructive is that it presents a substantial collection of performances by a small group of master musicians contributing to a discourse on Anatolian song in a coherent manner over a relatively concentrated period of time, that is around five years between 1983 and 1987. It may be understood as discourse since four performers from different regions but with deep cultural connection, as professional bağlama specialist performers and as Alevi, present and lead the performance of individual songs alternatively, rather than as an arranged consort. While the performers contribute to the performances of each other on bağlama or supporting vocal, the overall sense of the recordings is as a gathering and a discourse and this provides for a collection of works that may be usefully analysed as a collection.

There are sixty-six tracks on the five recordings of which forty-seven (71 percent) can be considered deyiş and remaining nineteen (29 percent) anonymous türkü. So while the Muhabbet series certainly puts the deyiş to the fore, the Anatolian folksong (türkü) remains significantly represented together with the deyiş emphasising their relationship and common cultural origins and habitation. In other words, the presentation of the primacy of the deyiş is not a rejection of or challenge to the türkü but rather a suggestion of a more contextualised view.

The following table (Table 1) provides an analysis of the attributions of the deyiş and reveals an emphasis on the three Anatolian representatives of the seven great master ozan-s of Alevi culture (Pir Sultan, Hatayi and Kul Himmet) on the one hand and contemporary masters on the other, represented most notably by Muhiis Akarsu who among the performers on the Muhabbet series is the one renowned aşık or composer.
of *deyiş*. Aşık Daimi (d. 1983) and Aşık Veysel (d. 1973) are the next most represented modern *aşık*-s. While the majority of the twenty *aşık*-s are represented are identifiably Alevi, the inclusion of *deyiş* of Karacaoğlan and Summani appear to be inclusions representing the regional identities of the performers. Karacaoğlan is associated with the Taurus (Toros) Mountains and particularly Musa Eroğlu's home town of Mut, while Summani is a renowned *aşık* of the Erzurum region from where Arif Sağ and Yavuz Top have their roots. What is clear from an analysis of the attributions is that the authority of sixteenth century master poets is certainly asserted, particularly through the number of Pir Sultan Abdal *deyiş* (nine), but this is combined with a representation of the richness of the tradition of the folk poet through a broad selection of attributed *deyiş*, overwhelmingly but not exclusively Alevi. Moreover there is a strong emphasis on twentieth century *aşık*-s including Daimi, Veysel, İsmail İpek, Davut Sulari, Aşık Hüdai and most importantly Muhlis Akarsu. These modern *aşık*-s are included alongside the masters and the involvement particularly of Akarsu demonstrates the creative continuity of the tradition.

Table 1: Attribution and form of the mahlas on the Muhabbet series recordings 1-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution</th>
<th>Number of <em>deyiş</em></th>
<th>Forms of mahlas used</th>
<th>Presence on Muhabbet recordings series number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhlis Akarsu</td>
<td>10 (2)</td>
<td>Akarsuyum Akarsu Akarsuyu</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir Sultan Abdal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Abdal Pir Sultanım Pir Sultan Abdalım Pir Sultanım eydür</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatayi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Can Hatayım Hatayı Şah Hatayım</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karacaoğlan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Karacaoğlan (der ki)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kul Himmet</td>
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<td>Kul Himmetim</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Lyrics</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>Kul Mehmet</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agahi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agahi</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Köroğlu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Köroğluyum</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of lyrics in which the mahlas verse is not included.

The following two tables (Table 2 and Table 3) show an analysis of the sources for the deyiş and türkü. Again it reveals a broad and rich tradition of source performers. Akarsu and Eroğlu are clearly prominent as individual sources; and the predominant locations associated with the sources – Sivas, Erzincan and İçel – represent the regions associated with the performers. The second table groups the source location more broadly into regions European Turkey (Eur.), western Turkey (W), central Turkey (C), central north-eastern Turkey (CNE), central southern Turkey (CS) and south-eastern Turkey (SE). The analysis shows the central north-eastern and central southern Turkey as the predominant regions which equates generally with the historic concentration of Alevi populations and, broadly, the regions with which the performers identify. The analysis also reveals however that the source of the repertoire of songs is not restricted to these areas and extends, though in less concentration, to other areas where significant Alevi populations exist in central and south-eastern Turkey but also to western and even European Turkey. The implication is that the Alevi heartland – and the regions with which the performers identify – prevails and asserts itself as the primary source of the repertoire but that the
performers willingly engage with sources beyond these regions in the context of a coherently explored repertoire, though these recordings are certainly not presented as a tour of Turkish regional styles. Rather, a coherent expressive position is asserted that has deep attributive and regional connections but which is able or even intended to embrace a wider purview.

Table 2: Source aşık or singer and the location with which they are associated for the songs on the Muhabbet series recordings 1-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source aşık or singer</th>
<th>No. of deyiş and türkü</th>
<th>Location with which the source is associated</th>
<th>Presence on Muhabbet recordings series number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhlis Akarsu</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kangal, Sivas</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musaeroğlu</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mut, İçel</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşık Daimi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arif Sağ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aşkale, Erzurum-Erzincan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşık Veyssel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Şarkışla, Sivas</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Ebber Çiçek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesimi Çimen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sarız</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nusret Süumanioğlu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Narman, Erzurum</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacim Dede</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kantara, Maraş</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erzincanlı Şerif</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydar Ağbaba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maksut Uşağı Aşiret</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tunceli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feyzullah Çınar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sivas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neşet Ertaş</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kırşehir</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyit Meftuni</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Arguvan, Malatya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadık Doğanay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Zile, Sivas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izzet Altınmeşe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Antep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vahid Dede</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kırklaireli, Trakya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuri Üstünses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Divriği, Sivas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşık Hasan Hüseyin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adıyaman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İpek Bayrak</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuzer Dede</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kantarma, Maraş</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşık Ali Cemali</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tunceli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akbabalar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ismail İpek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Aşşin, Maraş</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davut Sulari</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Çayırlı, Erzincan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yavuz Top</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tercan, Erzincan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemal Çiğrik</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Malatya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahri Kayahan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Malatya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisarlı Ahmet</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kütahya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İhsan Güvercin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Malatya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Locations, localities and regions associated with the songs on the Muhabbet series recordings 1-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of deyiş</th>
<th>Associated localities</th>
<th>Eur.</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>CNE</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sivas</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kangal Şarkışla Zile</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erzincan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tercan Çayırlı</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İçel (Mersin)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mut</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erzurum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aşkale Narman</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malatya</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arguvan</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maraş (Kahramanmaraş)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Afişin Kantarma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayseri</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sarız</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunceli</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kütahya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kırklareli</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kırşehir</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adıyaman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In presenting this analysis I mean to suggest that one of the most valuable aspects of the Muhabbet series of recordings is the way it suggest the importance of understanding the performance of deyiş as part of a discourse with the creative and performance tradition more broadly, as represented by the collective corpus of works and those who create and perform them, along with the associations they bring or inherit in respect to identity, authority and origins. Not only do the songs naturally have individual merit, intent and meaning, they also develop meaning through their part in the broader creative and performance traditions – through their collective associations understood through the recognition of attribution and source – and how this is realised through the interpretive expression and strategies of knowledgeable and master performers.
4.6  Tolga Sağ at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival

4.6.1  Festival background

The ‘Traditional Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Festival’ (Geleneksel Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Etkinlikleri or Pir Sultan Abdal Şenlikleri) was established in 1979 and coincided with the erection in September of that year of the eight-metre high statue of Pir Sultan Abdal that dominates the hill above the village of Banaz. The statue was begun in the winter of 1978 and completed before the festival. A second festival was held in June 1980. The first festivals were organised by Murtaza Demir (a prominent activist and organiser from Banaz), Haydar Aslan (president of the Banaz Köyü Pir Sultan Abdal Turizm ve Tanıtma Derneği – the Banaz Village Pir Sultan Abdal Tourism and Promotion Association – which had been established in 1976) and Cahit Koççoban (the designer and sculptor of the Pir Sultan Abdal statue). Participants at the first festivals included local performers, the Banaz Köyü Yaşlılar
Semah Grubu (Banaz Village Elders Semah Group), another semah group from Hacıbektaş, a children’s folksong choir from Ordu-Fatsa, a dance group from Artvin and guest artist Ali Asker271. As a result of the 12 September 1980 military coup the festival was discontinued like the larger Hacıbektaş Festival where a performance of Erol Toy’s play Pir Sultan Abdal had been banned in 1977 (Massicard 2003, 126-127). The festival was re-established over a decade later and the third festival was held in 1992.

In 1993, for the fourth Geleneksel Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Etkinlikleri the organising committee, still led by Murtaza Demir, planned a four day event to be held in both Sivas (on 1-2 July) and in the village of Banaz (3-4 July). An ambitious and extensive program was organised including performances by renowned ozan-s and performers including Arif Sağ, the bağlama prodigy Hasret Gültekin, Ali Çağan, Nesimi Çimen, Dertlı Divani, Musa Eroğlu, Sabahat Akkıraz and Muhlis Akarsu. In addition there were panel discussions, photographic exhibitions, theatre performances – including Toy’s Pir Sultan Abdal play – poetry readings, semah performances, films and book signings. A number of major writers and scholars were in attendance including Aziz Nesin, Asım Bezirci and Afşar Timuçin272. On 2 July, a Friday, a mob gathered after Friday prayers outside the Madımak hotel where many of those attending the festival were staying. The principal target was Aziz Nesin who had recently published extracts from Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses and had spoken on local radio about his personal atheism. Propaganda denouncing the

271 Information about the founding of the festival is based on a personal communication by Murtaza Demir in March 2003, Şahhüseynoğlu (2001), Demir (2002) and the website of the Banaz Köyü Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği (Banaz Village Culture and Collaboration Association) http://www.banazkoyu.com/.

272 Information taken from the program of events available on the Internet in 2000 (Geleneksel IV Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Etkinlikleri program 2000).
attendance of Aziz Nesin had already begun two weeks before the festival; and the mob that had formed outside the mosques were organised by Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) and municipal council members (Öktem 2011, 96-97). When the mob moved to the Madımak and it became apparent that security forces would not stop them they set fire to the hotel in which nearly one hundred people were trapped (Öktem 2011, 97). While a number of those inside escaped, including Aziz Nesin and Arif Sağ, thirty five people died in the hotel and two protesters outside the hotel were also killed. Of the thirty five killed inside the Madımak hotel, two were hotel employees and the rest were festival attendees including the "aşık"-s Nesimi Çimen and Muhlis Akarsu, the musician Hasret Gültekin and the literature (and Pir Sultan Abdal) scholar Asım Bezirci. As Soileau (2005, 99-100) sums up the impact of the Sivas incident:

The massacre at Sivas has become the most commemorated event of recent Alevi history from the massive rally in Ankara immediately following the incident to the annual marches in various cities on 2. July. Posters, flyers and exhibitions are continually produced, recounting the events, remembering the victims by including photographs and short biographies, and placing the event in the long line of massacres and injustices with which Alevis associate their history: the martyrdoms of Husayn, Mansur al-Hallaj, Nesimi, and Pir Sultan Abdal, the massacres in various provinces in Turkey in the 1970’s, and later the attacks in the Gazi suburb of Istanbul in 1995. The incident has also had the effect of increasing the interest of Alevis in expressing their identity as Alevis and in organizing.

273 The number of victims is variously and confusingly given as 37, 35 and 33. Alevis generally honour the deaths of 33 canlar (Alevi ‘souls’) and acknowledge the two hotel employees who also died, but less often the two from among the mob who were also killed. Lists of those killed are given in various sources but see the Sivas kitabı (the Sivas book) produced in the year following the massacre by the Turkish writers association (Aşut 1994, 335). A number of other books documenting the events were produced in the years following the events including those by Yıldırım (1993), Coşkun (1995) and Gölbasi (1997). A publication prepared by Ahmet Koçak (2003) on the tenth anniversary of the events includes interviews and recollections from many of the survivors.
The response to this event in the context of Alevi expressive culture was almost immediate. Muhlis Akarsu, who was killed in the events, had completed the recording of his last cassette but according to Arif Sağ it took some time before it could be released after the events. Shortly after the events when Sağ was on his way to a funeral in Sivas a young man handed him a poem. Sağ felt that the song was suitable, it suited Pir Sultan, and said nothing wrong, so he recorded it for Akarsu’s cassette with the singer Sebahat Aslan. Sağ says that this is the only song he sang about the Madımak events as he did not want to use the events for personal gain. The author of the poem credited on Akarsu’s recording is Hüseyin Aşkın and it is a re-interpretation of the well-known deyiş of Pir Sultan Abdal Kul olayım kalm tutan ellere. The circumstances concerning Sağ’s recording of this song were learned from a personal interview with Sağ in Istanbul in July 2002.

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274 The circumstances concerning Sağ’s recording of this song were learned from a personal interview with Sağ in Istanbul in July 2002.

275 For the Pir Sultan Abdal version see the Translations chapter, section 5.5.37.
This song, based as it is on the deyiş attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal, places the events of 1993 within the history of Alevi martyrdom and endurance in the face of adversity with its call to the “Shah” and the line Pir Sultanlar ölür ölür dirilir (a reference to another Pir Sultan Abdal lyric, Yürütre Hızır Paşa) which sadly evokes the fate of repeated martyrdoms while also asserting the resilience of rising again from this fate. Sağ’s performance on the Akarsu recording recalls the performance of the Pir Sultan Abdal lyric on Muhabbet 3 and the sound of the later Muhabbet recordings in its sombre and serious arrangement using just voices, bağlama and bass.

As Soileau observes, Alevi festivals while they can be considered ritual events, alongside cem-s, their scale and degree of openness reflect “the situation in which Alevis today find themselves” (Soileau 2005, 92). Festivals such as the Pir Sultan Abdal festival allow for various perceptions of Alevi identity to be enacted and expressed but as part of a shared experience – “the most recent moment in an ongoing process of identity formation, ultimately in the individual, but as part of a community” (Soileau 2005, 104). While the festival concentrates attention and purpose and parades and performs meaningful symbols it also potentiates the possibilities of the liminal since the scale and openness of the event permit less constrained associations. So, for example, the masters of ceremony will repeat

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276 Text transcribed from Sağ’s performance on Akarsu’s posthumously released recording (Akarsu n.d.).

277 Interestingly David Grabias when doing field recordings for his documentary Ashiklar, those who are in love, in 1994, recorded a singer in Eskişehir identified as Ashik (Aşık) Ali performing this version. The sleeve notes on the CD release of the recording do not distinguish this version from another version of the deyiş included on the CD performed by Aşık Nuri of Banaz and are both identified as Pir Sultan Abdal songs with the title Kul olayım kalem tutan ellere despite the differing words.
invocations from Pir Sultan’s lyrics such as ‘Gelin canlar bir olalım’ (Come friends let us be one), ‘Açılın kapılar şaha gidelim’ (Open the gates and let us go to the Shah) and ‘Dönen dönüsün ben dönmezim yolumdan’ (Let the one who turns away turn I will not turn from the way) and the proceedings commence with a focus on the local tradition but as the day progresses popular performers and halay dancing become more prominent. Entertainment and enjoyment are clearly part of the festival which allows for a more broad cultural inclusion but it remains within the “socially-accepted perception of tradition and contemporary actuality” (Soileau 2005, 105) required to sustain the expression of essentially Alevi identity. As Soileau (2005, 105) has pointed out, western musical instruments that demonstrate an engagement with the modern and popular culture are readily acceptable – I witnessed a number of groups using acoustic guitars, keyboards and even electric guitars at the festival – but not those associated with elite Ottoman culture or Sunni Islam – so, for example, I also witnessed the end-blown folk flute kaval in many performances, but certainly not the end-blown flute of elite culture the ney.

Figure 7: View of the village of Banaz from Ziyaret Tepe (June 2002).
I attended the Pir Sultan Abdal festival in June 2002 (thirteenth) and June 2007 (eighteenth). The festival on both occasions followed a similar pattern. It was conducted over two days, Saturday and Sunday, in mid-Summer. The festival was concentrated around the amphitheatre on Ziyaret Tepe, the hill rising immediately above the village of Banaz. The amphitheatre consisting of tiered concrete seating surrounding a low circular concrete stage faces the statue of Pir Sultan Abdal. The iconic mountain Yıldız Dağı is visible from the amphitheatre off to the northwest. The festival consists for the most part of musical performances in the amphitheatre during the day – there is no lighting but a sound system is used. In the late afternoon and evening the festival moves its focus to Topuzlu Baba, an area on the opposite side of Ziyaret Tepe which includes a hall (cemevi), kitchen, kurban (sacrifice) area and shaded picnic grounds. Here panel discussions are conducted and a cem is conducted on the Saturday night. Banaz is a small village of around 100 households and does not have services such as shops or hotels. The villagers accommodate many of the visitors to the festival. For the festival a small number of food stalls selling cold drinks, tea and kebabs are set up.

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278 Technical problems occurred a number of time during the festivals I attended in 2002 and 2007, with loss of sound and speaker banks dropping out. The start of the festival in 2002 was delayed while electricity was ‘bush-rigged’ to get power to the stage area.

279 I attended a cem conducted by Dertli Divani in 2007. In 2002 at the invitation of a Banazlı resident in Australia who was visiting Banaz at the time, ‘Kızılbaş’ Mehmet Aslan, I stayed with a local Banaz family that was not particularly engaged with the festival and consequently I did not attend the evening events. However on that occasion I arrived in Banaz from Sivas the day before the festival and had the opportunity to look around the village and was introduced to many of the Banaz people, as well as visiting the ‘Pir Sultan Abdal house’, visiting the tomb of Seyit Ali on the peak of Ziyaret Tepe, and joining a community aşure meal in the local school. In 2007 I travelled to the festival by bus from Ankara with a group of performers and attendees.
The festival performances at the amphitheatre were preceded by speeches of welcome by local government and organising officials. Along one of the walls of the amphitheatre banners were displayed – in 2002 this included banners of Hacı Bektaş Veli, the Imam Ali and Atatürk. The opening performances are allocated to local artists and Banaz elders. In 2002 and 2007 İsmail Şimşek, a Banazlı aşk, commenced the performances on both the Saturday and Sunday. On the opening day he was joined by Banaz elders turning the semah. Respect for the local elders was taken seriously and when others tried to join the semah being turned by the Banazlılar they were forcibly removed from the circle. The performances continue through the day and include local and regional performers, semah groups and culminating in the afternoon with the more high profile popular guest artists. In 2002 the guest artists included Ali Ekber Eren, Mazlum Çimen and the main attraction Tolga Sağ. Saturday afternoon is the high point for the performances and while the procedure is repeated on the Sunday by mid-afternoon the crowds have largely dispersed.
My analysis that follows concentrates on Tolga Sağ’s Saturday afternoon performance, being the feature performance of the 2002 festival, as a text of social and cultural expression. Soileau who identifies the importance of festivals in the expression of Alevi culture and identity advocates an understanding of performance, understood as the interaction between performer and audience, as a way to see how community identity is worked out. Soileau also suggests that such communal identity is the collection of individual identities as they emerge from this interaction (Soileau 2002). While Tolga Sağ’s performance is naturally enacted in the specific context of the festival itself, and indeed the festival’s history, it is also constructed from the social and individual history and perceptions of the performer and the audience (individually and collectively) – it is in this performance interaction that immanent associations reveal their interpretive possibilities.

Figure 9: Banazhlar turning the semah at the opening of the 2002 festival. Aşık İsmail Şimşek is the performer. Banners of Hacı Bektaş Veli, Atatürk and İmam Ali are visible (June 2002).
4.6.2 Entextualising the performance as an interpretive act

As my analysis aims to demonstrate, Tolga Sağ’s performance is a complex and sophisticated interpretive act that reveals levels of authority, situational relevance, personal heritage, social and artistic lineage, tradition and creative impulse and execution. The situational context is certainly an important part of the impetus for the performance; it is a situational context that has a history and location that naturally imbues the performance with symbolic weight that the performer and audience cannot ignore. The situational context suggests the interpretive purpose of the performance but the interpretive act itself performed through the selection, structure and expression of traditional oral song, the deyiş, with its associative and immanent riches, permits the potential for an entextualised perspective on its interpretive function.

Sağ’s performance demonstrates significant and deliberate structure and emphasis that can be seen from the perspective of performance theory as “a highly reflexive mode of communication … a specially marked, artful way of speaking that sets up or represents a special interpretive frame in which the act of speaking is to be understood” (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73). As Bauman and Briggs suggest, “performance potentiates decontextualisation” or, more usefully, suggests the processes of ‘entextualization’ which they define as:

the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting. A text, then, from this vantage point, is discourse rendered decontextualizable. Entextualization may well incorporate aspects
of context, such that the resultant text carries elements of its history of use within it. (Bauman and Briggs 1990, 73).

Performance understood as an interpretive act reveals the ability of a performance to suggest relevance and resonance beyond the situational; which is not to mean this is counter to the situational and indeed, as in the case of Sağ’s performance the situation context is central, but as Ricoeur states: “as a result of this emancipation from the situational context, discourse can develop non-ostensive references which we [call] a ‘world’ … as an ontological dimension” (Ricoeur 1998, 207-208). That is to say, performances entextualised (not only contextualised) permit or suggest ontological dimensions that may be evoked and interpreted by the receptive participants, individually or communally, in the performance arena. Not only does this motivate and provide the dynamic for creative and interpretive continuity and generation, it suggests the possibility of such activity, being meaningfully referent and associative, in other contexts.

Of course Sağ’s performance was an empirical and ephemeral act (other than my, or other’s recording or memory of it) but the point to emphasise is from where that performance emerged – the process of that creative, interpretive act is a work that “opens up a world which it bears within itself” (Ricoeur 1998, 208). This world is the “ensemble of references opened up by the texts” (Ricoeur 1998, 202) and the world it projects. What I suggest is that understood in this way it is possible to discern the performance and its entextualization in what Foley characterises, in the context of ‘immanent art’, as a ‘performance arena’, which he defines as the “virtual space and time in which the poet and audience – more accurately poets and audiences – transact their traditional business” (Foley 2002, 116) as well as, and not dismissing, the
situational context. Viewed this way, the performance – or the enactment of ritual of oral poetry in Foley’s terms – can be seen to create its own place (Foley 2002, 116) and, it follows, an arena of creative expression that supports interpretive or dialectic purpose establishing, if it is to be at all effective, ontologically meaningful references. As an audience participant engaged with the performance, my subjective position is as Ricoeour (1998, 94) says, “not to discover an intention hidden behind the text but to unfold a world in front it”. If I allow that my hermeneutical intent is an act of appropriation, it is not to understand “an alien experience of a distant intention, but the horizon of a world towards which a work directs itself” (Ricoeur 1998, 178) – that is, the world I seek to understand and interpret.

4.6.3 Analysis of Tolga Sağ’s festival performance

Tolga Sağ (born in 1973 in Istanbul) is the son of the great bağlama virtuoso Arif Sağ and, like his father, he is a regular performer at the annual Pir Sultan Abdal festival. His performance in 2002 was his second appearance at the festival. By the time of his appearance at the festival he had released his first solo recording called Yol (The Way) in 2000 and had been involved in the first recordings of a series called Türküler Sevdamız (Folk songs are our love) a series of ensemble focused recordings consciously intended to continue, at least in general character, the Muhabet series. He had made a solo vocal recording debut appearance on his

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280 They generally take turns appearing at the festival. The festival would seem inconceivable without the appearance of a representative of the Sağ family. Şen Sağ, Tolga’s wife, also a well known singer, has also appeared at the festival. Erdal Erzincan, a relation and protégé of Arif Sağ, and his wife, Mercan, also appeared at the festival I attended in 2007.

281 Three Türküler Sevdamız (Erzincan, Ismail, and Sağ 1997; Sağ, Erzincan, and Çelik 2001; Sağ et al. 2005) recordings have been released since the first in 1997 involving Tolga Sağ and Erdal Erzincan (on all three) with İsmail Özden, Yılmaz Çelik, Muharrem Temiz also participating. The third in the series is particularly weighted towards Alevi ritual deyiş and it is the liner notes on this recording that they state the intention for this series to continue the ambition of the Muhabet series to present Alevi
father’s 1996 recording Umut. At the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival Tolga Sağ was the headline performer and his first performance, an hour long set, was the feature performance on the afternoon of Saturday 22 June 2002. On Sunday 23 June 2002 Sağ gave a shorter half-hour performance.

Before the performance Sağ was kept away from the crowds in the performer’s preparation space, a small concrete bunker attached to the earth and concrete amphitheatre behind the stage area. Thus, a certain degree of anticipation and ‘star’ treatment was afforded his entrance onto the stage. Following the announcement he strode onto the circular platform, dressed in a grey suit, collar and tie, and raised his bağlama in acknowledgement of the crowd. His raising of the instrument was not in the overt politically defiant two hands (like the pose of the ten metre high statute of Pir Sultan Abdal behind the stage) but appeared more in recognition and acknowledgment of the instrument, the music and those participating in attending the festival and this performance.

 Sağlık’s performance lasted one hour and continued without any defined pause, though there were moments of applause and dynamics in the arrangement of songs performed that provided shape to the overall performance. The performance consisted of twenty-one individual songs (including deyiş, türkü, uzun hava and halay forms) in what I have identified as six thematic and structural ‘phases’.

282 The performance is included on the CD, Disc 1, accompanying this thesis. See Appendix A for track listings.
First Phase

Sağ began with a short açış or doğaçlama, an improvised prelude in a free rhythm on the bağlama before starting straight into a deyiş by Davut Sulari that begins Dünya arsızındır fırsat pirsizin (It is the opportunistic and utter shamelessness of the world). This is a dramatic opening, setting a tone that immediately references the history of the Pir Sultan Abdal festival and Alevis’ relations to the world – it elicited a small applause from the more attentive in the audience. It also hints at Sağ’s musical heritage, as his father frequently recorded songs of Davut Sulari; and Tolga himself recorded this song for the second volume of the Türküler sevdamız series released in 2001. This emphatic opening and the importance of the words is emphasised by the melody sung freely which starts by rising to the seventh descends to the fifth and rises again touching on the octave then settling on the fifth.
The melody then follows a generally descending line. It has a strong declamatory quality in which the rhythm is evident and articulated but serving the delivery of the words and is supported by a simple strumming on the bağlama with unadorned cadential phrases articulating the lines. He sings two verses, the dramatic opening verse and the mahlas verse that identifies the authorship and authority of the words.

Sağ then transitions to the second song in türkü form called Yarım için ölüyorum (I am dying for my beloved), a song with significant immanent qualities. Ostensibly the song is about a declaration of love in spite of the disapproval of those who would pass judgement, particularly referring to the ignorant (cahil) who would do so: cahil ne der ise desin (let the ignorant say what they say). The song was associated with the aşık Nesimi Çimen, a victim of the 1993 Sivas events, and it was recorded on Arif Sağ’s important 1983 recording İnsan Olmaya Geldim. With this song Tolga Sağ references the immanent associations of the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival and the renewal of martyrdom in the association with Nesimi Çimen; together with his own musical heritage with the reference to song recorded by his father on his major recording. The text of the türkü is as follows:

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283 The song has three lines of eight syllables, the second and third lines being repeated in performance. The mention of the name ‘Cafer’ in the opening line of the last verse suggest this is a mahlas although I have not identified this lyric with any aşık or ozan of that name in the literature.  
284 It was also recorded shortly after this, no doubt influenced by Sağ’s recording, on one of the strongest türkü recordings of the mid-1980s by Necla Akben titled Yarım için ölüyorum produced under the musical direction of Yavuz Top (Akben n.d.).
I am dying for my beloved, let the strangers say what they say
I am turning pale and wan, beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved
Let the strangers say what they say, let the ignorant say what they say
I am turning pale and wan, beloved, beloved, beloved, beloved
Let the strangers say what they say, let the bigots say what they say

And Cafer was the lovesick slave, his worth was a rusty coin
I was a nightingale my beloved a rose, beloved, beloved, beloved beloved
Let the strangers say what they say, let the stupid say what they say
I was a nightingale my beloved a rose, beloved, beloved, beloved beloved
Let the strangers say what they say, let the bigots say what they will

Emphasising a position, a stance, in respect to the 1993 events, and by inference
Alevi history more generally, Sağ substitutes the words yobaz and ahmak in place of
cahil in the repetitions of the refrain. Where cahil means ‘ignorant’ (which might be
understood as a passive position), yobaz means ‘bigot’ and ahmak ‘stupid’ or
‘foolish’, terms which point to the intentions and responsibilities of those it
references. When Sağ sang ‘yobaz’ there was a spontaneous eruption of applause
from the audience. Musically the song has a strong, propelling rhythm that provides
an urgency and instance to the statements of the song. It starts in 10/8 metre with the beat pattern of 3+3+2+2 with a shift to a 7/8 metre (3+2+2) during the repeated ‘yâr yâr yâr yâr’ refrain.

**Second Phase**

Sağ then introduces the first Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş which shifts the performance and establishes an acknowledgment and recognition of Pir Sultan Abdal as an Alevi poet of fundamental ibadet (worshipful, ritual) themes. The song Medet ya Muhammet medet Ya Ali (Help me Muhammad, help me Ali)\(^{285}\) musically and lyrically takes the performance to the source of Alevi expressive culture. Lyrically it a plea to Muhammad and Ali. Musically it is an expression of strongly typical motifs of Alevi musical form as described above and can be considered a *cuş havası*, or ‘ecstatic air’, a deyiş performed in the cem following the düaz-ı imam to emotively engage the congregation. The mahlas form is Abdal Pir Sultan indicating that in the expressive context, issues about the form of the mahlas indicating different identities appear irrelevant\(^{286}\). The music in 7/8 time (2+2+3) mostly repeats a short phrase within a tetrachord (a minor third with a leading note) with a second melodic section rising to the fifth above the ostensible tonic and descending through an augmented fourth and minor third to return to the repeated thematic material. The song achieved dramatic lift since it raised the basic tonality of the performance by a (minor) third. The ostensible tonic is the third note of the home scale of the bağlama which is comfortably performed on the instrument by using the thumb on the lowest string to hold the tonic leaving the open middle string to sound a droning fourth below and the

\(^{285}\) The text and translation are included in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.38.
\(^{286}\) As noted in respect to my translation of this deyiş, Aslanoğlu includes a variant of this text with the mahlas Pir Sultan and consequently includes among those deyiş attributed to the eponymous Pir Sultan.
open top string to perform the melodic parts. Although Sağ did not pause between songs, as he resolved the bağlama to the tonic of its root scale (kerem dizi) further applause was forthcoming from the audience apparently acknowledging the Pir Sultan Abdal song.

Sağ followed with another Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş that combines the metonym of Alevi identity (Ali) with reference to the defiant qualities associated with the figure (and the songs) of Pir Sultan Abdal. The deyiş begins Rehberi Ali’nin devri yürüye (May the age of the Guide Ali advance). In the published anthologies this more commonly appears as Hazreti Ali’nin devri yürüye. Like the previous piece it is in 7/8 time with the beat pattern 2+2+3. The tune is also commonly used for the deyiş Gül yüzüm sevdiğim associated with the influential Alevi singer and bağlama virtuoso Ali Ekber Çiçek. This deyiş reaffirms the theme and expressive references of the previous deyiş in its reference to Ali and in the musical metre, while also picking up the defiant quality of the opening two songs and revealing our understanding of Pir Sultan Abdal as a persona encompassing the fundamentals of Alevi belief and the qualities of social leadership.

The last of the three Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş to be sung, Türbesin üstüne nakş eyledim (I decorated the top of his tomb), introduces the İmam Husayn and the theme of martyrdom central to Alevi belief. Not as a lament (mersiye) but with a highly accomplished bağlama accompaniment establishing a busy ostinato which emphasises the repetitive nature of the short phrases constituting the melody. The mahlas this time is in the form ‘Pir Sultan’. The melody pivots around the third note.

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287 The text and translation of this deyiş is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.29.
288 The text and translation are included in the Translations chapter, section 5.5.46.
of the scale, giving the song a major scale feel although the fifth note of the scale (the major third in the melody) is not actually played. The melody functions around the tetrachord on the tonic but constantly returns to the third. It picks up on and suggests the tonality of the two preceding pieces. The transition from the previous deyiş was accomplished by an instrumental bridge that forms a major fourth chord above the third, giving the harmonic impression of a move from a tonic to sub-dominant chordal change. The effect is also made pronounced, not just by the introduction of a chordal shift but because this chord also manifests as a major sixth chord over the tonic of the previous deyiş and the implied tonic of this deyiş. This instrumental bridge provides dynamic lift and also foreshadows the opening musical phrase of the last piece in this phase of the performance, the duaz-i imam.

Sağ completes this second phase of his performance, which follows the muhabbet or cem context structure of ‘three nefes and one duaz’, with a well known duaz-i imam collected by Dertli Divani which begins Medet Allah medet medet ya Ali289. With the repetition of ‘medet’ this obviously picks up on the theme of the Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş that opened this phase. This is another cem piece and as a duaz-i imam it invokes and extols the names of the Twelve Imams of Shi’a tradition with the repetition the name of God in the invocation ‘Hu’ after each half line. So, thematically Sağ returns to and reasserts the context of Alevi ritual culture more generally. This duaz, associated with the Urfa (Kısas) tradition also foreshadows the Urfa semahi pieces he will perform in the fourth phase of his performance. Musically the duaz begins with a phrase that echoes the instrumental bridge in the previous deyiş. Melodically, the duaz is constructed around three short descending phrases

289 This duaz has been notated and discussed earlier in the section on duaz-i imam (4.3).
that never actually resolve to the implied tonic, however Sağ completes this by instrumentally resolving to the tonic creating a natural end to this phase, which is picked up by the audience who again applaud.

**Third Phase**

Sağ moves to the next phase of the performance with another improvised açış (prelude) which establishes the mode for the uzun hava (long air) which follows. The uzun hava may be an improvised melody or a rhythmically free but formed melody to which a text is sung, usually expressing longing, and regret. The uzun hava Sağ sings, Bu nasıl işidi bu nasıl hışım is from the Sivas region and is about the pain of anger, dissention and parting. Sağ only performs a single verse. The uzun hava serves a number of functions in the context of the performance. It provides an effective transition from the three nefes and one duaz suggestive of ritual performance by allowing a dynamic change; it references the regional Sivas folklore; and it demonstrates his ability to handle this particular and difficult form. The latter point is important from the point of view of the performer’s credentials, though uzun hava do not play a significant role in Alevi ritual performance, and Sağ does not dwell in this area and quickly returns to rhythmic songs. When I observed his performance at the same festival five years later in June 2007 he played the same uzun hava.

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290 I am grateful to the professional Turkish singer – a specialist in uzun hava – and scholar Neşe Onaçça for clarifying this point (personal correspondence 8 July 2009). She also informed me that her mother often sang the melody Sağ uses but with different words.

291 Recordings by türkü singers usually include one or more uzun hava.

292 The mersiye (a lament, usually for the Imam Husayn) is often performed in an expressively free metre, but it can be argued that this is not specifically an uzun hava as generally understood and does not involve melisma effects that would obscure the words, for example.
The next song opens in a declamatory style echoing the opening deyiş of Davut Sulari. This song is a work composed by Mustafa Atıcı titled Oğul (The son) and begins with the line Gömdüm oğul seni toprağa gömdüm (I buried you son in the earth). This is a song that Sağ recorded on the first Türküler Sevdamız album. In his performance of this song he stresses the guttural ‘kh’ sound for ‘k’ that is associated with eastern Anatolian dialect. Here he seems to be associating his performance with the village audience and the Anatolian rural context. Lyrically it picks up on the theme of the distain for the bigot and tyrant (‘zalim’): “seni vuran eller kırılsın oğul” (may the hands that strike you be broken, son).

There is a quick transition to the next piece, a song by Mehmet Koç (b. 1945 in Gürün, Sivas), called Dilo beginning Yüce dağbaşında. This song is the opening song on Sağ’s first solo recording – the only one released at the time of this performance – Yol. Like the previous song, this is thematically appropriate but also highlights Tolga Sağ the recording artist, performing contemporary songs as well as the traditional, through songs that some certainly among the younger audience may recognise and associate with Sağ through his recording.

**Fourth Phase**

The next phase picks up and develops themes already established. The first piece is a semah that reiterates, stylistically, the last of the three Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in the second phase of the performance. The words are mostly derived from a deyiş by Muhlis Akarsu, another victim of massacre at the 1993 festival in Sivas, beginning
Açığım yok kapalım yok dünyada 293. This is followed by two deyiş from the Urfa semahi. Başım açık yalın ayak yürüttün from Aşık Sıtkı and Kerbela çöllünden sakin mi geldi from the seventeenth century aşık Dedemoğlu. The last piece thematically echoes the earlier Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş. The introduction of semah pieces was an invitation for the audience for another level of engagement as people came onto the raised circular area and turn in a circle with semah movements. The Urfa semahi like the earlier duaz-i imam was collected by Dertli Divani and has become one of the most well known, or popularly performed, semah in recent years.

Figure 11: Audience members turn the semah dance while Sağ performs (June 2002).

Fifth Phase:

Following the semah-s Sağ again lowers the tempo and picks up an association made in the semah phase by performing a deyiş from Muhlis Akarsu titled Gurbeti ben mi yarattım 294. Again this deyiş suggest associative contexts that it references. Not only its association with a Pir Sultan like martyr in Muhlis Akarsu himself, but this piece

293 The text and translation of Akaru’s deyiş is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.11.1.
294 The text and translation is included in the Translations chapter, section 5.11.2
was also the title song of Arif Sağ’s first long play recording devoted predominantly to Alevi deyişler which I have discussed in some detail above.

Sağ then performs Aşık Mahzuni Şerif’s deyiş Ağlasam mı, beginning Mevlam gül diyerek iki göz vermiş. Mahzuni had in fact died only a month prior to this performance, so the inclusion of a deyiş by Mahzuni can certainly be understood as honouring his memory. The deyiş was in fact also recorded by Sağ with İsmail Özden and Erdal Erzincan as an ensemble performance on the first Türküler Sevdamız album. It is also one of Mahzuni’s deyiş that specifically invokes the name of Pir Sultan, but it is as Pir Sultanlar (Pir Sultans), not the specific individual but the community of persons, those like Mahzuni, who feel represented by or connected to the persona evoked in the name.

_Mahzuni Şerif’im dindir acını_
_Bazı acılardan al ilacını_
_Pir Sultanlar gibi darağacını_
_Bilmem boylasam mı boylamasam mı_

I am Mahzuni Şerif ease your pain
Take your cure from some of the pains
I do not know if like Pir Sultans
I will end up on his gallows tree or not

Sağ now plays a short deyiş written by Aşık İhsani called Ben ölüyom sen ölmüyom (I’m dying, you’re not dying). Curiously Sağ performs this deyiş with the mahtas as Ruhsati and not İhsani. Ruhsati was one of the most renowned aşık-s from the Sivas region, from Deliktaş near Kangal. Why Sağ presents this as a Ruhsati deyiş is unclear. Is it simply a mistake or a considered re-attribution? Whatever the reason, it
does demonstrate the potential proclivity to re-assign the mahlas in a situational or interpretive context. If Sağ was deliberate in his Ruhsati attribution, then the choice is interesting since Ruhsati’s identity as Alevi is ambiguous. Some anthologists do include him as such, notably Özmen who includes him in his five volume collection of Alevi-Bektaşi poetry states he was of Alevi origin (Özmen 1998: 4, 641) and Bezirci says he was connected to a Bektaşi tarikat though notes that according to some he was actually connected to the Nakşibendi (Bezirci 1993: 1, 423). As mentioned previously, Aşık Zakiri was connected to the ‘Ruhsati line’ through the fact of being given his mahlas by Mesleki who was the apprentice of Ruhsati, who was himself the apprentice of Noksani. Ruhsati, like Sefil Selimi in the late twentieth century, occupies a liminal region and represents a lineage that is accepted as sympathetic to, or culturally connected to Alevi belief and expression. It is the expression of sentiment that is significant and Sağ’s inclusion of a Ruhsati song, whatever the reason, would seem to acknowledge both the Sivas tradition and the willing inclusiveness or extension of Alevi culture and identity.

**Sixth Phase**

The Ruhsati song transitions into the final phase of the performance by means of an instrumental bridge associated with the song Kostak yeri, hinting at Sağ’s ‘hit song’ and what is to follow. This final phase of the performance shifts from the overt Alevi stylistic emphasis – that having been fully established – towards Turkish folk song (türkü) and dance (halay) more generally. Sağ’s deftness in handling this transition musically highlights unity rather than a deliberate distinction in the form and content. The transition is commenced with the distinctive bridging phrase on the bağlama that then leads not straight into Kostak yeri but into Eşeği saldımya çayır a
deyiş from Kazak Abdal, a seventeenth century aşık from the Balkans (Romania). Here Sağ seems to be opening up reference to the wider embrace of Alevi-Bektäşi culture, looking beyond the Anatolian, specifically Sivas, locus. In this phase he establishes his performance in the broader Anatolian folk tradition and popular expression of that tradition including participatory dance. While Eşlığı saldım is still a deyiş, musically it establishes halay rhythms and motifs; thus the transition expands upon and extends what has come before while directing the performance into its final dance music phase.

Having effected this transition successfully, Sağ now goes right to the heart of Anatolian popular folk culture – almost literally – with a song called Bacacılar yüksek yapar from Refik Başaran the renowned bağlama player and singer from Ürgüp in central Anatolian region of Cappadocia. Başaran (1907-1947) made a number of recordings between the mid-1930s and mid-1940s and was an important source musician with a very strong and articulated single string style of playing the saz (bağlama), well suited to this type of dance music, though very different from Alevi performance style295. Sağ would include this türkü on his second solo album, Toprak ve Turna (Sağ 2004), released two years after this performance in 2004.

Sağ now performs his ‘hit song’, Kostak yeri, a popular türkü strongly associated with the Niğde region. This piece was the lead promotional song on Sağ’s first solo album released in 2000 which was accompanied by a video clip that included his father, Arif Sağ, appearing at the end of the clip to acknowledge his son, much as the master acknowledging his apprentice.

295 A valuable collection of archival recordings of Refik Başaran was prepared by Bayram Bilge Tokel and released commercially by Kalan Müzik in 2001 (Başaran 2001).
The music now is in Anatolian dance music (oyun havaları) mode and the younger members of the audience in particular were on the raised area dancing the Anatolian circle dance halay. Sağ follows Kostak yeri with Mor koyun another song he recorded on first Türküler Sevdamız collection. He completes this phase and the entire performance with a ‘potpori’\textsuperscript{296} of halaylar in 6/8 metre as a way of providing a climactic ending to the dance music, through the change of metre and its association with eastern Anatolia (and even suggestions of Azeri music), thus completing the scope of this phase that began with a subtle reference to the western edges of the Turkish ‘nation’, moved to the heartland of central Anatolia and finished in the eastern regions of Anatolia. Sağ begins the short potpori with a halay song from the Kars-Ardahan region called Göleli gelin (The bride of Göle), a song that appears as the final piece on his Yol album; and finishes with a halay from Ağrı, Şu dağlar karlı dağlar (Those mountains are snowcovered mountains).

\textbf{Figure 12: Audience participants dance halay while Sağ performs (June 2002).}

\textsuperscript{296} A common practice among Turkish recording artists is to conclude a recording, or one side of a cassette recording, with a medley potpori (potpourri) of short snatches of popular folk songs.
Tolga Sağ’s performance is revealed to be very skilfully and effectively structured, producing a dynamic and nuanced experience that is delivered in a register that is masterfully targeted to the audience present and the context of the Pir Sultan Abdal festival, but which also, through its associative and immanent qualities implies the more complex aspects of Alevi culture and social identity. By nuanced referencing of his own (personal) heritage, which also, through his father Arif Sağ, references seminal acts of promoting Alevi expressive culture in the 1980s; and of the wider context of Alevi expressive culture and its place within Turkish tradition, Sağ delivered a rich performance that could be experienced at many level, but which achieved its success through its coherent structure, stylistic mastery and immanent qualities.

It is significant that Sağ delivered the performance without break. Although he punctuated the performance through dynamics, changing rhythms and tempo and introducing short improvised or bridging instrumental sections – and it was further punctuated by spontaneous applause at times – the performance presented as a structured whole, rather than merely a set of songs. This technique itself references or builds upon a performance approach of his father Arif Sağ. The effect is to produce entextualising power and meaningfulness as the songs reinforce each other – we observe the breadth, the depth and creativity of the tradition, and the fact that there is an associative story, rather than merely a repertoire of individual songs. It also highlights the creative elements and possibilities. By including, in a unified whole, the range of works from seminal and modern master aşık-s, ritual and

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297 I witnessed this approach in Arif Sağ’s performance live at a halk ozanları concert in Ankara in 1987, in a video of his performance at the in Berlin in March 1991 for an Anadolu Alevileri Kültür Haftası, and on his cassette release of a 1993 live recording called Direniş (Sağ 1993).
regional traditions and contemporary writers, Sağ is able to demonstrate a faceted expressive culture engaging from various perspectives, rich and varied in its elements, but also able to deliver a meaningful coherence through masterful performance and structure without recourse to explanation nor the constraint of the performance context. He establishes this early in the set with a modern masterwork by Davut Sulari; then, in the second phase, by the weight of the authority of the Pir Sultan Abdal deyişler; later incorporating works by two of the greatest late twentieth century aşk-s Muhis Akarsu and Mahzuni Şerif; and further establishing the presence of ritual tradition through the Urfa cem and semah works; while also including contemporary works composed by Mustafa Atıcı and Mehmet Koç and popular Anatolian halay dances.

Within an hour long performance Sağ was able with evident communicative economy using stylistic musical references and motifs, metonymic devices and immanent integers such as the selection of deyiş and their mahlas attributions, to construct a coherent and unified expressive work which is deep-rooted in Alevi culture and expressive tradition and which is open to interpretive possibilities while engaged with but not constrained by the performance context.

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298 The concept of communicative economy is Foley’s who with typical eloquence explains, in respect to the concept, that “in fact each metonymic integer functions as an index-point or node in a grand, untextualizable network of traditional associations... Once those signals are deployed, once the nodes are activated, the work issues forth with surpassing communicative economy, as the way of speaking becomes the way of meaning” (Foley 1995, 54).
4.7 Critical reflection: a performance approach to the interpretation of Alevi deyiş

4.7.1 Introduction

The starting points for this study were the questions that arose from a pre-understanding encounter with the deyiş – the ostensibly signed lyric song. These questions included: how do I approach and perform such songs given the presence of the author or attributed persona and how do those personas have meaning in the performance context? This chapter is a critical reflection on my approach to performing Alevi deyiş in different performance spaces and contexts and presents a view of the performance epistemology that has motivated and guided much of this interpretive study of the Alevi deyiş.

I suggest that through the phenomenological hermeneutic pathway of encounters, examination and explication, and experience and appropriation I am able to construct a coherent and valid interpretive performance of these works. The substructure of this interpretation developed through performance is formed of the associative axes that are found not solely in the theme and subject of the song text but also, and even most critically, in the immanent personas evoked by the mahlas understood as a traditional textual integer. To this may be added an understanding of the associative force of the thematic material and stylistic elements of Alevi music and acknowledgement of the creative possibilities suggested by the recordings and performances of influential musicians.

299 Understanding DuBois’s typology of interpretive strategies (DuBois 2006, 3).
Bauman states that “we view the act of performance as situated behaviour, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts” (Bauman 1977, 27); however the rendering of meaning and the relevant contexts evoked through the hermeneutical action of the performer mean that the understandings delivered, implied or sought in that action acknowledge not only the performance moment and its functional and aesthetic demands, but also the capacity of the interpreted works “to address within us the horizons of our experiences” (Savage 2005, 175). While Savage sees this capacity as shattering the “conventions of socio-historical contextualizations” we may, rather, see this experiencing of the deyiş performed and re-contextualised (or entextualised) as the natural consequence of their distanciation in the expressive world combined with the performer’s motivation to understand and interpret the circumstances of their socio-historical contexts of production, function and meaning. Taken outside the situation of its ritual function or even its attendance in political, cultural or social action, I suggest that a notable quality of the deyiş with its mahlas, and the presence of the immanent personas they evoke, is to create its own situated behaviour in the performer’s interpretive action. Thus my performance is situated in the context of the interpretive coherence it strives to achieve.

Interpretive coherence is perhaps the essential quality required to achieve the entextualisation of the performance that permits the hermeneutic objective of the performance to suggest new understandings and motivate the continuity or lineage of creative action. My performance is, then, a creative and interpretive action following paths suggested by my entextualised readings – my hermeneutic appropriation – of the recordings and performances of artists such as Arif and Tolga Sağ. The meaningfulness of my performance is in its realisation of the possibilities for interpretation through associative and immanent qualities that are inherent in the
deyiş (with its mahlas) and its ontological dimensions derived from its traditional oral and historical construction, its role in establishing and maintaining social and communal links of authority and statement, and its inherent referent qualities revealed through the interpretation of performance and individual creativity.

### 4.7.2 Discussion of performances

I will discuss four performances of Alevi deyiş that I gave between 2002 and 2008. These were not the only public performances I have given of Alevi music but I have chosen them as being the most instructive performances for my purpose; and as three of them were audio recorded they more readily allow for critical reflective analysis. Importantly, they also represent performances in which I have consciously engaged with the central concerns of my thesis in respect to a phenomenological epistemology of Alevi deyiş directed towards what Titon describes as the “emergent self” (Titon 1997, 99) in a field that is, by the virtue of the fact that it is contextualised to my performance, thus a “metaphorical creation of the researcher” (Rice 1997, 107), and where the purpose and objective is experiencing and understanding the music (Titon 1997, 87).

Details of the performances that I will discuss are as follows.

**Performance 1**

**Date** 10 November 2002

**Place** Eugene Goosens Hall, ABC Centre, Sydney

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300 The recordings of performances 1, 2, and 3 are included on the accompanying CDs. See Appendix A for disc listings.
### Event

‘Sonic Circus’, an event described as “a collective celebration of diverse musics, images, sounds and gestures [with] music from around the world reflecting our migrant heritage, by musicians and dancers from the University of Western Sydney’s School of Contemporary Arts”.

### Format

Solo performance for voice and bağlama including introductory remarks followed by three songs performed without break.

### Time

12:30 pm (Sunday)

### Duration

11 minutes

### Songs

- **Dolap** (Pir Sultan Abdal)
- **Yarım için ölüyorum** (Cafer?)
- **Ötme bülbül ötme** (Pir Sultan Abdal)

### Performance 2

### Date

25 March 2005

### Place

Exhibition Park in Canberra (EPIC), Canberra, ACT
‘Trocadero’ venue – a small capacity indoor venue

### Event

2005 (Australian) National Folk Festival
‘Silk Road’ themed concert

### Format

Solo performance for voice and bağlama including short introductory remarks followed by eight songs performed without break.

### Time

9:30 pm (Good Friday)
Duration  25 minutes

Songs performed

Kerbela ağıt – Bugün matem günü geldi (Hatayi)
Duaz-ı imam – Medet Allah medet (Muhammed)
Urfə semahi (instrumental extract)
Duaz-ı imam – Gel dilber ağlatma beni (Virani)
Tevhid semah – Bugün biz pir geldi (Kul Himmet)
Ayrılık hastretlik (Şidki)
Yarım içinölüyorum (Cafer?)
Ötme bülbül ötme (Pir Sultan Abdal)

Performance 3

Date  2 November 2005

Place  National Library of Australia Theatre

Event  ‘Mystic Music and the Memory of Martyrs: an introduction to Alevi music’
A ‘lunch-time’ presentation forming part of the National Library of Australia’s free public events program for spring 2005.

Format  Solo performance for voice and bağlama including introductory remarks followed by eight songs punctuated with introductions and supported by a PowerPoint slide display providing images, précis and translations of song texts.

Time  12:30 pm (Wednesday)

Duration  60 minutes

Songs performed

Tevhid semah – Bugün biz pir geldi (Kul Himmet)
Kerbela ağıt – Bugün matem günü geldi (Hatayi)
Duaz-ı imam – Medet Allah medet (Muhammed)
Turna semahi – Yine dertli dertli (Karacaoğlan)
İnsan olmaya geldim (Nimri Dede)
Yarım için ölüyorum (Cafer?)
Ötme bülbü ötme (Pir Sultan Abdal)
Fırlıdak adam (Mahzuni)

Performance 4

Date 28 June 2008

Place Parramatta Town Hall, Sydney, NSW

Event ‘Sivas Anma’
Rememberance event for the 1993 Sivas tragedy including musical performances, speeches, video and lecture from visiting scholar Erdoğan Çınar.

Format Solo performance for voice and bağlama including four songs performed without break.

Time Evening (Saturday)

Duration 20 minutes

Songs İnsana muhabbet duyдум duyuldu (Sefil Selimi)
performed Mevlam gül diyerek iki göz vermiş (Mahzuni)
Yarım için ölüyorum (Cafer?)
Ötme bülbü ötme (Pir Sultan Abdal)

I do not intend to discuss all these performances in chronological order nor in equal depth and detail; rather, I will focus this discussion on Performance 2 (National Folk Festival 2005) which I consider the most instructive. However the other
Performances are important in helping to reflect upon that performance. Indeed numerous other performances both formal and informal over many years that I have not specifically detailed may also be understood to inform this discussion. This includes impromptu performing in two türkü bars in Istanbul in 1997, other performances at the National Folk Festival both solo and with groups, participation in cem ceremonies conducted in Sydney, Melbourne and Mildura (in regional Australia), informal sohbet evenings with Alevi friends; and learning, preparing and performing the *deyiş* in practice situations by myself or with my friend and teacher Eyyup Aydoğmuş (Bevan).

Performances 1, 2 and 3 were undertaken after my first fieldtrip to Turkey – and specifically my attendance at the Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Banaz – in 2002. The fourth performance was after my second fieldtrip visit to the Pir Sultan Abdal festival in 2007. They represent conscious attempts towards new understanding through the experience and practice of performance. In working out through experiencing and performance my new understandings I am also working out an interpretation which, as Rice identifies, is situated as neither precisely emic nor etic, insider nor outsider (Rice 1994, 88). In committing to a performance context I am committing an interpretive process to a number of tests some of which relate specifically to the situated moment of performance and others to the epistemologically emergent self that is engaged in the hermeneutic cycle of (pre)understanding, explication (examination) and experience (new-understandings). The performative interpretation is not proposed as apodictic, but rather a contributive assertion and, in Rice’s terms, is “finite, open-ended and contestable” (Rice 1994, 7). Neither is the interpretive

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301 In 1997 with Grup Anadolu, in 2001 with Deyish, and 2003 and 2007 (solo). Grup Anadolu was led by Eyyup Aydoğmuş with Nargiz Aydoğmuş, Bora Kanra, Barış Bektas, Paul Koerbin and a group of semah dancers. Deyish was a trio of Eyyup Aydoğmuş, Nargiz Aydoğmuş and Paul Koerbin.
process intended as relativistic or post-modern but, metaphorically put, as the revelation of a strand of light from a prism held at a certain angle. The objective of this process is to retain the interpretive focus on the disclosed worlds (of symbols, associations, attributions, immanence) so that, as Ricoeur states, understanding is not about projecting oneself into the text but receiving “an enlarged self from the proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation’ (Ricoeur 1998, 182-183) which opens up this “dialectic of distanciation and appropriation” (Ricoeur 1998, 183) to addressed audiences as a world of revealed understanding.

4.7.3 The National Folk Festival performance, 25 March 2005

Originally conceived as a festival showcasing ‘folk music’ and dance performances, both traditional and contemporary, that moved location from year to year between the states and territories that make up the Commonwealth of Australia, since the early 1990s the festival has been permanently located in the Australian national capital city, Canberra. The festival has become the largest artistic festival in Canberra attracting many local and interstate visitors during the Easter holiday period. During the course of the four day event many concert and informal performances of music and dance and other events such as craft and children’s activities run simultaneously. The style of performances presented are broad ranging and certainly not focused specifically or even principally on traditional musical performance. Each year the festival showcases performers from a specific state or territory (e.g. Tasmania, Victoria, the Northern Territory) often combined with additional themes, such as maritime heritage, working life or music of the Celtic nations. The 2005 National Folk Festival showcased the state of Tasmania and the theme the ‘Silk Road’.
Approaching this performance I had to establish a position in respect to the themed concert in which my performance was included. This theme of the ‘Silk Road’ was quite apparently little more than a clichéd exotic label to bring together a diverse range of ‘world music’ performances that generally related to the Middle East, Near East and Central Asia, though it was hardly structured beyond the thematic label. It clearly evoked notions of exotica, orientalism and musical tourism. While the organisation of this theme within the National Folk Festival was overtly tokenistic, my desire and decision to be involved, as a performer, was directed by the ostensible standing as a ‘national’ festival; the potential and opportunity to perform to an interested audience drawn from a large festival attendance (since people would have to chose to attend this performance rather than other concurrent events); my desire to (re)present what I considered a deep and rich musical culture that may not otherwise be represented; and the knowledge that Alevi figures of authority have considered cultural festivals as an acceptable place for the performance of ritual music outside the ritual context 302.

In undertaking this performance I necessarily conceived my performance as (re)presenting Alevi ritual music and that I could reasonably do so given my basic competence in performing the music and the knowledge that to do so in the festival setting was not likely to be controversial nor transgressive. However, it was evident to me that I was assuming a responsibility for the presentation of the music which my performance had to address. Thus I understood the need to construct a performance

302 Dertli Divani is against cem songs being sung in bars and taverns, where people lose control of themselves, but he has no issue with them being played at cultural festivals (personal communication, Ankara, July 2002). The National Folk Festival is an event where alcohol is available however the venue in which I was to perform was not part of the ‘wilder’ areas of the festival space.
that was, in structure, form and content, appropriately honest – and here I understand the meaning of ‘appropriate’ in its suggestion of the hermeneutic appropriation my performance would intend; while being understandably vulnerable to the self-serving sense of the concept of ‘appropriating’ as well. That is to say it would be of primary importance to reveal myself as a performer and interpreter of the songs with integrity and honest intent. My performance must, first and foremost, be demonstrative of the actualisation of the alien ‘text’ for me the performer in a manner that is emotionally, structurally and aesthetically honest, in which the world suggested is interpreted but not distorted.

I determined to present a performance derived from and centred on Alevi ritual music that would also extend beyond cem ritual music exclusively to deyiş that moved toward a broader interpretation of expressed Alevilik. Given the shortness of the allotted time – 25 minutes which would also include set-up time and change over from the previous performer – the possibility of giving full expression to this ambition was obviously limited. This rather pragmatic concern was one of the contributing factors in my decision, at the outset, to perform all the songs I chose without pause for explanation between the songs.

The decision to perform the songs without a break while having some impetus from the exigencies of the time constraints of a festival performance ‘slot’, also, and rather more importantly, arises from my observation of performances by Arif and Tolga Sağ, Musa Eroğlu, Erdal Erzincan and others. As I have demonstrated in my analysis of Tolga Sağ’s performance at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Banaz,

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303 As Ricoeur states: “interpretation brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar. This goal is attained only insofar as interpretation actualises the meaning of the text for the present reader” (Ricoeur 1998, 185).
structuring a performance in this manner engenders the potential for a rich interpretive expressive ‘text’. It also has the effect of suggesting a certain coherency to the constituent songs suggesting, to my mind, a more apposite evocation of the social, political and cultural world the performance imagines. In terms already discussed in respect to the Tolga Sağ performance, the entextualised performance can be interpreted as a text that can suggest meaning beyond the situated performance event. This I considered to be all the more important because, in the performance context, not only are the songs deprived of important ritual contexts but they are in most cases shortened, sometimes considerably so. There is also a ritual based context for this manner of performance whereby songs are commonly performed in groups. As previously noted, this can be seen in the performance of (usually) three or four duaz-i imam followed by deyiş and çuş havası in the early part of the cem. Finally, another motivating factor for this approach to performing the songs was the significant demand on me as a performer to be able to sustain an unbroken performance. Such a demand required my serious intent, sufficient practice to be able to do it and from this effort the consequent deeper understanding of the text and the performance aesthetics. It also, consequently, demanded of me, as an etic performer performing outside his native cultural and language context, an intense concentration during the performance. Ideally such concentration would be to an almost trance-like state that would focus my presence on the works and the performance as a palpable experiencing of this music that would be part of the performance experience for the audience.

In performing the songs without break I would also perform them without any prop or crib by way of scores or notes – that is, they must emerge from within me as a
competent and committed performer not as the intermediary between a score or script and the audience. This naturally left me open to significant failure if I lost my way, was distracted, forgot the words or broke a string, but it seemed to me that a hermeneutically genuine performance that could make claim to any degree of interpretive resonance must come from the innermost self such that the situated performance was effectively an engagement of the performer, the audience and the immanent presences emerging from the songs with as little intervening distraction or static as possible.

To take this further, my rehearsal and preparation for the performance focused on ‘getting’ – internalising – the songs and the continuity of the ‘set’. I consciously decided not to script my introduction, though I did decide that some introductory remarks were required since it would be most unlikely many, if any, people in the audience would have any knowledge of Alevi culture. While of course I thought about what and how much to say and I considered this important – at the very least for timing purposes – I felt this needed to be and (being part of the performance aesthetic) sound extemporary to support the effect of giving myself over entirely to the performance. Again I understood this to be a risky strategy – especially as I do not consider myself a good extemporising speaker in any context – yet felt it ought to be a challenge to deal with ‘in the moment’ of performance and to avoid sounding too ‘studied’ and scripted or even detached from the songs I would perform. It was also, to my mind, an approach that may itself engender new-understandings arising from my response to the performance moment. Again, this approach ran the risk of presenting deficient, distorting, misleading and unintended commentary and in the preparation and delivery of my performances this remains the something I am most
equivocal about and in my reflective estimation remains least convincing aspect of
the performances.

In selecting repertoire that would establish and centre the performance on the
foundational ritual music of Alevi expressive culture, I determined to include a range
of forms associated with the rituals services of the cem, especially and specifically
the duaz-ı imam, the tevhid, the semah and the mersiye (Kerbela ağıt). In working
with these forms it was not my intention to attempt anything approaching a re-
enactment of cem services. So, for example, I was not concerned to perform the
different forms in the order they would appear in the services of a cem. I also
determined that I would include works of the great and renowned Alevi aşk-s and to
bring the authority of their texts to the performance. I also sought to engage with
contemporary Alevi expressive culture and circumstance. To some degree this would
be taken care of by the very nature of the performance, influenced aesthetically by
contemporary performers, notably Arif and Tolga Sag, but also Muhlis Akarsu and
Yavuz Top in particular. This also situates my stylistic approach to a specific
performance aesthetic derived from the expressive style of influential performers
active in the 1980s and 1990s. The aesthetic and stylistic influence of these
performers still has resonance but they have also engendered new expressive ideals
and conventions, notably the virtuosic şelpe (finger style playing) that I did not
attempt to incorporate. Similarly I made no attempt to locate or impose on the deyiş
(mersiye) attributed to Hatayi (that I would begin the set with) ideas of nostalgia or
historic performance practice as an ancient or ‘sixteenth century’ work\textsuperscript{304}. With the

\textsuperscript{304} I have never detected a motivation towards or sense of historic performance practice in Alevi
music in popular culture or Turkish folk music generally. Even when artists have re-introduced
reputed older forms of the bağlama (saz), as with Erkan Öğur’s promotion of the kopuz or Ulaş
choice of repertoire my intention was to move in a deliberate direction, from the ritual esoteric to the socio-political exoteric through a transition to two *deyiş* not associated with ritual and a song with an associative connection to the riots and deaths at the 1993 Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Sivas.

In selecting repertoire I was attentive to the musical qualities of the songs choosing those I considered would be attractive and accessible to an audience not familiar with this music. After all, I understood my own initial interest in Alevi expressive culture was overtly musical, including in respect to the musical sound of the sung lyric even if the lyric was not semantically understood at that time. Thus I was conscious of the entertainment requirements of the performance; however it is also true that the effectiveness of my interpretive and expressive ambitions of the performance would naturally be enhanced by a selection of songs that had the best prospects of being attractive and interesting on first hearing.

### 4.7.4 The performance setting and performance described

The venue for the performance, called the ‘Trocadero’, was as an intimate indoor venue, with a capacity of around 200, with a low and wide stage around which the audience was placed. The venue included a sound system and basic lighting. The concert, billed as the ‘Silk Road Concert 1’ included four performances, two small ensembles, one opening the concert and one closing, and two solo performers in between the two ensembles. My performance was the third of the four acts and was followed by a group performing Greek and Sephardic music.

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Özdemir’s use of the dede *saz* or ruzba, this is associated with innovative and forward looking techniques and styles.
I had no influence over the programming and was very surprised to see that the performer before me was in fact a musician from the local (Canberra) Alevi community. This person was known to me though I was not a close acquaintance and had never performed with him, formally or informally, and he had not performed at the festival previously. I considered the programming to be unfortunate in some respects, though I was aware that our approaches to the performance would be quite different, and I did have concerns that an hour of an ‘esoteric’ music by solo performers to an audience unfamiliar with it might prove a challenge in retaining the audience’s attention.  

The Alevi performer who preceded me performed primarily his own compositions, which were in deyiş form and which he had recorded on CD which he was offering for sale. He did not speak to the audience during the performance, even though he was a very competent English speaker. In addition he took the rather extraordinary step of playing along during the performance to his pre-recorded music which had an odd result in being quite often out of synchronisation and generally out of tune. As I waited to the side of the stage I was aware of a rather bemused and restless audience. The effect on my preparation for the performance was to consider if I needed to say something about the music that has preceded me or indeed whether I should include more by way of introductory remarks than I intended. While somewhat unsettling for my preparation, I determined that I would approach the performance essentially as I had planned.

305 With many venues operating at the same time at the festival it is typical for festival goers to move from one venue to another during concert programs.
I will now discuss each of the songs performed in some detail looking at the reason for their inclusion, associative aspects that inform my interpretive objective and observations on the actual performance.

I began with the mersiye or Kerbela ağıt (lament) attributed to Şah Hatayi beginning Bugün matem günü geldi. This lament is sometimes performed very freely rhythmically, however my performance is influenced by the recording of Arif Sağ (1990) and, aesthetically perhaps more so, by the performance of Gülcihan Koç at the Bin Yıllık Türküsü (Song of a Thousand Years) event in Cologne in May 2000. There were practical and structural considerations for beginning with this song. As a slower song, performed with some freedom in the rhythm, it would allow me to settle into the performance and allow any sound issues such as the balance between voice and bağlama to be more easily settled by the sound mixing engineer since I could extend or insert instrumental preludes and interludes. It also established the dynamic, tonal and modal marker that I would be able to refer to when transitioning to the second phase of the set. More importantly, this lament gave me the opportunity to begin the performance with an emotively measured delivery. Moreover, through the ritualised expressive remembrance of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn it introduced the themes of ehlibeyt (the Prophet Muhammad’s family), martyrdom and lament that are central elements of Alevi ritual and expressive culture.

The next song was the first of two divaz-i imam that I performed. The text is attributed to the aşılık Muhammed and musically is associated with the Kıisas (Urfa)

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306 As I had witnessed at a cem in the Karacaahmet Dergahı in Istanbul in June 2002 where this mersiye was performed by the dede Kemal Uğurlu.
307 Though I performed only three of the five verses recorded by Sağ.
tradition, Dertli Divani usually being credited with its wider exposure. This song introduces musical sounds that are more identifiably Alevi in character, with a compelling rhythm in 8/8 metre with a rhythmic structure of 3+2+3 beats, short and repetitive thematic phrases, a descending stepwise tonality in three sections without overt resolution, with a brief rhythmic variation in the central section.

It is a striking piece musically, especially for people unfamiliar with Alevi music, and part of my purpose in including this song and including it at the beginning of the set was, hopefully, to capture the audience’s attention with its singular and memorable melodic and rhythmic characteristics. The effect of the melody, tonal movement and rhythm is accentuated by the effect of responding with the invocation “Hu” at the end of each line. The effect is somewhat diminished in the performance by the fact that I had to sing both the line and the response – though I was encouraged by the fact that Tolga Sağ had been required to do the same in his performance I had witnessed at Banaz in 2002.

Since the duaz finishes in a suspended manner on the semi-flattened second note of the scale, with the tonic note of the bağlama düzeni (tuning) implied but never reached, and the chord fretted including the semi-flattened sixth note, a natural transition was facilitated to the opening of the Urfa semahi (Bugün yastı gördüm) which begins with a run from the seventh note to the sixth and back to the seventh. I decided to include this piece as an instrumental extract only. This is sometimes known as the Nenni semahi because of the repeated phrase “nenni de nenni nenni /

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308 The same duaz-i imam that I have notated in my earlier discussion on the duaz-i imam (section 4.3) and in respect to Tolga Sağ’s performance.

309 Compelling in the sense of forward movement as well being engaging.

310 The descending stepwise melody over a small range is curiously suggestive, to me, of the early Medieval Matins hymn of praise and thanksgiving, the Te Deum.
has nenni nenni / dost nenni nenni” which I chose to sing in the performance. In
doing this as (essentially) an instrumental piece my aim was to focus on the musical
qualities of the semah with its complex and changing rhythm and melodic range of
an octave and a third. It also allowed me to include part of a semah within the time
constraints of the performance; and I also saw it as a way of structurally keeping the
two duaz-ı imam in the set connected since vocally the second duaz text follows the
first, with an instrumental ‘breath’ between.

The second duaz-ı imam has a text attributed to Virani, one of the seven great Alevi
ozan-s. My performance again derives from the recording of this song by Arif Sağ
(1989) and from my learning and informal performing of the song with my teacher
Eyyup Aydoğmuş. Curiously Sağ, and the version I followed, omits one verse so that
this invocation of the twelve imams is demonstrably deficient. 311 While I
subsequently discovered and learned the missing verse 312, at the time of this
performance I only knew the incomplete Sağ version. This song is associated with
aşık Nesimi Çimen 313 which was a further motivation for including the song since it
establishes a context to which two later songs in the performance relate. The song
also has attractive musical features with a fast 7/8 metre and chorus like invocation,
picking up from the earlier duaz, of “Hu ya Ali / Hu ya Ali / Hu ya Ali / Hu”.

I completed the selection of ritual deyiş with the tevhid, Bugün bize pir geldi, with a
text attributed to Kul Himmet (Üstadım). The performance of this tevhid is once
again inspired by Arif Sağ, in this case his recording on the album İnsan Olmaya

311 Reproductions of this text on the Internet perpetuate this truncated version.
312 Dertli Divani and Veliyettin Ulusoy provided me with the missing verse in 2008.
313 A recording of the complete duaz is available on Kalan Müzik’s two CD set of archival recordings
of Nesimi Çimen (2003).
Geldim (Sağ 1983). As mentioned previously, it is one of the most recorded of the ritual songs with Sağ’s recording opening the way for commercial recordings by other renowned singers such as İbrahim Tatlıses, Nuray Hafıftaş and Sabahat Akkıraz. My performance reduces the verses to a mere three, making it overtly deyiş like rather than retaining the ritual qualities of endurance and repetition. To address this in part, I placed this at the centre of my performance and as the ultimate number of the ritual pieces. This is also in recognition of the tevhid as one of the climactic services of the cem service. I also included the invocation – Ali pirim Ali şah etc. – at the end to stress its ritual origin despite this truncated nature of my performance. Musically the tevhid introduces a common duple rhythm that I expected a general festival going audience would more readily engage with and, perhaps find it a relief after the complex and changing rhythms of the preceding songs – again with the purpose of locating this piece as a high point in the set. Further, it introduced a new scale to the performance with the flattened fifth and major sixth – the yanık kerem tetrachords – a characteristic that I hoped would enhance its effect and calibrate the performance with the introduction of new musical interest.

Having presented a body of ritual songs to establish this as the foundational or central theme of Alevi expressive culture my intention was to transition to deyiş with socio-political associations. In the structure of the set and given my intent to perform without break, I needed to transition from the rhythmic tevhid to first deyiş of the second phase of the performance, Aşık Sıdkı’s Ayrılık hasretlik. To do this I played a short improvised bridge on the bağlama re-establishing again the standard kerem dizi (scale) and tonal range of the opening Kerbela ağıt. The performance approach to this deyiş further referenced the opening Kerbela ağıt in having a discernable
rhythmic quality but somewhat freely delivered. This is accentuated in this *deyiş* though the metric change in the song alternating between 8/8 (3+2+3) and 7/8 (2+2+3). The song is a wistful lament on the absence of the singer’s beloved who calls on the morning wind to delivery news of his/her beloved. Sıdkı was an influential *aşık*, particularly beloved of Dertli Divani who has included ritual songs from Sıdkı on his recordings – thus my thought was to draw a connection with the Urfa pieces. My version of the song comes once again from Arif Sağ’s 1983 cassette recording *İnsan Olmaya Geldim* on which Sağ acknowledges the source as Nesimi Çimen. Thus through the associations of the persona of *aşık*-s and performers I sought to form connections with the source community and culture giving interpretive impetus and potential to the performance of this song through my understanding of these immanent qualities. This song becomes pivotal in this performance because it suggests the same world from which the ritual music that I began with comes, through associative elements of geography and the *aşık* Sıdkı, and it affirms and acknowledges the individual performative and aesthetic influence of Arif Sağ. Through further associative elements it re-introduces Nesimi Çimen connecting, again, to the ritual songs through association with the second duaz and pointing to the song that will follow. The associative elements can be developed further through the association of Sıdkı and Pir Sultan Abdal and the *deyiş* Gelin *canlar bir olalım*[^314] and point towards the climax of the performance and the Pir Sultan Abdal *deyiş Ötme bülbül ötme*.

[^314]: *Gelin canlar bir olalım* although inextricably associated with Pir Sultan Abdal may have found its association with Pir Sultan through Aşık Ali İzzet and some consider Aşık Sıdkı’s version the original. See Gül (1984, 199-200), Gölpinarlı and Boratav (1991, 78) and Aslanoğlu (1997b, 492).
The next song I included, Yarım için ölüyorum, stands out for a number of reasons. It is the only song in türkü form that I performed and its attribution is ambiguous. The line Cafer de sevdalı kuldu pahası bir paslı puldu suggests Cafer as a mahlas, although the identity of this poet is uncertain. Nevertheless, it remains a significant song for me and indeed it is one of the two songs that appear in all four performances under discussion. Again my referential performance is that of Arif Sağ on İnsan Olmaya Geldim and like a number of songs on that recording the source is Nesimi Çimen. After Çimen’s death in the Madımak conflagration in Sivas in 1993 the song has assumed poignant and emotive associations and resonances as I witnessed in Tolga Sağ’s performance at Banaz in 2002 which I have discussed above. My performance follows Tolga Sağ’s lead in altering the refrain to include the word ‘yobaz’ (bigot) on the repeat to intensify recognition of the tragedy – and more specifically the bigotry that motivated and allowed the tragedy – which this song evokes. I included this in my earlier three song ‘Sonic Circus’ performance in 2002 and, as at that time, I introduced this deyiş with an instrumental reference to Dertli Divani’s Altım üstüm kaç kuruşluk. The 10/8 timing of the that deyiş with beat units of 3+3+2+2 provides a lifting of the dynamic of the performance as the penultimate song and incorporates short repetitive and rhythmic Alevi melodic motifs which are also echoed in the song. During the performance of this song my tezene (plectrum) split just before the instrumental break preceding the second verse which caused me to falter. In turning the tezene around in my figures while continuing to play I lost concentration and stumbled over the second line of the second verse,

315 Text and translation is included in section (4.6.3) discussing the performance of Tolga Sağ.
316 I have not been able to match the lyric with any of the few and mostly obscure Cafers that are mentioned in the literature. Cafer Usta, Aşık Müdami’s master, from Ardahan for example is one possibility, though not a convincing one.
317 Which also connects it to the great Alevi masterpiece Ezel bahar olmayınca (the words attributed to Hatayi) from the singing of Aşık Daimi. The same melodic material is also used for one version of Pir Sultan Abdal’s deyiş Yürü bre Hızır Paşa as can be heard in Emre Saltık’s full voiced performance of the song on the collective recording Pir Sultan Dostları (Various 2004).
actually repeating the first line. The unsettling effect of the splitting tezene and subsequent disturbance to my concentration also caused some hesitation in the lyrics in the next and final song and the need for me to consciously re-focus my concentration.

The final song selected for the performance is the one other song that appears in all the performances I am discussing, Pir Sultan Abdal’s Ötme bülbül ötme. This is certainly one of the most performed and recorded deyiş attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal. The importance of Pir Sultan Abdal in Alevi expressive culture (and my understanding of this) means that I could hardly conceive of a performance of Alevi song that did not include a deyiş attributed to him, that it must be situated at a dynamic highpoint of the performance and be a deyiş that would have the musical qualities to convey a climactic finish to the performance. Its performance associations touch most of the influential performers of Alevi deyiş. It is strongly associated with Yavuz Top, Aşık Daimi, Feyzullah Çınar, Hasret Gültekin, Livaneli and was a showpiece at the Bin Yılın Türküsü event in Cologne in May 2000. Yavuz Top’s innovative arrangement of the deyiş on his Deyişler 1 recording, amalgamating two versions of the song – that associated with Daimi and Çınar together the version collected by Muzaffer Sarısözen from the Divriği region with its larger musical range – produced a composite version that has continued to be popular, often as a platform for virtuosic displays, more noticeably after it was re-arranged for the Bin Yillın Türküsü event by Zafer Gündoğdu. My version opens and closes with a somewhat clumsy and perhaps injudicious reference to this composite version while the bridges performed between the songs were intended to evoke the version of somewhat less
artifice and more direct expression recorded by Feyzullah Çınar, originally in Paris in 1971 (Çınar 1995).

4.7.5 ‘Sonic Circus’ performance, Sydney, 10 November 2002

This performance was the first that I consciously conceived as informing this interpretive study of Alevi deyiş. Being part of an event for postgraduate students at the University of Western Sydney my involvement was the result of my newly established postgraduate candidature. My purpose was to present in a succinct manner, given the ten minutes alloted to my performance, some essential characteristics of the subject and expressive culture I intended focusing on in my study project. Certainly, at this time I did not conceive of presenting a thesis but rather my objective was to present, in ten minutes of performance, Alevi expressive culture as a worthy, valid, rich, engaging and neglected subject for scholarly consideration.

The audience for the performance included for the most part academics, other postgraduate students and their friends. It was held at the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Eugene Goosens Theatre in Sydney and audio recording of the performances was an important consideration of the event. In this performance context I understood my audience to be my thesis supervisors and other academic staff and, to a lesser degree, my fellow postgraduate students. I also understood that the audience for the recording of the performance may be a more influential consideration for the development and execution of the performance than the audience in the performance space, although in some cases they will be the same. Nevertheless, unlike the other performances discussed here, even those that were
recorded, I needed to take into consideration the anticipated artefact of this performance. More than any other of the performances discussed this performance I was cognisant of, or perhaps more correctly more focused on, the scholarly endeavour.

While the Sonic Circus event aimed to present diverse and mostly musical, performances – which could be interpreted as an emphasis on the performances and performed works per se – I determined that my performance would require some introductory contextualising explanation given my assumption that Alevi culture would not be familiar to the audience. Within two minutes and thirty seconds of introductory comments I mentioned a number of issues and ideas associated with Alevi culture with the intention of inspiring interest in the songs to follow while giving the outline of suggested contextual concepts for the audience to be aware when hearing the songs. So, I mention in quick succession the concepts of minority, secret ritual, heterodox belief, persecution, opening up of expressive culture, esoteric beliefs, Pir Sultan Abdal as the greatest bard, Pir Sultan’s hanging and the personal element involved in this as well as the social, the richness of the tradition (many songs), the Pir Sultan Abdal festival and the reworking or re-interpreting of lyrics in contemporary performance. This introduction was deliberately intended to put as many of these concepts as possible into the performance arena while obviously not being able to expand or explain any of the issues raised in detail. As such, the introduction was not intended as a lesson or explanation, but rather as an enticement for the audience to accept and have some sense of the complexity and the immanent qualities of the songs I would perform. It was also the attempt of a performer to
advertise and assert the performance and the performance material as both intriscally and overtly interesting.

In the Sonic Circus performance I established the approach I would take to subsequent performances and indeed two of the songs included in this performance appear in all the performances I discuss as the final or penultimate works. Also, the way in which I structured the three songs as a unit without break would stand as a model for subsequent performances.

This performance had a purpose of establishing Pir Sultan Abdal as the central figure of Alevi lyric song tradition, so two of the three songs performed are deyiş attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal.

The first song, Dolap, beginning with the lyric ‘Ali Ali deyip ne inilersin / İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin’ evokes a mystical tradition associated with Yunus Emre while bringing to the fore the central Alevi identity of the Imam Ali. The lyric as I performed it also evokes Husayn (and his martyrdom) as the possible cause of the waterwheel’s lamenting: Yoksa Hüseyinden (dost) haber mi geldi / İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin (Or is it because of the news of Husayn / You moan waterwheel what trouble is eating you?) In the fuller texts Muhammad and Hasan are also recalled318. The opening invocation of ‘Ali Ali’ provides a structural connection to the invocation in the refrain of the final song Ötme bülbül ötme.

318 The full text and translation of this deyiş are included in the Translations chapter, 5.5.2.
From a musical perspective I considered Dolap allowed me to emphasise that this performance would not be about Turkish music as exotica or cliché. The melody suggests the major scale with arrangement on the bağlama emphasising the major third in the first part and a leap to the fifth in the second. The melody falls to the third below the apparent tonic – actually the implied tonic being the home tone of the bağlama in bağlama düzeni – suggesting some ambiguity and un-resolved aspects of the melody, though this does not detract from the evident strong major scale tonality. This tonality, I felt, established my performance of Alevi song as being as somewhat removed from the ‘oriental sound’ and tonality of, for example, the hicaz (hijaz) scale with its flattened second and major third more readily associated with the exotica of oriental dance. I hoped that this major scale tonality would, in short, be surprising to the audience.

The transition to the second song, Yarım için ölüyorum, was made using an instrumental reference to Dertli Divani’s Altım üstüm kaç kuruşluk that I have discussed above in respect to the National Folk Festival performance. Besides providing a necessary transition from Dolap to Yarım için ölüyorum this instrumental break was intended to demonstrate the importance, in its own right, of the bağlama in the performance of this music. This instrumental transition uses specific techniques that colour the melody that can only be effectively achieved on the bağlama tuned to the bağlama düzeni. It was also intended to suggest the possibility of virtuosity on the instrument – not necessarily in my performance but in as far as my performance acknowledged that of influential virtuosos, notably Arif Sağ whose recordings of Dolap, Yarım için ölüyorum and (to a lesser degree) Altım üstüm kaç kuruşluk were models for my performance.
In my introductory remarks I hinted at the importance of Tolga Sağ’s peformance of Yarım için ölüyorum at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal Festival on my own performance of this türkü. In my performance at Sonic Circus I was very conscious and deliberate in noting and performing the substitution of the word cahil (ignorant) replacing it with yobaz (bigot) in the first verse and ahmak (stupid, fool) in the second following Sağ’s performance closely as this seem to me then to be a signal interpretive action in its minimal directness, clarity and reliance on associative understanding.

The transition to the third and final song Ötme bülbül ötme, was more difficult to achieve given the strong rhythmic quality of Yarım için ölüyorum and the limited range of Ötme bülbül ötme and its rythmic quality achieved through a specific tezene (plectrum) technique. I have found this transition to be a challenge in all subsequent performances and, unlike the transition into Yarım için ölüyorum, I have not settled on a standard means of achieving this. For this performance I used instrumental phrases derived from Aşık Daimi’s Kandilden içeri. This allowed for a less abrupt transition from the rhythmic qualities of Yarım için ölüyorum while in effect ‘bookending’ the song with musical themes I associated with two of the most influential and important Alevi aşık-s of modern times in their ability to combine a deep connection with Alevi ritual culture, social awareness and contemporary performance culture, Dertli Divani and Aşık Daimi. In seeking a coherence for my performance and the resolution of practical considerations such as the transition from one song to the next, I found the incorporation of associative elements such as the referencing of expressively meaningful musical themes, as the means to construct a
performance and this provided a structure on which to assert an interpretively conceived approach to performance.

4.7.6 ‘Sivas anma’ performance, Parramatta (Sydney), 28 June 2008

This performance differs from the other three performances discussed as it formed part of an Alevi event at which the audience was entirely Alevi, Turkish or Kurdish. The event was held to remember the tragedy of the 1993 Pir Sultan Abdal Festival held in the city of Sivas during which thirty-seven people were killed when the Madımak hotel was besieged and set alight by a religiously inspired mob. The main part of the remembrance (anma) event involved a talk given by visiting scholar Erdoğan Çınar and the screening of a documentary film on the Sivas tragedy. It also included a solemn but emotionally charged and ritualised reading of the names of those who died in the Madımak hotel and began with a number of musical performances including my own.

I was the only participant in this event who was not an Alevi nor indeed Turkish or Kurdish. My interest in Alevi culture was known to the organisers and I was acquainted to a limited degree with some of the people involved having attended other functions, cem-s and social gatherings where I had on occasion performed deyiş. I understood my invitation to participate to be based on the organisers' perceptions of my interest in and sympathy to Alevi culture and their confidence in my competence to perform deyiş that would be suitable for the event. I also understood the invitation to me as a gesture of the Sydney Alevi community trying to reach outside the Alevi community and that my involvement would symbolise and in some way actualise a positive response to this intent, even if it did not result in – nor
intend – a broader non-Alevi audience in attendance. This performance, then, presented quite daunting challenges and responsibilities for me and the greater possibility of failure given the sensitivity of the context and the knowledge – linguistic, socio-political and cultural – of the audience.

In constructing the performance for this event I considered it important to establish my position in respect to the community. However, I decided that I would not include any speech or introductory remarks as this would require me to venture into territory, linguistic and socio-political, that I was not fully at ease with. Also, I understood the event to be weighty with speeches and commentary and that my involvement was predicated on my performance of deyiş; therefore I approached my contribution as one that was focused entirely around the musical performance.

In order to establish a position in respect to Alevi culture I began with the aşık Sefil Selimi’s deyiş İnsana muhabbet duydum duyali since Aşık Selimi was not himself Alevi but is highly regarded by Alevis for his deyiş that express great understanding of and sympathy to Alevi culture. The deyiş İnsana muhabbet duydum duyali is among his finest and certainly one of his most renowned expressions of his position. In opening with this song I was identifying with the lyric content and the position of Aşık Selimi as identifying as neither strictly an insider nor outsider, though certainly someone who sought to understand and establish empathy.

I followed this deyiş with Mevlam gül diyerek iki göz vermiş by Aşık Mahzuni Şerif. Mahzuni had died shortly before my first field trip to attend the Pir Sultan Abdal

319 I have discussed this deyiş earlier in the section concerning the mahlas taking tradition (3.3.8).
Festival in Banaz in 2002 and selecting this deyiş was in part a homage to this great poet and musician. I had in fact visited his gravesite on Çilehane hill in the town of Hacibektaş in July 2002 where he was recently buried; and Tolga Sağ had also performed this deyiş in his performance at the Pir Sultan Abdal festival I discussed previously. The deyiş directly relates a position of awareness of social injustice to the identity of Pir Sultan Abdal, using the plurality of that identity as an inclusive symbol. In performing this deyiş I hoped to demonstrate my awareness of the social and political issues and concerns that coalesce for Alevi around the identity of Pir Sultan Abdal and assert the expression of inclusive empathy in this lyric – in some respects we are all a community of, or respectful to, Pir Sultanlar (Pir Sultans) when we express our empathy and understanding.

The final two songs included in this short performance have been discussed previously – Yarım için ölüyorum and the Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş Ötme bülbül ötme. As with the other performances discussed I used the instrumental reference to Dertli Divani’s Altım üstüm kaç kuruşluk as the transitional device from the Mahzuni deyiş to Yarım için ölüyorum. The musician prior to me had in fact given a performance on a balta saz that had belonged, I was told, to Aşık Nesimi Çimen, one of the victims of the Madımak events. Though I was unaware of this programming, or even the participation of this musician, when planning my performance, my inclusion of Yarım için ölüyorum, a song associated with Çimen, was clearly apposite. This song also allowed me to demonstrate some competence on the bağlama and also to express immanent understandings through the previously mentioned substitution of yobaz for cahil in the türkü’s refrain. I hoped to demonstrate that I not only understood the associations of this particular folksong, but I also understood the
general perception held of the perpetrators of the Sivas massacre as bigots in opposition to the freedom of expression and association (of love) that the song expresses.

I considered it important to include (and end my performance) with a deyîş from Pir Sultan Abdal. By the time of this performance my inclusion of Ötme bülüböl ötme following Yarim için ölüyorum was largely fixed in my performance repertoire. However, specifically for this performance, this lyric includes the poinant and pointed line in the final verse, Hakka pek seviğim için âsîldim highlighting Pir Sultan Abdal’s martyrdom for his love of right, truth and justice (all meanings inherent in ‘hak’) and consequently its resonances in regards to the tragedy remembered at this event.

4.7.7 ‘Mystic Music and the Memory of Martyrs: an introduction to Alevi music’ National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2 November 2005

Of the four performance discussed this was the least satisfactory and least successful in achieving the objectives of interpretive integrity and coherence. The more ambitious objective of the performance as ‘an introduction to Alevi music’, to an audience which I anticipated would not be familiar with Alevis or Alevi culture, resulted in a more decontextualised or, in hermeneutical terms, explicated presentation. In part this seems the result of this performance requiring me to act overtly as an interpreter rather than act out interpretation through the process of hermeneutical appropriation. There is a sense of the ‘documentary’ about the approach that suggests a performance based more on ‘pre-understandings’ and explicating endeavours rather than interpretive understanding.
There were a number of factors in regard to this performance that distinguish it from the other performances discussed including:

1. The presentation as a seminar rather than specifically a performance and so a large part of the time was given over to talking.
2. The advertising of the performance with a themed title.
3. The performance of songs broken by explanations rather than as a continuous unity.
4. The use of PowerPoint slides to provide visual support to the performance.
5. The context of my status as, primarily, a staff member of the National Library of Australia.

This event formed part of a spring program of seminars and performances at the National Library in 2005. I was an employee of the Library in a managerial role and my interest in Turkish culture and music was generally known to the senior management. It was suggested by the then Director-General of Library that I should present one of the spring program seminars. All these events were introduced by senior staff of the Library and my performance was introduced by Ms Pamela Gatenby an Assistant Director-General at the Library and head of the Division in the Library in which I worked. Ms Gatenby’s introduction (and closing remarks) emphasised my role in the Library, that is to say a role not related to the seminar I was presenting. In some respects this suggested something of a dilettantish rather than authoritative position.

As this seminar was intended for the general public I decided that a broad and introductory scope was appropriate and this intent is evident in the sub-title “an introduction to Alevi music”. The headline title of the performance clearly aimed at
attracting interest in the few words permitted to fit within the advertising brochures, using catch words of ‘mystic’, ‘music’ and ‘martyrs’.

Like the other performances discussed I gave particular care and consideration to the program of deviş I performed. My purpose was to move through the principle contexts of Alevi music performance beginning with ritual cem music through to popular interpretations that stress universal and humanist qualities of Alevi lyric culture and finally onto the political context of Alevi song composition and performance.

The venue for the performance was the National Library of Australia’s theatre, a moderately sized room with tiered seating used for a range of events from conferences to film presentations. It was held during lunch time hours and was informal, encouraging people to bring their lunch with them. While the performance was recorded by the Library’s audio technology staff, the sound system was not fully utilised during the performance. One ambient microphone provided some very low level support, however the concert was essentially acoustic.

The facilities of the theatre allowed me to make use of a PowerPoint presentation to project slides providing visual support including translations of terms, translations or summaries of the song texts and photographs and other visual imagery. This was all managed by me on stage.

The full text advertising the performance in the National Library of Australia’s events program was: “Mystic Music and the Memory of Martyrs. This presentation includes a performance, using voice and baglama (Turkish lute), of ritual, philosophical and social songs of the Turkish Alevi bards. The Library’s Paul Koerbin will provide an introduction to a 500-year-old lyrical and musical tradition largely unknown in the English speaking world”.

The slides used for the presentation are included in Appendix B.
Following the introductions by Ms Gatenby, I began with an eight minute introduction which ranged across issues, concepts and terminology that was intended to give an impression of Alevi culture. Ten minutes into the seminar I began the first musical performance playing three shortened cem *deyiş* – a tevhid, a mersiye and a *duaz-i imam*. These three songs were performed without break but were ordered so as to present a moderately paced rhythmic song followed by a slower song with a freer rhythm and ending with a highly rhythmic fast paced song. That is, they were not ordered in the manner they might appear in a cem – indeed they were in reverse order. All these *deyiş* were included in the National Folk Festival performance discussed above.

While not presented in a manner that could be said to reflect cem practice the opening *deyiş*ler were intended to present music (songs) associated with the central ritual practice of Alevi culture; that is, to establish this as the foundation of Alevi culture. This objective was a factor influencing the decision to perform three (albeit significantly shortened) cem *deyiş* as a unity so as to establish a foundational weight for the cem music rather than present merely a selection of individual songs.

The next phase of the seminar was intended to demonstrate the sophistication of traditional Alevi music while introducing the issue of folklore as national song and state censorship. The *Turna semahi* from the Divriği *aşık* Mahmut Erdal has long been part of the standard Turkish Radio and Television folk orchestra and choir repertoire. I have mentioned elsewhere in this thesis the circumstances surrounding the form in which this semah was incorporated into the standard national repertoire.
In performing this as a separate piece I sought mainly to highlight the musical complexity in the changes of metre and tempo. The semah provided me the opportunity to discuss, briefly, some basic musical aspects including scales and the tuning of the bağlama.

The next phase of the performance sought to introduce the interpretation of Alevi mystical lyrics as essentially humanistic. The deyiş I performed, İnsan olmaya geldim, also allowed me to say something of my own journey towards an interest in Alevi music and culture since it was a recording of this deyiş that was the initial inspiration for my deeper interest in Alevi music and culture. In introducing the deyiş I highlighted the fact that this deyiş was given its musical arrangement and an adaptation (re-interpretation) of the words by the renowned and influential performer Arif Sağ. Part of my intent here was to give an example of Alevi deyiş interpreted as popular song with a suggestion of universal, humanistic, themes.

Having moved through ritual music, national and popular uses of Alevi music, the next phase raised the political aspects of Alevi culture and musical expression. I introduced the political context for Alevi deyiş through the paring (now standard in most of my performances) of Yarım için ölüyorum and the Pir Sultan Abdal’s Ötme bülbül ötme. This allowed me to say something of the 1993 Sivas massacre and project some images of the conflagration and iconography of the events. As with previous performances discussed, although perhaps more overtly here given the general audience, Yarım için ölüyorum allowed me to demonstrate how a subtle change or emphasis in the lyric can evoke profounder associative resonances.
The final song that I performed, *Fırıldak adam*, was chosen to demonstrate a number of the immanent qualities in Alevi song. As a song written by one of the most renowned and prolific modern *aşık*, Mahzuni Şerif, I intended it as an example of the continuation of the *aşık* tradition into the present day. I showed an image of Mahzuni’s grave on the sacred hill above the town of Hacıbektaş to demonstrate the reverence and regard with which such *aşık*-s as Mahzuni are held. I connected this composed Alevi song to Anatolian folk music generally by preceding the song with a short instrumental version of the folksong *Pançar pezik değil mi* which is associated with the Hacıbektaş area322. Finally I chose this song as it demonstrates in three verses the ability to effectively incorporate in a succinct lyric form foundational Alevi concepts and perspectives, universalising and humanistic objectives and contemporary Alevi life and political issues. Much of this is achieved through the invocation of names (Husayn, Hacı Bektaş, Kerbela, Mervan, Mahzuni) and concepts associated with Alevi ritual and belief (*çem, ikrar, lokma, kul, düşkün*). Mahzuni’s song is about the appropriation of such culture, particularly by politicians, for self-interested and essentially dishonourable purposes. While clearly he is talking of Alevi cultural events he includes reference to ‘Mevlana’ (that is, Rumi and the Mevlevi, an orthodox tarikat) which widens the criticism from the purely sectarian. In my performance on the repeat of the line: *Hacı Bektaş Mevlana da işin ne* (what business have you with Hacı Bektaş and Mevlana?) I substitute ‘*Pir Sultan* da’ for ‘*Mevlana* da’ thus incorporating my own interpretative position with a subtle variation in the lyric323.

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322 This song can be found with explanatory data in Şimşek and Palacı (2001, 746-749) although it entered my repertoire through my lessons with my bağlama teacher.
323 The text and translation of Mahzuni’s deyiş can be found in the Translations chapter, section 5.12.1.
Musically *Fırdıdak adam* provided something of a change of tonality being in the misket dizi (scale) with its fully flattened second and minor third and the melody has a strong duple metre rhythm. I also attempted to incorporate the rather full arrangement from Mahzuni’s recording into my solo bağlama performance. I considered the song musically to be more readily accessible or engaging to an audience unfamiliar with Alevi music or indeed Anatolian folk music because of the rhythm, a tonality more akin to western scales and the incorporation of more instrumental components with the introductory reference to *Pançar pezik değil mi* and the arrangements between verses. I sought to leave the audience with a musical – performative – impression.

This performance was perhaps more revealing of the process of explication rather than the experience of interpretation. The audience may have learned more through this approach but experienced less; since, for me, it was a less engaged, less focused and a less coherent performance and in that respect it was also less expressively honest. By describing contexts and associations the immanent qualities were somehow more limited and perhaps compromised in their explicitness – at least to me – and the performance therefore less able to suggest meaning. An interpretive performance should endeavour to invite the continued process of interpretation and this seemed less possible in this performance. It was a performance that lacked the possibility of entextualisation – to exist as an interpretive text. So, while the audience may have been engaged – at least I hope so – the performer was less so. I may have presented as someone who knew something about the music and was able to competently perform it, but it is less likely that I was convincing as someone for whom the music was part of the emergent self or someone for whom the mysterious
names summoned in the mahlas of the lyrics actually revealed their wellsprings of immanence.

4.8 Summary: the deyiş and mahlas from experiences to new understandings

In this chapter I have analysed the experiencing of Alevi deyiş from three perspectives of public performance: commercial recordings, live performance at a contextualised festival and my own performances. In analysing these recordings and performances I have identified interpretive strategies that reveal the use of the immanent and associative qualities associated with the deyiş, and particularly the mahlas, to suggest a world of Alevi cultural identity asserting and substantiating its authoritative lineage and networks while engaging creatively and interpretively with broader communities. In Arif Sağ’s emergence as a virtuosic and influential exponent of Alevi music as exemplified in his solo and ensemble recordings in the 1980s, I identified a strategy to interpret and present Alevi deyiş as the fundamental form of Anatolian Turkish traditional song not as a marginalised political form. In addition, I suggested that the series of Muhabbet recordings provide an encapsulated experience of Alevi expressive culture in its presentation of a corpus of song established through the dialogue of individual performers and the associations of the thematic content, lyric personas and personal experience they engage with.

In my analysis of the performance of Tolga Sağ at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival I revealed a masterful interpretive performance understood not only in the context of the festival but, through its interpretive coherence, as an entexualised experience that again revealed a richly associative world of Alevi culture and personal identity,
experience and creativity. Sağ’s performance demonstrated the potential for the performance experience, when understood and engaged with hermeneutically, to suggest new understandings and reveal worlds beyond the context of the performance. I have suggested that the concise communicative device of the mahlas understood together with the thematic content of the lyric and the personal experiences of the performer and the audience (collectively and individually) provide the key to such interpretation and understanding.

In reflecting critically upon my own performances of Alevi deyiş I have aimed to reveal the method and application of my interpretive understanding of the world suggested by immanent qualities of the songs. I have suggested that the extent of interpretive success, in the sense of revealing the level of personal appropriation and new understandings, is dependent upon the ability to move beyond explication and explanation to an experiential integrity and coherency.
5. **TRANSLATIONS: ‘AN EXTREME CASE OF HERMENEUTICAL DIFFICULTY’**

5.1 **Introduction**

Gadamer states that “every translator is an interpreter” and “the fact that a foreign language is being translated means that this is simply an extreme case of hermeneutical difficulty” (Gadamer 2005, 389). In approaching the Alevi deyiş and the mahlas convention from a perspective of hermeneutics I am accepting that, again in Gadamer’s words, “the horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer originally had in mind or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed” (Gadamer 2005, 396). The textualisation of the oral tradition, as we have seen in the case of Pir Sultan Abdal (and Kul Himmet) appears for the most part compelled, if not necessarily to conclusion, by the authorial identity (and concomitant historical or social circumstances) as we see in the dedicated pursuit of plausible identities within the tradition as the authors of the texts. My proposition is that engagement with the texts as expressive, performative and essentially oral culture allows us to more expansively experience how they mean because we can witness and personally experience the hermeneutical processes of appropriation and distanciation.

While Gadamer supposes a specific author and an audience, the works of oral tradition engage authors and interpreters and audiences in the evolving dimensions of time and place, of function and purpose. This by no means suggests that we should abandon or disregard the eponymous author or authors nor their audience but the making of translations is “necessarily a re-creation of the text guided by the way the
translator understands what it says …[and] … what we are dealing with here is interpretation, and not simply reproduction” (Gadamer 2005, 387). In translating these deyis they may be understood as a text emergent through its history of transmission (including textualisation) and it is the “interpreter’s own horizon [that is] decisive … not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one’s own what the text says” (Gadamer 2005, 390).

The point of departure for this work was that of an outsider encounter with a deeply lyrical (textual), orally transmitted, esoteric culture that, in recent times particularly, also manifests in the public world of social, political, cultural and creative activity; and ultimately how, as an outsider, I could engage in an honest and hermeneutically valid way with this encounter. But, as Steiner cautions, “not everything can be translated. Theology and gnosis posit an upper limit” (Steiner 1998, 262) and many of these lyrics touch upon such areas. Indeed poetry itself may only succumb to “creative transposition” in grappling with the fundamental issue “in what ways can or ought fidelity to be achieved” (Steiner 1998, 275). As Steiner also observes, “the mechanics of translation are primarily explicative, they explicate … and make graphic as much as they can of the semantic inherence of the original” (Steiner 1998, 291). So, in presenting these translations here I do not suggest that they represent the culmination of the hermeneutic experience but, rather, that they perhaps serve equally to remind us of the ongoing requirement of hermeneutics to continue to encounter, to explicate and work towards experiencing new understandings.
An important, even motivating objective in this endeavour was to provide a collection of translations that would form part of my hermeneutic endeavour but which would also fulfil one of the objectives of this study to provide access to materials that are not readily available to non-Turkish speaking scholars and so expand the possibilities for further and comparative study.

The translations below are provided, firstly to support the arguments put forward in this thesis by providing access to both the original and English translation of a body of Alevi *deyiş* songs and in doing so provide a document of my engagement with and perspective on the interpretive possibilities they present. The majority of the translations are of lyrics ascribed to Pir Sultan Abdal and I have not, for reasons that arise from the arguments of this thesis, made distinctions on the basis of the form of the mahlas, be it Pir Sultan, Pir Sultan Abdal or Abdal Pir Sultan.

In agreement with Andrews (2004) I have considered formal features of the original text, such as rhyme and line length, to be expendable in translation (for good or ill). Unlike Andrews I have not taken the view that footnotes or extraneous explanations “should be avoided at all costs”; nor in making the translations have I always felt qualified “to guess at contexts and reflect them in style and tone”. I have sought rather less to make the translations poetic accomplishments of merit per se, than to provide what I believe are, at least, semantically accurate versions. I concur with Halman (2004) that “a single translator can hardly do a definitive version” but that a consort of renditions may be far more effective. These translations represent, then, only a single part in that consort of possible versions.
5.2 Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in English translation

These translations are included as a contribution, of some substance, to the very few available English versions of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics. The available published English translations include:

1. ‘A lout has entered the loved one’s garden’ (Dostun bahçesine bir horyat girmiş)\(^{325}\) translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu (Menemencioğlu 1978, 135).
2. ‘I asked the yellow crocuses’ (Sordum sari çideme) translated by Richard McKane (Menemencioğlu 1978, 136).
3. ‘Would I could serve the hand that holds the pen’ (Kul olayım kalem tutan eline) translated by Nermin Menemencioğlu (Menemencioğlu 1978: 137).
4. ‘You great big judge with that big fat head!’ (Koca başlı koca kadı)\(^{326}\) translated by Talat S. Halman (1992, 50).
5. ‘So many are the sufferings, which shall consume me’ (Derdim çoktur kangisına yanayim [sic])\(^{327}\) translated by Frances Trix (1992, 9-10).
6. ‘Scribe, write the Shah about my plight’ (Kul olayım kalem tutan eline)\(^{328}\) translated by Nilüfer Mizanoğlu Reddy (Silay 1996, 149).
7. ‘I asked the yellow crocus’ (Sordum sari çideme) translated by Nilüfer Mizanoğlu Reddy (Silay 1996, 149).
8. ‘O Landlord of the soul, bring me news of the heart’ (Ey can sahibi, gel candan haber ver)\(^{329}\) translated by Sidney Wade and Güneli Gün (2005, 21).

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\(^{324}\) As noted in the literature survey in the introductory chapter, the only substantial collection of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics published in translation as of 2010 is the collection of 100 deyiş in French translations by Jean-Louis Mattei (2010).

\(^{325}\) Turkish texts, incipits and sources of the texts are not given by Menemencioğlu.

\(^{326}\) Turkish text, incipit and source are not given by Halman. I have only referenced the one complete lyric translated by Halman although he includes sundry other translated lines.

\(^{327}\) Trix’s version is from the recitation of Albanian Bektaşi Baba Rexheb though she includes a Turkish text cited as taken from Ergun’s Bektaşi şairleri ve nefesler.

\(^{328}\) Turkish texts, incipits and sources of the texts are not given by Silay.
9. ‘Come now, let us eat and let us drink’ (Gelin yiyelim içelim) translated by Sidney Wade and Güneli Gün (2005, 22).

10. ‘A Beauty in Union Station’ (Birlik makamında bir güzel gördüm)\textsuperscript{330} translated by Jennifer Ferraro and Latif Bolat (2007, 11-12).


5.3 Sources of the texts translated and editorial issues

The principal source for the texts on which have based my translations of Pir Sultan is Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943). The work of Gölpınarlı and Boratav provides a substantial number of texts drawn from earlier publications, most notably the monographs of Ergun (1929) and Besim Atalay (1340 (1924)), and also unpublished manuscripts including çönk and mecmua and the copy of the \textit{Menâkıbu}’l-\textit{esrar behçeti}’l-ahrâr in Gölpınarlı’s possession; together with oral sources collected in the Sivas region, notably those collected by and from the aşık Ali İzzet Özkan. An advantage of Gölpınarlı and Boratav’s collection is that the sources of the text are indicated, although not in as much detail as would be desirable, and when multiple sources are given it is not necessarily clear which source is used. Where possible I have consulted the earlier sources given by Gölpınarlı and Boratav particularly as Ergun gives occasional useful indications of variant manuscripts available to him. Although Ergun’s could reasonably serve as a preferred text in the cases where Ergun is the source of the text given by Gölpınarlı and Boratav, in the interests of consistency I have cited the Gölpınarlı and Boratav text as the basis of the translation.

\textsuperscript{329} The two poems translated by Wade and Gün are headed by number which, though not explained, refer to the numbering of texts in Öztelli (1971).

\textsuperscript{330} Ferraro and Bolat include incipits for the translations and a short bibliography, although the specific sources for the texts are not indicated.
except where I determined that there was a likely copying error in the Gölpınarlı and Boratav publication. The complications of editorial ‘static’ are more likely in the case of Atalay since I have relied for the most part on a modern Turkish translation of the original work which was in Ottoman Turkish, although I have consulted the Ottoman text in cases of ambiguity.

Using Gölpınarlı and Boratav as the preferred and principal text I have then generally used the earliest publication in book form for texts not included in Gölpınarlı and Boratav, principally Öztelli (1971) and Aslanoğlu (1984) while Bezirci (1994), Fuat (1999) and Avcı (2006) among the many other editions of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics have been the most consulted.

The selection of the texts for translation is intended to provide a representative sample of the range of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics. I have also sought to include translations of those lyrics that have a strong presence in contemporary Alevi expressive culture, particularly in the recordings of the later decades of the twentieth century. Further, I have included translations of a small number of deyişler of other Alevi aşık-s that I have made particular reference to in this work.

In providing a text as the basis of the translations I have not attempted to normalise orthography, form, spelling or punctuation. This inevitably provides for some inconsistency but this is an accurate reflection of the state of the published texts. In rendering the translations I have however in a number of instances considered less major variations as warrant to suggest or explore interpretive possibilities or shades

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331 A later expanded edition of Gölpınarlı and Boratav’s book was published in 1991 which includes 143 lyrics not in the original publication. These texts are drawn from a number of sources but most substantially from Öztelli (1971)[1983 ed] and Aslanoğlu (1984).
of meaning beyond the source text given. I have noted only significant variations or versions of interest or instruction within the footnotes.

In respect to the restraint regarding the normalisation of the source text to modern Turkish forms or orthography the lyric, *Benim pîrim Şah-ı Merdân Ali’dir*, provides an indicative example. I have not, for example normalised the remnant Ottoman vowel harmony to modern Turkish convention by changing bilbül (nightingale) to bülbül nor other phonetic variation such *ahşam* (evening) to *akşam*. This text given here, which does not appear to have survived in the oral tradition but rather only in a Menâkıbu’l-Esrar Behcetü’l-Ahrâr manuscript and so cannot be compared with orally transmitted versions, must be understood with the awareness Andrews advises in respect to Ottoman lyric poetry more generally that we are often working with “an editor’s version of an already interpreted transcription of a manuscript” (Andrews, Black et al. 1997, 13). The cönk and mecmua from which many texts were collated by the early anthologists were in Ottoman script and so the editorial process includes, at the very least, transcription and transliteration – and possibly translation – and the orthography is at times inconsistent. In the case of the orally collected and recorded deyiş similar issues of transcription and orthographic variance apply and certainly, too, transliteration where original transcriptions were in Ottoman script. The anthologists and scholars give little if any description or indication of their editorial methods, İbrahim Aslanoğlu perhaps being the most frustrating in this regard given the significance and influence of the organisation his collection published as Pir Sultan Abdallar (1984). Aslanoğlu, for example, states that in forty-five years working on Pir Sultan he examined around 650 cönk and mecmua, where necessary did some work to mend or improve texts (“*gereken yerlerde onarım da yaptım*” and
settled on the variants that had the characteristics in language and expression of the poets that lived around or soon after the time of Pir Sultan (Aslanoğlu 1984, 18).

Such issues of transcription, transliteration, variants and editorial ‘mending’ require an approach to translation that begins with a text that is reliable in substance, but which is cognisant not just of the evidence and remnants of the transcribing and editorial processes – though certainly that – but also to the expressive interpretations of the texts (where they exist). The translator is, perhaps, less constrained; indeed is compelled to respond to the liberation from the constraints of the source language editorial issues if the fundamental ‘hermeneutical difficulty’ is to be tackled. The translator necessarily confronts the semantic, symbolic and editorial problems of the source text, but through the hermeneutics of translation finds the new horizon of the target language and the possibilities and pitfalls that such territory affords for expression and the task of understanding.

5.4 On translating the mahlas and other terms

While my understanding, objectives and approach to the translations will naturally impart a degree of consistency, I have treated each lyric individually and not striven to create a corpus of a single tone. Clearly the poems emerge from a range of provenance and deal with different themes and purpose and this, for the translator, can lead to different interpretive suggestions particularly in respect to the esoteric aspects of the lyrics. This problem is evident in what to do with terms such as hak, eren, pir, talip and aşık that appear regularly in the texts. These and many other words in the text have multiple shades of meaning referring at times to specific circumstances of ritual or at other times possibly have more general meaning. For the
most part since no English word suffices to convey such shades of meaning the translator must decide whether or not to translate the term, settle of consistent term or apply a term appropriate to context even though the shades of meaning may be lost. The word hak, for example may mean ‘God’, ‘truth’, ‘right’ or ‘justice’, any one of which may seem more suitable in certain cases or indeed the range of meanings may apply. In short I do not claim to be consistent in my rendering of such terms. In respect to the words such as eren and aşık I have in many cases opted for ‘dervish’ a word that is perhaps suitably both ambiguous and meaningful in English. At other times, where it seem appropriate, I have chose more specific suggestions, such as ‘enlightened’ for eren.

In respect to the translation of the mahlas lines and verses I have generally and deliberately erred on the side of the literal, retaining grammatical shifts and parataxis which I interpret as a revealing quality of the essential character of the lyrics. Thus I have not attempted to resolve changes and sudden shifts in tense and the lyric voice and I have retained the form of the mahlas name as it appears in the source. This is a contestable approach, certainly; and demonstrated by Mattei who in his major collection of French versions of Pir Sultan Abdal lyrics for the most part does not retain distinct forms such as Abdal Pir Sultan, Pir Sultan’ım Haydar or even Pir Sultan Abdal332.

I have added a number of footnotes to the translations, mostly dealing with issues of translation and some clarifications. I have not attempted to present fully annotated versions, though that would be a valuable and worthwhile undertaking, but a major

task that could not be fulfilled within the scope of this study. The Pir Sultan Abdal 
lyrics are arranged by title which for the most part is derived from the first line of the 
poem unless the *deyiş* is more commonly known by another title, as in the case of the 
first translations given below.

### 5.5 Pir Sultan Abdal *deyişler*

#### 5.5.1 *Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim*

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 35-36).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asur sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal Pir 
Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929) from and Banaz oral traditions (*şifahî rivayetleri*).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Hızır Paşa bizi berdar etmeden</em></td>
<td>Before Hızır Pasha hangs us on the gallows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim</em></td>
<td>May the gates open so we may go to the Shah&lt;sup&gt;333&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Siyaset günleri gelip yetmeden</em></td>
<td>Before reaching the day of execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim</em></td>
<td>May the gates open so we may go to the Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gönül çıkmak ister Şah’ın köşküne</em></td>
<td>The heart wishes to go to the pavilion of the Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Can boyanmak ister Ali müşküne</em></td>
<td>The soul wishes to be coated with the sweet scent of Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pirim Ali On iki İmam aşkına</em></td>
<td>My master for the love of Ali and the twelve Imams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim</em></td>
<td>May the gates open so we may go to the Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Her nereye gitsem yolum dumandır</em></td>
<td>Wherever I go my way is in a haze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bizi böyle kılan ahd ü amandır</em></td>
<td>Thus one promises us security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Zincir boynum sıtkı halim yamandır</em></td>
<td>Chains tighten my neck and my state is bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim</em></td>
<td>May the gates open so we may go to the Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yaz selleri gibi akar çağlarım</em></td>
<td>Like summer torrents I flow and burble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hançer aldım ciğerciğim dağlarım</em></td>
<td>I took my dagger and shall twine my heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Garip kaldımda arada ağlarım</em></td>
<td>I was estranged in that state and shall weep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Açılın kapılar Şah’ara gidelim</em></td>
<td>May the gates open so we may go to the Shah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>İlgın ılgın eser seher yelleri</em></td>
<td>Slowly, slowly blows the morning winds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>333</sup> The Safavid Shah.
Yâre selâm eylen Urum Erleri
Bize peyik geldi Şah bülbilleri
Açılın kapılar Şah’a gidelim

The Dervishes of Rum give greeting to the beloved
A messenger came to us nightingales of the Shah
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah

Pir Sultan’ım eydûr mûrvelî Sah’ım
Yaram baş verdi szlar çiğërğahım
Arşa direk direk oluştur ahım
Açılın kapılar Şah’a gidelim

I am Pir Sultan, he says my Shah is generous
It brought my wound to a head and pained my heart
My cry of woe is raised loudly to the throne
May the gates open so we may go to the Shah

5.5.2  Ali Ali deyü ne inilersin

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 132-133).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzset Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Ali Ali deyü ne inilersin
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin
Sen de benim gibi yârîldın
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin

Why do you moan crying Ali Ali?
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?
Like me have you be parted from you beloved?
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?

Dolap inilerdi düstü irmağa
Muhammedin hub cemalin görmeğe
Hasan Hüseyine bir su vermeğe
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin

The waterwheel moaned and fell into the river
To see the beauty of Muhammad’s graceful face
To give some water to Hasan and Husayn
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?

Kim kesti getirdi seni yerinden
Dağlar taşlar ah eyedî zârîndan
Sen de mi ayrıldın nazlı yârînden
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin

Who cut you down and brought you from your land?
The mountains and stones cried out at your sorrow
Are you parted from your reticent beloved?
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?

Yoksa yâd illerîn eli mi değdi
Yoksa irakibin dili mi değdi
Yaz bahar ayûnun seli mi değdi
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin

Or is it that the hand of strangers struck you?
Or has your enemy’s calumny struck you?
Have the torrents of spring and summer struck you?
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım așka dayandı
Hasret nârı ile çigerim yandı

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, he put his trust in love
My heart is alight with the fire of longing

334 Anatolia.
335 The throne of God; the ninth level of heaven.
5.5.3 Ben dervişi̇m diye göğsün açırsın

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 113-114)

Cited source: Gölpınarlı cönk and Besim Atalay’s Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı.

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Yoksı Hüseyinden haber mi geldi
İnilersin dolap derdin ne senin

Or is it the message come from Husayn?
You moan waterwheel, what trouble is eating you?

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Ben dervişi̇m diye göğsün açırsın
Saying ‘I am a dervish’ you stick out your chest

Hakks zikretmeğe dilin var mıdır
Do you have the tongue to invoke God?

Sen kendi gorsene ilde n’ararsın
Why not look to yourself, for what you seek elsewhere?

Hâli hâl etmeğe hâlin var mıdır
Do you have the strength to reach the state of ecstasy?

Bir gün balık gibi ağa sararlar
Like a fish one day they will wind you in a net

Mürşidinden rehberinden sorarlar
They will question you about your master and guide

Türsü yakıp köşe köşe ararlar
They will light incense, scattering, seeking

Ben arıyım dersin balın var mıdır
‘I am a bee’ you say – do you have honey?

Dertli olmyanlar derde yanar mı
Do those without affliction complain?

Tahkik derviš ikrarından döner mi
Does a real dervish turn from his vow?

Her bir uçan gül dalına konar mı
Do all creatures of the air light on a rose branch?

Ben bülbülüm dersin gülün var mıdır
‘I am a nightingale’ you say – do you have a rose?

Pir Sultan’ım senin derdin deşilmez
I am Pir Sultan, your troubles are not opened up

Derdı̇ olmyanlar derde duş olmaz
Those without affliction don’t confront suffering

Mürşitizsiz rehbersiz yollar açılmaz
The pathways are not open without master and guide

Mürşit eteğinde elin var mıdır
Do you have your hand on the master’s cloak?

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336 Atalay has this as the last line of the last verse and here gives the line ‘mürşit eteğinde elin var mıdır’ (Atalay 1991, 156).
337 Rehber, translated here as ‘guide’ is also a functionary in the cem service who ensures appropriate practice. The Rehber may also deputise for the dede; indeed Shankland notes usage where it is an alternative term for dede (Shankland 2003a, 190). Mürşid refers to the spiritual leader, or master, and may also have the same connotation as pir or dede.
338 Fuat notes this line as referring to the practice of fumigating the hive to scatter bees so that the honey may be had (Fuat 1999, 55).
339 ‘True’ does not capture the full measure of the sense of tahkik which implies an understanding, through experience, of the manifestation of truth or the divine (hak).
340 I have used three meanings of ‘dert’ here: ‘trouble’, ‘affliction’ and ‘suffering’. The elegance of the repetition in the original would be rather parodied in an English rendering that used, for example, ‘trouble’ in all instances. The repetition of dert allows and opportunity for the translation to incorporate the nuances of meaning.
341 That is, spiritual paths or ways; or indeed the ‘pathways to God’ – ‘Tanrı’ya giden yollar’ (Fuat 1999, 55).
5.5.4 Benim pîrim Şah-ı Merdân Ali’dir

Turkish text: Latin script edition of the Menâkıbu’l-Esrar Behcêtü’l-Ahrâr prepared by Ahmet Taşğın (Bisatî 2003, 84).

Benim pîrim Şah-ı Merdân Ali’dir My master is Ali, Shah of the Seven Guides
Selâmunı gündür bedr-i sabahdan Send him your greetings by the moon at dawn
Ben tâlibim ne haddim var pîr olam I am a seeker, how could I dare to be a master
Pîre duâcyım her gün sabahdan I pray to the master every day in the morning

Ahsâm oldı günde gitti yerine Evening time and the sun goes to ground
Tâlib olan kullan eyler pîrine The seeker does service to his master
İki musâhibde biri birine Two in companionship one for each other
Cümle müşkillere yeter sabahdan Enough for all hardship in the morning

Bizim yerde göz dikerler akceye In our land the eye is fixed on the coin
Akceyi virirler gene akcesiye All they give for coin is a coin again
Seher vakti bilbül konar bakceye The nightingale settles in the garden at dawn
Göz yaşını gün döker sabahdan The sun sheds it tears in the morning

Deryalarda biter iki dürdane Two pearls grow in the deep oceans
Biri gevher biri sedef biri dürdane Each a gem, one a pearl, one mother-of-pearl
Biz deurgeonmuş Şah-ı Merdâna We have refuge with the Shah of the Seven Guides
Cümle müşkillere yeter sabahdan Enough for all hardship in the morning

342 This refers to a practice in the ceremony for the investiture of the candidate to the tarikat in which the novice dervish is brought before the mürşid who takes the right hand of the dervish in his right hand while the dervish holds the skirt (etek) of the mürşid’s cloak in his left hand (Fuat 1999, 55).
343 I am grateful to a reviewer of a paper in which this translation was included for valuable critical comments on my original attempt at translating this deyiş.
344 Pir refers to a founding saint of a tarikat; or more generally a saint, sage or master. In this lyric Pir Sultan asserts the central importance of the master-disciple (seeker) relationship intimating at the transmission of authority by expressing his humility to his master (pir) the Imam Ali in the opening verse while declaring his own exalted status in the form of his mahlas in the final line.
345 Şâh-ı Merdân is a common epithet for the Imam Ali. The translator must confront the question whether to translate such constructions. In this case I have chosen to leave Şah as the anglicized and functional ‘Shah’ (rather than the translation of ‘Lord’ or ‘Monarch’) while translating the qualifying element of the izafet group that constitutes the epithet. In this context Merdân refers to the seven spiritual beings considered the guides or masters of the faithful. The epithet Şâh-ı Merdân is significant in Alevi lyric as it identifies Ali as the monarch of all spiritual guides or greatest among men “mert insanların en büyüğü” (Öztelli 1973, 16).
346 Tâlip refers to one who seeks or strives and in Alevi ritual culture may be understood as a follower or disciple of a specific dede lineage.
5.5.5 Bir çift turna geldi Kars illerinden

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 50).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

This song, though it contributes to the legend of Pir Sultan Abdal expressed in song, is commonly claimed to have been written by Ali Baba, Pir Sultan’s musahib (companion), following Pir Sultan’s death (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 49-50; Fuat 1999, 158-159).

Bir çift turna geldi Kars illerinden A pair of red cranes came from the lands of Kars
Öter garip garip bizim illerde Strangely and lonesome they sang in our lands
Evrilir çevrilir göle konmaya Turning around and around to alight at the lake
Korkar ki avcı var diye göllerde Was it that they feared the hunter in those lakes?

Sakin ey sevdigim Urum kışdır Take care my Anatolian beloved
Yağmur yağar çığaların üstüdür It rains and your plumes will turn cold
Konup göçmek Evliyalar işidir Settling and moving on is the work of the saints
Konup göç ki söylenesin dillerde Settle and move on so there can be no muttering tongues

Eşinden m‘ayrıldın nedir fırkatin What is your separation, was it from your partner?

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347 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of an earlier versions of this lyric for this felicitous rendering – my original attempt being verbose and vague – and for the suggestion that diyar (meaning country or land) may be an incorrect transcription for deyr, meaning hermitage or tavern (or indeed monastery or temple) and which also carries the sense of “the world” in respect to mystical concerns. This does seem a highly plausible reading; and, with the addition of the dative ending (deyre) would neatly fulfill the syllabic requirement of the line. However, I confess to partially sidestepping a definite reading settling on the non-committed if not altogether oblique “here”.

348 ‘Gecdi’ (geçti) could effectively be translated here as ‘who passed’ but I have settled on the more literal reading of ‘he passed’ to highlight the changes of person common in deyiş especially in respect to the mahlas verse. This reading still retains the connection to Pir Sultan while suggesting a degree of distanciation – in Ricoeur’s sense of the inscribed expression’s relationship to its potential for autonomy and interpretation – that I believe to be a latent characteristic in this lyric form. Had the verb preceded the name in a position suggesting more clearly a participle function a translation as ‘who passed’ would have been more compelling.
Çık Yıldız-Dağına bir semâ tutun
Orda Pir Sultan var ırvâhî Zâtun
O seni geçirir çokun sellerden

Cam yeme sevdiğim senindir hane
Silaya mı gitmek istiyon yine
Ali kilâguzun olsun bu sene
Kimse değip dolaşmasın yollarda

Varıp da silaya çıkarsan böyle
Kötülüğ m gördüysem iyiği m söyle
Derdim çoktur halim Pir e arzeyle
Ali gibi olmuş var mı kullarda

5.5.6 Bir güzelin âşıkıyım ağalar

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 88-89).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVIIinci asr sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal.

Bir güzelin âşıkıyım ağalar
Annin için taşa tutar il beni
Gündüz hayaliinde gece düşümde
Kumdan kuma savuruyor yel beni

Reyhanı devşir devşir dest’ eyle
Ben deliyim öğüt verip pest eyle
Düşmanının il yanında dost eyle
Bir geceçik mihman eyle sar beni

Ak gül olsam al yanağa sokulsam
Gül-âb olsam ak yüzüne società
Kölen olsam pazarlarda satılsam
Kölem deyü ak sinene sal beni

Lords, I am the lover of a beauty
Because of this the strangers cast stones at me
All day in my imagination and at night in my dreams
The wind blows me around like sand

Gather up sweet basil and make a bouquet
I am crazed – give advice and be humble
Make me, your enemy, a friend among strangers
Be a night-time visitor and embrace me

If I were a white rose and touched your red cheek
If I were rose water sprinkled on your white face
If I were your slave and were sold in the marketplace
Saying ‘my slave’ embrace me to your white breast

349 Here meaning the Imam Ali.
350 That is, Pir Sultan.
351 Fuat suggest this refers to Ali Baba himself (Fuat 1999, 159).
352 Or, perhaps, “ridicule and taunt me”. 
Pir Sultan Abdal’ım gamzeli oktur
Hezaran sinende yaralar çoktur
Benim senden özge sevgüdüğüm yoktur
İnanmazsan ol Allah'a sal beni

I am Pir Sultan Abdal it is the glance of an arrow
So many thousands are the wounds in my heart
I have no other beloved than you
If you don’t believe this dispatch me to Allah

5.5.7 Bir nefesçik söyليلim

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 97).

Cited source: Derviş Ruhullah’s Bektaşi nefesleri and Gölpınarlı cönk.

Bir nefesçik söyليلim
Dinlemeszen neyليلim
Aşk deryasız boylıyalım
Ummana dalmağa geldim

Let us sing a little hymn
What should we do if you don’t listen
Let us traverse the depths of love
I came to plunge into that vast ocean

Aşk harmanında savrulдум
Hem elendim hem yüğulдум
Kazana girdim kavrulдум
Meydana yemeye geldim

I was winnowed in the harvest of love
I was both sifted and kneaded
I entered the pot and was roasted
I came to the Meydan to be consumed

Ben Hakkin ednâ kalayım
Kem damarlardan beriyim
Aşy-i Cem’in bülbülüyüm
Meydana ömmege geldim

I was the lowest of God’s slaves
I was clear of malicious streaks
I was the nightingale in the Ceremony
I came to the Meydan to sing

Aşk harmanında savrulдум
Hem elendim hem yüğulдум
Kazana girdim kavrulдум
Meydana yemeye geldim

I was winnowed in the harvest of love
I was both sifted and kneaded
I entered the pot and was roasted
I came to the Meydan to be consumed

Ben Hak ile oldum aş’na
Kalmadı gönlümde nesne
Pervaneyim ateşine
Şem’ine yanmağa geldim

I was well acquainted with God
Nothing else remained in my heart
I am a moth unto his flame
I came to his candle to burn

353 This is a literal rendering that I prefer given the mention of wounds in the following line. An alternative reading could be “the shooting of a teasing glance”.
354 Fuat has sor (ask) rather than sal making a reading “If you don’t believe me, ask Allah” (Fuat 1999, 75).
355 ‘Umman dalmağa’ literally ‘to plunge into the ocean’ also has a sense of being absorbed into or fathoming the deep mysteries. Özbek notes the metaphorical usage pertaining to one of deep knowledge or the perfected person man who has attained the secret of truth or reality: “hakikat sırınna ermiş kâmil insan” (Özbek 2009, 474).
356 This could be rendered as ‘Sacred Place’ in this context.
357 I have continued the imagery of this verse from harvest to consumption, translating yemek as the passive of yemek (to eat) though it also has something of the suggestion of being victorious.
358 This and the following line could be read as ‘your flame’ and ‘your candle’. This fine ambiguity is lost in English.
5.5.8 Bir ulu kervandık kalktk Musuldan

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 67).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929).

Bir ulu kervandık kalktk Musuldan
We were a mighty caravan headed out from Mosul

Gitti kervanımız Ali’ye doğru
Our caravan headed directly to Ali

Yenice kartldk gamla gussedenden
We were newly freed from grief and sorrow

Gitti kervanımız Ali’ye doğru
Our caravan headed directly to Ali

Benden selâm söyle güzel Ali’ye
Give my greetings to the beautiful Ali

Güzeli sevenler düser belâya
Trouble befalls those who love the beautiful one

Yolumuz uğradı Toprakkale’ye
Our pathway stopped by Toprakkale

Gitti kervanımız Ali’ye doğru
Our caravan headed directly to Ali

Helâllık vermedik kavim kardâşlar
We did not forgive injustice, people, brothers

Yandi cigerciçim yuregim haslar
My poor heart burned and now it wheezes

Üç gün iç geçedi yagan yâşlar
For three days and nights the rains fall

Gitti kervanımız Ali’ye doğru
Our caravan headed directly to Ali

Sabahtan uğradım ben bir araba
In the morning I came upon an Arab

359 Or defective.

360 Translating ‘dar’ means that much is inevitably lost; however it seems appropriate to attempt a rendering here given its place in the mahlas verse, with its assertion of identity and the dramatic force of the final line. Here dar would refer to the central place in the Meydan where the rituals of the initiate or confessor take place. What is certainly lost is its other meaning of, more fully, darağacı, the ‘gallows tree’ and its association with martyrdom of Mansur al-Hallaj and, of course, Pir Sultan himself.

361 While there are a number of locations in Anatolia called Toprakkale, this may be a reference to the location of the prison in the centre of Sivas where, according to legend, Pir Sultan was confined by Hızır Paşa. Alternatively, it may refer to the basalt Byzantine fortress at the junction of the Adana-Antep-Iskenderun roads, a familiar landmark even for bus travellers on these roads today.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yüzümü süreym hâk-i turâba</td>
<td>I shall rub my face on the dusty earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kızılşehir derler o da harabe</td>
<td>Those ruins, so they say, are Red City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitti kervanimiz Ali'ye doğru</td>
<td>Our caravan headed directly to Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pir Sultan Abdal’im kubbem gördü</strong></td>
<td>I am Pir Sultan Abdal my firmament appeared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emir ile yeşil taclar urundu</strong></td>
<td>With the commander the green caps are worn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bize bu ayrılık Haktan verildi</strong></td>
<td>This separation was given to us from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitti kervanimiz Ali'ye doğru</td>
<td>Our caravan headed directly to Ali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.5.9 Bize de Banaz’da Pir Sultan derler**

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 38-39).

Cited source: Banaz oral traditions (şifahî rivayetleri).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bize de Banaz’da Pir Sultan derler</td>
<td>To us in Banaz to us they speak of Pir Sultan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizi kem kişi de bellemesinler</td>
<td>Let them not think of us a bad people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paşa hademine tenbih eylesin</strong></td>
<td>Let the Pasha give orders to his servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kolum çekip elim bağlamasınlar</strong></td>
<td>Let them not seize my arm and bind my hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Hüseyin Gazi Sultan binsin atına**</td>
<td>Let Husayn Gazi Sultan mount his horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dayanılmaz çarh-t felek zatna</td>
<td>He cannot resist the work of destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizden selâm söylen ev külfetine</td>
<td>Greetings from us to those in their homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Çıkıp ile karşı ağlamasınlar</strong></td>
<td>May they not go against the foreign land and weep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala gözüm zülfün kelep eylesin</td>
<td>Hazel eyed one let your hair unfold like silk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Döksün mah yüzüne nikap eylesin</td>
<td>Let the moon pour down and be a veil on your face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Baba Haktan dilek dilesin</td>
<td>Let Ali Baba request his petition from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bizi dâr dibinde eğlemesinler</strong></td>
<td>Let them not wait for us at the foot of the gallows</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

362 Araba here could mean ‘wagon’ (araba), however I have followed Avcı’s rendering of this implying the meaning ‘Arab’ (Avcı 2006, 276).
363 The identification and location of Kızılşehir is uncertain. However there are many places in the Sivas region referred to as kızıl (red) after the Kızılırmak (literally ‘Red River’, the ancient Halys), including Kızılkaya and Kızılköye both in the region of Pir Sultan’s village of Banaz. It may possibly be a reference to Sivas itself. On the matter of possible locations see Avcı (2006, 275).
364 Possibly a specific reference to a leader of direct descent from Muhammad.
365 The 1943 edition of Gölpınarlı and Boratav gives this as “eylesin” making the line a syllable too long (and the meaning different). It is corrected in the 1991 reprint (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1991, 46).
366 Karşı.
367 According to legend the father of Battal Gazi remembered in the Ankara and Çorum regions and possibly a Safavid commander (Özbek 2009, 257).
368 Pir Sultan Abdal’s musahib (companion).
Ali Baba eğer sözе uyarsa
Emir Huda’n’ndir Beyler kıyarsa
Ala gözlü yavrularım duyarsa
Alım çözüp kara bağlamasınlar

Surrum işlenedi kaddım büküldü
Beyaz vücudumun bendi söküldü
Önüm sira Kırklar Pirler çekildi
Daha Beyler bizi dillemesinler

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım çoşkun akarım
Akar akar dost yoluna bakarım
Pirim aldım seyrangâha çıkarım
Daha Yıldız-Dağın yaylamasınlar

Bu yıl bu dağların kart ermez

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 93).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan collected from Ali Baba, Ortaköy (village), Şarkışla, Sivas region.

5.5.10 Bu yıl bu dağların kart ermez

The snow doesn’t melt on the mountains this year
The morning breeze blows an ill wind of ruin
The Turkmen no longer start out for the highlands
The nomads have cleared off and the land is in ruin

I purled and flowed like the Red River
I struck out and threw off the barrage within me
I left the orchard of the rose faced gazelle
I entered the garden where the rose is in ruin

369 I follow Fuat’s reading of this line. He has alım (meaning alımı) rather than alım and suggests the meaning red coloured and adorned dress (Fuat 1999, 144-145) and would therefore suggest the kızılbaş.

370 I have translated ‘Kızıl Irmak’ literally as ‘Red River’ although this is certainly a reference to the major northern Anatolian river Kızılırmak which flows from the Köse mountain range east of Sivas, south past Sivas and Nevşehir making its way northwards to the west of Çorum and emptying into the Black Sea to the west of Samsun.

371 ‘Bozuk bozuk’ with its intensifying repetition has a strong sense of ‘devastation’, ‘destruction’ or ‘complete ruin’. In translating this phrase I have sought to use a repetitive English phrase that will
Elim tutmaz güllerini dermeğe
I cannot hold his roses for the gathering

Dilim tutmaz hasta halin sormağı
I cannot speak of my sickness for the asking

Dört cevabin manasını vermeğe
Nor to give the meaning of the sacred books

Sazım düzen tutmaz tel bozuk bozuk
My saz un-tuned, the strings broken and in ruin

Pir Sultan’ım yaradıldım kul diye
I am Pir Sultan I was created a mere subject

Zâlim Paşa elinden mi öl diye
Thinking to die – at the hand of the tyrant Pasha?

Dostum beni ismarlamış gel diye
My companion commanded me saying come

Gideceğim amma yol bozuk bozuk
I will go but the way lies destroyed and in ruin

5.5.11 Bülbül olsam varsam gelsem

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 133-134).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish phrase</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bülbül olsam varsam gelsem</td>
<td>If I were a nightingale and if I were to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakkin divanna dursam</td>
<td>If I were to stand in the presence of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben bir yanıl alma olsam</td>
<td>If I were a rosy red apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalında bitsem ne dersin</td>
<td>If I were to sprout on your branch, what do you say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen bir yanıl alma olsan</td>
<td>If you were a rosy red apple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalında bitmeye gelsen</td>
<td>If you were to come and sprout on my branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben bir gümiş çövmen olsan</td>
<td>If I were a silver clad crooked staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çeksem indirsem ne dersin</td>
<td>If I were to draw and strike a blow, what do you say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen bir gümiş çövmen olsan</td>
<td>If you were a silver clad crooked staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çekip indirmeye gelsen</td>
<td>If you were to draw and strike a blow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben bir avuç dari olsam</td>
<td>If I were a handful of maize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

function in all the verses to convey a sense of burden or refrain of the original, although this has not always captured the intensity of the original.


373 Saz refers to the long-necked lute sacred to Alevi culture. I chose not to translate saz as ‘lute’, though such a translation is simple and organologically accurate, so as to avoid suggestion of the courtly lute-playing minstrel or troubadour of Western tradition.

374 Generally understood as a reference to Pir Sultan Abdal’s nemesis Hızır Paşa; again see Fuat (1999, 141).

375 Çövmen understood here as çevgen (çevgân or çöven) meaning stick with a bent end. Fuat says it is a forked stick used to gather up food (Fuat 1999, 49).
Yere saçılsam ne dersin If I were scattered on the ground, what do you say?
Sen bir avuç darı olsan If you were a handful of maize
Yere saçılmaya gelsen If you were scattered on the ground
Ben bir güzel keklik olsam If I were a beautiful grey partridge
Bir bir toplasam ne dersin If I were to gather up grain after grain, what do you say?

Sen bir güzel keklik olsan If you were a beautiful grey partridge
Bir bir toplamaya gelsin If you were come to gather up grain after grain
Ben bir yavru şahan olsan If I were a young falcon bird
Kapsam kaldırsam ne dersin If I were to seize and steal you away, what do you say?

Sen bir yavru şahan olsan If you were a young falcon bird
Kapıp kaldırmaya gelsen If you were to seize and steal me away
Ben bir sulu sepken olsam If I were a shower of sleet
Kanadım kırsam ne dersin If I were to break your wing, what do you say?

Sen bir sulu sepken olsan If you were a shower of sleet
Kanadım kirmaya gelsen If you were to break my wing
Ben bir deli poyraz olsam If I were a wild nor’easter wind
Tepsem dağıtsam ne dersin If I were to spurn and send you off, what do you say?

Sen bir deli poyraz olsan If you were a wild nor’easter wind
Tepip dağılmaya gelsen If you were to spurn and send me off
Ben bir ulu hasta olsam If I were to have a great sickness
Yoluna yatsam ne dersin If I were to lie down in your way, what do you say?

Sen bir ulu hasta olsan If you were to have a great sickness
Yoluna yatmaya gelsen If you were to lie down in my way
Ben bir Azrail olsam If I were the Angel of Death
Canımı alsm ne dersin If I were come to take your soul, what do you say?

Sen bir Azrail olsan If you were the Angel of Death
Canımı almaya gelsen If you were come to take my soul
Ben bir cennetlik kul olsam If I were a subject destined for heaven
Cennete girsem ne dersin If I were to enter into heaven, what do you say?

Sen bir cennetlik kul olsan If you were a subject destined for heaven

376 Here I have translated kul as ‘subject’. It literally means ‘slave’ but has the sense also of ‘creature’ or ‘human being’ as existing in relation to God.
Cennete girmeye gelsen  If you were to enter into heaven
Pir Sultan üstadin bılsa  Pir Sultan if he were to find his master
Bilece girsek ne dersin  If we were to enter in company together, what do you say?

5.5.12  Cennet’ten Ali’ye bir niyaz geldi

Turkish text: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal
(Ergun 1929, 54).

Cennet’ten Ali’ye bir niyaz geldi  Salutation came from Paradise to Ali
Ali’ye terceman gelen elmalar  Apples come in commitment to Ali
Ali’ın kokladı hem yüzüne sürdü  My Ali smelled them and showed respect
Ali’ye terceman gelen elmalar  Apples come in commitment to Ali

Elmasın elmasın seni aşlarlar  You are the apple and they grafted you
Meyveni yerler de dalın taşlarlar  They ate the fruit and threw away its twigs
Sultan olan kulun suçun bağışlarlar  As Sultan of God’s creatures they pardoned your sin
Ali’ye terceman gelen elmalar  Apples come in commitment to Ali

Elmasın elmasın rengini boya  You are the apple appear in your colour
Cümle melâikler donunu giye  All the angels shall dress in your garment
Kadrini bilmiyen kabağın soya  Those ignorant of its worth peel the skin

377 Gölpinarlı and Boratav’s text (and presumably that originally from Ali İzzet) introduces the third person in this line in a manner that is both striking and subtle. It focuses the text away from the dialogue of first and second person personas to the object persona of Pir Sultan. The Turkish is however subtle as this change only involves the dropping of a final ‘n’ (second person) or even ‘m’ (first person). Later anthologists have the line as ‘Pir Sultan üstadin bılsa’ (see (Fuat 1999; Aslanoğlu 1984; Avci 2006; Bezirci 1994) as does Muhlis Akarsu (1994) in his recording of the song. The suggestion is that Gölpinarlı and Boratav’s text includes an error, although a later edition of the book does not correct it (Gölpinarlı and Boratav 1991, 161). I am not entirely persuaded and have retained the ‘erroneous’ reading in my translation for the interest of the change of tense which is consistent with frequent deyiş practice. The meaning of the line is not essentially altered though the rhetorical device is. The line can be read as ‘Pir Sultan, if you were to find your master’ or ‘Pir Sultan, if he were to find his master’ since üstadin(ı) can be read as ‘his master’, üstadı, with the accusative ending ‘ın(ı)’ – the ‘ı’ missing in the line as is frequently the case in the syllabic lines – or as ‘your master’, üstadın, with the accusative ‘ı’. While conceivably ‘Pir Sultan’ could be the object missing its accusative ending, it seems clearly to be in the vocative given the place of üstadin as the accusative and the placement of the name at the beginning of the line. However, a reading of ‘Were you to find Pir Sultan your master’ while consistent with the direction of the dialogue is not possible.

378 Terceman (tercüman), rather than the common meaning of ‘translation’, in the Alevi-Bektashi context means a sacrifice (kurban) or a formal recited prayer beginning a service (Korkmaz 2005a) or when the rehber presents the talip to the mürşid and the novice stand in the dar (position of sacrifice or surrender to the tarikat); see Gölpinarlı and Boratav (1991, 213). The nuance of meaning it particularly difficult to convey but a rendering that had apples sacrificed would seem too distracting. The apple is also associated as a symbol of commitment of the kızılbaş to the Safavid Shah; see Aşık İsmail’s deyiş below (5.7.1).
Ali’ye terceman gelen elmalar

Elmasın elmasın misk ile anber
Kokuna birikir cümle peygamber
Etin Fatma Ana kabuğun Kanber
Ali’ye gerçeman gelen elmalar

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım vahadttır vahadet
Çiğidinden oldu Düldül gibi at
Bir adın Seyfullah okunur âyet
Ali’ye terceman gelen elmalar

5.5.13 Çeke çeke ben bu dertten ölmürüm

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 84).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal.

Çeke çeke ben bu dertten ölmürüm
Serveisen Ali’ye değme yarama
Ali’nin yluna serim veririm
Serveisen Ali’ye değme yarama

Ali’nin yarası yâr yarasıdır
Buna merhem olmaz dil yarasıdır
Ali’yi sevmiyan Hakân nesidir
Serveisen Ali’ye değme yarama

Bu yurt senin değil konar göcersin
Ali’nin dolusun bir gün içersin
Körpe kuzulardan nasıl geçersin
Serveisen Ali’ye değme yarama

Enduring, suffering, I die from this affliction
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound
I devote myself to the way of Ali
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

Ali’s wound is the wound of the beloved
There is no salve for this the wound of the heart
The one who does not love Ali, what is he to God?
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

This land is not yours, you settle then move on
One day you will drink of Ali’s liquor
How can you abandon tender lambs
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

379 Imam Ali’s wife.
380 Imam Ali’s freedman.
381 Dert remains a difficult concept to convey in translation and is a word that may appear translated in a number of ways, depending on the context or the interpretation of the translator. Meanings such as pain, suffering, malady and illness; together with woe, trouble, sorrow, grief and care inhabit this word. It also, Özbek (2009) notes, conveys a sense of deep love, aşk or derin sevgi. With the latter in mind, and heeding the line that follows, I have settled on ‘affliction’ here.
382 Meaning that an enlightened state will be reached.
Ilgit ilgit oldu akıyor kanım  
Kem geldi didara talim benim  
Benim derdim bana yeter hey canım  
Serversen Ali’ye değme yarama

Gently and slowly did my blood flow  
Fortune fell foul upon my face  
Well my friend, is my pain enough for you?  
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

Pir Sultan Abdal’im deftere yazar  
Hilebaz yâr ile olur mu Pazar  
Pir merhem çalmazsa yaralar azar  
Serversen Ali’ye değme yarama

I am Pir Sultan Abdal his account is recorded  
Is it a marketplace to be a swindler with the beloved?  
Wounds become infected if the master cannot give salve  
If you love Ali don’t touch upon my wound

5.5.14 Çekilip Kırklara vardık


Çekilip Kırklara vardık  
Niye geldin can dediler  
Baş kesip niyaz eyledik  
Geç otur, meydan dediler

We withdrew and reached the Forty  
Why have you come, friend, they said  
We bowed and gave salutation  
Come and sit, behold the Meydan they said

Kırklar meydanı ganıdır  
Görenin kalbin eridir  
Külli şeklerden beridir  
Nerelisin can dediler

The place of the Forty is rich  
The heart of the guest is consumed  
It is absolved of all uncertainty  
Where are you from, they said

Kırklar ile yedik içtik  
Kaynayup sohbetteコストuk  
Yemiş yıl kürürede piştik  
Dahi çığışin can dediler

We ate and drank with the Forty  
We boiled over at the gathering  
Seventy years we cooked in the furnace  
You are still raw, friend, they said

Reberine ver özünü  
Erenler göre gönlünü  
Müşahibin hak bileni  
Edelimıhsan dediler

Give your true self to your guide  
The masters should see your heart  
Your companion knows the truth  
Let us bestow favour, they said

---

383 Musahiplik (companionship) is a ritualised lifelong relationship with another member of the tarikat (order). It is considered part of the initial stage of initiation for the novice (talip) in more formal aspects of Alevi structure (Clarke 1999, 12-13, 91)
I am Pir Sultan my blood my murder
I have mixed your blood to mine
Ninety years have I lain dead
You are well again friend they said

5.5.15 Çokan beri yollarını gözlerim


Çokan beri yollarımı gözlerim For a long time I kept my eyes on the roads
Hâlimi sormaya yâr sen mi geldin Was it you who came, beloved, to ask of my condition?
Bu gönlümün bağ boştanı This orchard, this garden that is my heart
Ayva ile turunç nar sen mi geldin Was it you who came as quince, pomegranate and orange?
Bu hasretlik beni hasta eyledi This deprivation and longing sickens me
Girdi gönül ummanları bayladi It entered and traversed the oceans of the heart
Vardı aşın yaylasında yayladi It reached and grazed upon the pastures of love
Gönlümün evine nur sen mi geldin Was it you who came as the light for my heart’s home?
Gelp şu yanında oturan misin Won’t you be the one to come and sit beside me?
Serimi sevdaya yetiren misin Won’t you be the one to bring me to love?
Ağır yüklerimi götüren misin Won’t you be the one to bear away my heavy burdens?
Katar maya ile dür sen mi geldin Was it you who came strung with money and pearl?
Yüzünde benlerin hindidär hindi Your freckles on your face are like Indian paper385
Bilmem nelek midir huri mi kendi I don’t know if she is an angle or a houri
Bir su ver içeyim yüreğim yandı Give me water so I may drink, my heart is ablaze
Ağustos ayında kar sen mi geldin Was it you who came as snow in the summer months386?

384 This devise appears in a number of variations in published sources and in recorded performances. I have used the text from Avci as he incorporates a version of all the verses. Aslanoğlu was the first to include it in a major collection, taking the text from Ziya Gürel. Aslanoğlu’s verses equate to verses 1, 3, 4, 7, 6 (with some variation of the first two lines) and 8 (Aslanoğlu 1984, 306-307). As Avci notes, the fifth verse in some versions appears as the mahlas verse, as in Öztelli (1971, 297) “Pir Sultan geyinmiş al ile yeşil / Yârin sevdalari sere alasır / Sevdîğim geyinmiş al ile yeşil / Çarşalar bezenmiş al, safa geldin”. As can be seen in the verse from Öztelli, some versions have the refrain as “saфа geldin” (meaning a personal, direct greeting).

385 A line that is certainly diminished in translation. A variant of this line reads “Hindidir yârımın kaslari Hind” which might be rendered “my beloved’s eyebrows are fine like the Indian” which barely achieves a less clumsy result.

386 More literally this of course should read “the month of August”, a rare and curious mention such a date – and most likely of recent derivation. The version in Öztelli reads “Temmuz” (July). My decision
Hurry along my love and think of yourself
Your beauty, my love, has no equal
Dressed as you are in all manner of fine cloth
Was it you who came adorned as the city bazaar?

I wonder are you from the land of my beloved
Or are you a rose from that special garden?
Are you from the highest land of Paradise?
Was it you who came as a virgin from highest heaven?

Nightingales sing in the garden of grace
My desire remains ensnared in the breast
My hand manacled before the executioner
Was it you who came as the salve to cure my pain?

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, get a grip of yourself
The longings of the lover will reach an end
Going around dressed in all manner of clothes
Was it you, love, who came adorned as the marketplace?

A rose opened amid the thorn
I came, a nightingale, to your garden to sing
A merchant I sold my load of jewels
I came to spend at Ali’s market place

My load could not be sold until I paid my toll
Fraud was not mixed with the quality of the gems

---

5.5.16 Diken arasında bir gül açıldı

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 40).

Cited source: Not indicated but assumed to be Banaz oral traditions (şifahi rivayetleri).

---

on the version given here is in part due to my perspective living in the Southern Hemisphere where snow in August is not a rare event!

387 In the version recorded on Muhabbet 4 giving Tacım Dede (from the Maraş region) as the source, the mahlas is ‘Abdal Pir Sultan’ım’ (Sağ, Eroğlu, and Top 2009d).
İnkâr toru ile şahin tutulmaz  
Bir gerçek toruna düşmeğe geldim

Ben bend oldum şu meydana atıldım  
İkrar verdim ikrarına tutuldum  
İptida tâliptim pire katıldım  
Pirin eteğini tutmaya geldim

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım yüreğim düğün  
İmamlar bendine boyandım bugün  
İrehber pişirir tâlibin çiğin  
Ahri bu imiş pişmeye geldim

5.5.17 Düün gece seyrimde çoštuydu dağlar

Turkish text: Ergun (Ergun 1929, 11)

This deyiş, an important one in the legend of Pir Sultan, is commonly thought to have been sung by Pir Sultan Abdal’s daughter Sanem shortly after his death.

Düün gice seyrimde çoštuydu dağlar  
Seyrin ağlar ağlar Pir sultan deyu  
Gündüz hayâlimde gice düşündəa  
Duşta ağlar ağlar Pir Sultan deyu

See note 342 for the deyiş Ben dervişim diye göğsün açarsın (5.5.3) on the meaning of etek tutmak in the context of the talip’s initiation.

While I translated “pişirir” in the previous line as the causative “cooks”, to follow and translate the dative verbal noun of the intransitive form “pişmeye” here with “ultimately I came for the cooking”, or even “to be cooked”, obviously would not work. In fact pişmek conveys both the idea of ‘to be cooked’ and ‘to ripen’ or ‘to mature’ so the repetition of the verb over the two lines therefore affords the opportunity to suggest both meanings.

Because this deyiş appears in a number of somewhat confusing variants I have used the earliest published text from Ergun. Gölpınarlı and Boratav include the text with the sources indicated as Ergun, Banaz oral tradition and Badicivan (Erzurum, Hasankale) oral traditions (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 41-42). Avcı provides other variations on the text (Avcı 2006, 230-233). I have retained the orthography – including the Ottoman vowel harmony – of Ergun except for the capitalisation at the beginning of each line which is erratic.
Ey benim divane gönlüm

5.5.18

Turkish text: (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943-120).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929); and Sadettin Nüzhet’s Bektaşi şairleri (Ergun 1930).

Ey benim divane gönlüm
Dağlara düştüm yalınız
Bu benim ahım yüzünden
Bir mihâk gördüm yalınız

Hey my mad foolish heart
I fell upon the mountains alone
This is the reason for this sigh of mine
I saw a period of the new moon alone

I have left dede untranslated rather than settling on one of possible meanings. It may mean literally ‘grandfather’ or ‘elder’ or, as is probably most suitable here given that it is implied that it is Pir Sultan’s daughter speaking, spiritual and communal leader. In the following verse she address Pir Sultan as “babamı” (my father) which seems a more intimate form of address and I have translated it as such; although baba is both a general form of respectful address and may also be applied to a spiritual leader.

From eternity love made me crazy
I am Husayn, I am Alevi say what you will
Why do you cast blame, enemy of the way
I am Husayn, I am Alevi say what you will
It is Imam Ali the essence of the eternal
If I drink poison from the hand of the master is it healing

393 I read “mihâk” as mahak meaning the last three days of the lunar month, the dark period of the moon: the new moon.
392 Gölpınarlı and Boratav’s version appears to have a printing error here: both editions have ‘dağlardan’ rather than the correct dağlar[
394 Avci (2006, 756) has these lines: Durmadan üç gün gece / Söylesem derdim yalınız which has influenced my rendering.
395 Ergun notes a variant in a mecmua that reads pir instead of şah (Ergun 1929, 72).
396 While I have elsewhere usually translated eren simply as dervish, here, following the mahlas line’s reference to those who see, I have prefered a rendering that suggest the more specific meaning of eren as one who has arrived at divine truth.
5.5.20 Fecha vermiş koca başlı kör müftü

Turkish text: Gölpınarı and Boratav (1943, 60).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Fetva vermiş koca başlı kör müftü  The fat headed blind Mufti has passed judgement
Şah diyenin dilin keseyim deyüş  Saying: I will sever the tongue that speaks of the Shah
Satur yaptırmuş Allahın lâneti  The cursed of God makes ready the cleaver
Aliyi seveni keseyim deyüş  Saying: I will slaughter the one who loves Ali

397 More correctly Sahib-ı zaman a title given to the twelfth Imam in occultation, Muhammad Mehdi.
398 Öztelli’s published text of this düaz-i imam is deficient lacking mention of the Imams Hasan, Husayn (except in the refrain line) and Zeynel Abidin. Kay (1999, 317) provides the missing verse:

Hasan Hulkmırza ol Mürtezâ‘dir  Hasan of sublime nature that is Murtaza
Imam Hüseyin ‘e canlar fedâdir  Souls are sacrificed for Imam Husayn
Zeynel Abâ esir Kerbelâ‘dir  Zeynel Abidin is a captive in Kerbelâ
Hüseyin yem Alevi ‘yem ne dersin I am Husayn, I am Alevi, say what you will

399 Azrail the angel of death.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Şer kulların örükünü uzatmış</td>
<td>He loosens the noose from the wicked ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Müminlerin baharını güz etmiş</td>
<td>He makes the believers’ spring turn to autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On İkiler bir arada söz etmiş</td>
<td>He speaks without regard for the Twelve Imams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Âşıkların yayın yasayım deyü</td>
<td>Saying: I will slacken the bowstring of the dervishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakki seven âşık geçmez mi candan</td>
<td>Is it not so that the God loving dervish does not die?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korkarım Allahtan korkum yok senden</td>
<td>I fear God but I have no fear of you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferman alınsız Hıdır Paşa Sultandan</td>
<td>Nor for the order Hızır Paşa takes from the Sultan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir Sultan Abdal’ı asayım deyü</td>
<td>Saying: I will hang Pir Sultan Abdal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.21 *Gel benim sari tanburam*

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 99-100).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s *XVII’inci asır saşşairlerinden* Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929), Besim Atalay’s *Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı* and Gölpınarlı cönk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkey text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gel benim sari tanburam</td>
<td>Come my yellow lute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen ne için inilersin</td>
<td>Why is it that you moan?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İçim ayuk derdim büyük</td>
<td>I am hollow within and my grief is great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben anıncın inilerim</td>
<td>It is for this that I moan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koluma taktilar teli</td>
<td>They attached string to my arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Söyletiler bin bir dili</td>
<td>They made me speak countless languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oldum ayn-i cem bülbülü</td>
<td>I was the nightingale in the ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben anıncın inilerim</td>
<td>It is for this that I moan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koluma taktilar perde</td>
<td>They attached fretting to my arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uğrattilar bin bir derde</td>
<td>They had me meet with countless sorrows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim konar kim göçer burda</td>
<td>Who settles here and who departs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben anıncın inilerim</td>
<td>It is for this that I moan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goğsüme tahta döşerler</td>
<td>They lay my body on the seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durmayıp beni okşarlar</td>
<td>They stroke me without ceasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vurdukça bağırm değerler</td>
<td>They open up my breast as they strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben anıncın inilerim</td>
<td>It is for this that I moan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gel benim sarı tanburam
Dizler üsünde yatıram
Yine kırdı hâtram
Ben anınçın inilerim

Sarı tanburadır adım
Göklere ağar feryadım
Pir Sultan’ımdır üstadım
Ben anınçın inilerim

Gel seninle ahd-ü peyman edelim
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
İkimiz de bir ikrarı güdelim
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni

Aman kaşı keman elinde aman
Sürdük safasını, etmedik tamam
Ehl-i ifran içre olduğum zaman
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni

Hem saza mailem hem de sohbete
Hem sana mailem hem de devlete
Aşkın ile düştüm diyar gurbete
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni

Yârımın cemâlî güneşle mâhu
Sana âşık olan çeknez mi âhu
Getir and içelim Kelâmullah!
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni

5.5.22 Gel seninle ahd ü peyman edelim


Gel seninle ahd-ü peyman edelim
Come and let us make a pledge with you
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you
İkimiz de bir ikrarı güdelim
Let the two of us cherish a vow
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

Aman kaşı keman elinde aman
For mercy, how her eyebrows are finely wrought
Sürdük safasını, etmedik tamam
We pursued pleasure, we did so without end
Ehl-i ifran içre olduğum zaman
When I was among the cultured crowd
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

Hem saza mailem hem de sohbete
I am inclined towards the saz and conversation
Hem sana mailem hem de devlete
I am inclined towards you and prosperity
Aşkın ile düştüm diyar gurbete
By your love I fell out upon the foreign land
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

Yârımın cemâlî güneşle mâhu
My beloved’s beauty is like the moon and sun
Sana âşık olan çeknez mi âhu
Does your lover not draw forth his moan?
Getir and içelim Kelâmullah!
Bring forth and let us imbibe the word of God
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

400 ‘İrfan’ in the izafet construction ‘ehl-i ifran’ has the sense of culture and knowledge including spiritual knowledge. In the version collected from Tacım Dede by Arif Sağ the line reads “İrfan meclisine vardoğan zaman” (Sağ 1990) which could be translated as “when you reach the assembly of the wise”.

401 Here I follow Öztelli (1971, 218) in reading ‘devlet’ as meaning baht (good fortune) or saadet (prosperity) and not ‘state’ or ‘power’.

402 While ‘düştüm’ means simply ‘I passed over to’ or ‘fell into’ it also suggests the concept of düşkün and estrangement from the spiritual community.
Abdal Pir Sultan’s çekti dâra
Düşmüşüm aşına yanarım nâra
Bakın hey erenler şu giden yâra
Ne sen beni unut, ne de ben seni

They drew Abdal Pir Sultan to the gallows place
I fell down for your love and suffer for you
Dervishes, behold that one on the way to the beloved
Neither you forget me, nor I forget you

5.5.23 Gelin canlar bir olalım

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 64-65)

Cited source: Collected by Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan from a mecmua (manuscript collection of lyrics) belonging to a villager named Muharrem in İğdiş village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gelin canlar bir olalım</th>
<th>Come comrades let us be one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Münkire kılıç çalalım</td>
<td>Let us strike swords upon the deniers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hüseynin kann alalım</td>
<td>Let us avenge the blood of Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevekkeltü taâlâllah</td>
<td>I put my trust in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Öüzü özce bağılyalim</td>
<td>Let us bind ourselves together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sular gibi çağlyalum</td>
<td>Let us murmur like the rushing waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bir yürüyüş eyliyelims</td>
<td>Let us make an onward assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevekkeltü taâlâllah</td>
<td>I put my trust in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Açalım kızıl sancağı</td>
<td>Let us unfurl the banner of red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geçsin Yezidlerinçağı</td>
<td>Let the time of the deceitful pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimize deş başçası</td>
<td>In our hand is the dagger of passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevekkeltü taâlâllah</td>
<td>I put my trust in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mervan soyunu vuralım</td>
<td>Let us strike at sons of Mervan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hüseynin kann soralım</td>
<td>Let us ask for the blood of Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padışahın öldürelsm</td>
<td>Let us kill the Padishah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tevekkeltü taâlâllah</td>
<td>I put my trust in God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

403 I have chosen to translate ‘dar’ clearly as gallows although its many meanings and resonances are necessarily obscured. It can mean a place of dwelling, or land or world; or may mean ‘in difficulties’. In its meaning as ‘gallows’ it obviously invokes the fate of Pir Sultan but rather less obviously in translation suggests also the ritual space where the dervish stands as penitent.

404 Although this deyiş is strongly associated with Pir Sultan and is perhaps one of his most famous and most quoted lyrics – being used as a left-wing slogan and march in the 1960s and 1970s, see Poyraz (2007, 170) – it is considered by some to be a false and later attribution to Pir Sultan and was in fact composed by Aşık Sıdkı Baba. There is indeed a lyric in the collection of deyiş published by...
**5.5.24 Gelmiş iken bir habercık sorayım**

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 51-52).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s *XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal*, Vahid Lütfü Saleçı ‘Kızılbaş şairleri’ *Yeni Türk mecmuası*, 84 (1939), and Naci Kum Atabeyli *XVIII’inci Beynelmilel Antropoloji ve Prehistorik Arkeoloji Kongresi tebligler kitabı* (1934).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish phrase</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Pir Sultan’ım geldi cûşa</em></td>
<td>I am Pir Sultan he’s come to boiling point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Münkirlerin aklı şaşa</em></td>
<td>The deniers shall be driven mad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Takdir olan gelir başa</em></td>
<td>What is destined shall come to pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tevkekeltü taâlâllah</em></td>
<td>I put my trust in God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

5.5.24 Gelmiş iken bir habercık sorayım

Since I’ve come I shall seek a little news

Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?

One should show respect to the true dervishes

Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?

On the low hill are your red and scarlet stones

On the heights is the sound of the red cranes

I don’t know what is the cause of your misfortune

Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?

My Shah is swathed in scarlet and red

He who does not see the friend’s face is the enemy

From the heights the land of the Shah is seen

Star Mountain, why does your mist not leave?

They signal to the red cranes and the falcons

The mountains are turned green for the new seasons

---

Sıdkı’s grandson Muhsin Gül (1984, 199-200) which does appear a more structured and developed version of this lyric. That version does not include this particular verse with its overt and alarming call for the slaughter of the Sultan (*Padişah*) although it does possess the same defiant vigour of the Pir Sultan lyric.

405 Erenler, those who have attained knowledge of the mysteries of the way; those who have reached divine truth.

406 That is, one who does not follow the true way.
Çiğdemler takımın söyle kızlara
Niçin gitmez Yıldız-dağ dumanı?

Şah’ın bahçesinde gönça gül biter
Anda garip garip bülbüler öter
Bunda ayrılık var ölümden better
Niçin gitmez Yıldız-dağ dumanı?

Ben de bildim şu dağların şahsın
Gerçek Erenlerin nazargâhsın
Abdal Pir Sultan’ın seyrangâhsın
Niçin gitmez Yıldız-dağ dumanı?

5.5.25 Gelsin ikrarına beli diyenler

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 109-110).

Cited source: Menâkıbu ’l-Esrar Behcetü ’l-Ahrâr.

Gelsin ikrarına beli diyenler
Let those who affirm their vows come
İniltim derdim Muhammed Ali’dir
My moan of suffering is for Muhammad Ali
İsmin anıncı salavat verenler
They give invocation mentioning the name
Mesrebim virdim Muhammed Ali’dir
My disposition my recitation is for Muhammad Ali

Gör’e Mansur kabul eyledi dâri
See how Mansur accepted his circumstance
Âlemde nesne bulmadı serserî
The vagabond found nothing in the world
Her kande bakarsam mürşidi piri
If at every source I look for the master and guide
Gözümle gördüm Muhammed Ali’dir
I saw with my eyes it is Muhammad Ali

Kimse bahane bulmadı naklîme
No-one found fault with my narrative
Haktan gayri nesne gelmez aklıma
Nothing comes to mind other than God
Düşüncêğiz bu garbet ıklimroot
We will ponder upon this foreign clime
Mekânım yurdum Muhammed Ali’dir
My place my land is Muhammad Ali

Gezevim âlemde bir yâr bulayım
I shall travel the world and find a beloved
Bu akan çeşmimin yaşın sileyim
I shall wipe away these tears that flow from my eyes
Aритим pâk ettim gönülüm sarayım
I cleansed and made pure the heart you shall embrace
İçeri girdim Muhammed Ali’dir
I entered within for Muhammad Ali
News from the companion came in moans
Heal, wounds within the heart, heal
Pir Sultan says don’t be dispirited heart
Succour for the abandoned is Muhammad Ali

5.5.26 Gözleyi gözleyi gözüm oldu

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 62).
Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929).

Watching and waiting I was all eyes
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come
No groves remain the land is blackened
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come

Like the Red River, break loose from your barrage
Come from Hama and from Mardin to Sivas
Düdül407 is saddled so gird Zülfikar your sword
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come

Let the believer be drawn into concealment
Let stones pour down on the head of the unbeliever
Let our banner be raised at Kazova408
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come

One day they will learn of the Shah’s409 coming
The Yezids were dressed in the cloak of damnation
They slaughtered Imam Ali Riza410
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come

407 The Prophet Muhammad’s mule.
408 A plain between Sivas and Tokat.
409 In the context of the lyric concisely evoking Imam Ali, the Mahdi (mehdi) and the Safavid Shah or perhaps all three in one.
410 True or not this line reflects the Shia assertion that all the Imams were victims, Ali and Husayn being killed and the rest (excepting the Mehdi who is in occultation) poisoned. As Vaziri suggests "their martyrdom is believed to be a manifestation of their excellence and so represents a divine virtue for the cause of the Shi’ites" (Vaziri 1992, 130).
5.5.27 Gurbet elde bir hal geldi başıma

Turkish text: Şemsi Yastıman (1977, 15)\textsuperscript{411}.


\begin{verbatim}
Pir Sultan Abdal’im bu sözüm haktır
Vallâhi sözümün hatası yoktur
Şimdiki sofunun yezidi çoktur
Ali’m ne yatırsın günlerin geldi

I am Pir Sultan Abdal this word of mine is true
I swear to God there is no lie in my word
Nowadays the deceitful dervishes are many
My Ali, why are you idle, your time has come
\end{verbatim}

\textbf{Gurbet elde bir hal geldi başıma}

\textit{Gurbet elde bir hal geldi başıma}  In a land of exile trouble happened upon me\textsuperscript{412}
\textit{Ağlama gözlerim Mevlâ kerimdir}  Don’t weep, my eyes, God is gracious
\textit{Derman arar iken derde düş oldum}  While seeking physic\textsuperscript{413} I met with suffering
\textit{Ağlama gözlerim Mevlâ kerimdir}  Don’t weep, my eyes, God is gracious

\textit{Hüma kuşu yere düştü ölmedi}  The Bird of Pardise fell to earth but didn’t die
\textit{Dünya Sultân Süleyman’a kalmadı}  The world does not stop for Sultan Suleyman
\textit{Dedim yâre gidem nasip olmadı}  I said let me go to my beloved but it was not destined
\textit{Ağlama gözlerim Mevlâ kerimdir}  Don’t weep, my eyes, God is gracious

\textit{Kağıda yazarlar ufak yazılar}  They wrote in small script upon the paper
\textit{Anasız olur mu körpe kuzular}  The tender lambs, were they motherless?
\textit{Yürek yârelidir, ciğer sızılar}  The heart is rent and full of grief\textsuperscript{414}
\textit{Ağlama gözlerim Mevlâ kerimdir}  Don’t weep, my eyes, God is gracious

\begin{verbatim}
411 This \textit{deyiş} is renowned through the performance of Ali Ekber Çiçek who is usually cited as the source for the song; and the earliest publication that I have located is in Yastıman (1977, 14-15). Avcı includes the lyric in his collection with some minor variants in the third and final verses. Atılgan records the mahlas form in the TRT repertoire as ‘Abdal Pir Sultan’ım’ and is of the opinion that the words actually belong to the eastern Anatolian folk poet Aşık Kurbani to whom a five verse lyric is recorded ending with the mahlas verse beginning “\textit{Kurbanîy‘em} bu bu böyle buyurdu” (Atılgan 2003, 524-525). The influence of Çiçek and Arıf Sağ on the the Muhabbet 2 recording however firmly establishes this \textit{deyiş} now as an attribution to Pir Sultan Abdal.

412 A fine opening line in Turkish that suffers significant loss in finding an English rendering. ‘Gurbet’ has a sense of being in a foreign land, displaced, in exile while longing for one’s homeland and the addition of ‘elde’ (‘in a strange land’), a formulaic construction with ‘gurbet’ that does however intensify the sense of displacement in a foreign place. ‘Hal’ has a connotation of a state of being, a condition, and particularly of trouble or misfortune. The standard construction ‘\textit{geldi başıma}’ – though the word order is usually reversed – meaning ‘to befall me’ does lose the sense of ‘mind’ or ‘head’ in ‘\textit{baş}’ and the inherent intimation of internal torment or affliction.

413 While my choice of the word ‘physic’ rather than the more obvious ‘medicine’ or ‘cure’ introduces something of an archaism, it does retain a suggestion of ‘strength’ that ‘\textit{derman}’ conveys.

414 ‘Full of grief’ is a rather free reading of ‘\textit{ciğer sızılar}’ in order to avoid the repetition of ‘heart’ (yürek, \textit{ciğer}) though it does allow the plurality of ‘\textit{sızılar}’ (pains, griefs) to be suggested.
\end{verbatim}
Pir Sultan Abdal'ım böyle buyurdu
Ayrılık donların bıçtı, giyirdi
Ben ayrılmaz idim, felek ayrıdı
 Ağlama gözlerim Mevlâ kerimdir

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, so he speaks
He cut and dressed in the clothes of isolation
I would not have been apart but fate separated me
Don’t weep, my eyes, God is gracious

5.5.28 Haktan inayet olursa

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 64).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, collected from Hüseyin Efendi, Kale (village), Divrik (Divriği), Sivas region.

Haktan inayet olursa

By the grace of God
Şah Uruma gele bir gün
May the Shah come to Rum415 one day
Gazâda bu Zülfikaru
In holy battle may he strike Zulfikar
Kâfirlere çala bir gün
Against the unbelievers one day

Hep devşire gele iller
May all tribes come together
Şaha ola köle kullar
May they be slaves for the Shah
Urumda ağlıyan sefiller
The destitute in the land of Rum
Şâd ola da güle bir gün
May they rejoice and smile one day

Çeke sancağı götüre
May they raise and bear the banner
Şah İstanbula otura
May the Shah416 sit in Istanbul
Firenken yer getire
May he return the captives from the Frankish lands417
Horasana sala bir gün
May he release them to Horasan one day

Devşire beyi paşayı
May he gather together master and lord
Zapteleye dört köşeyi
May he seize the four exremities
Husrev ede temaşayı
May the monarch enjoy the spectacle
Âli divan kura bir gün
May Ali establish court one day

415 Central Anatolia
416 That is the Safavid Shah.
417 This does not specifically imply those captive of Christians or Europeans but rather in the ‘European’ or ‘Frankish’ lands – the old Byzantine lands – occupied by the Ottoman Sultan – that is Istanbul. Özbek (2009) provides a definition of fireng or firengi as meaning pranga or kilit, that is being imprisoned or under lock and key, which would also work in this context.
5.5.29 Hazret-i Ali’nin devri yürüye

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 61-62).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929) and Besim Atalay’s Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı.

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Güllü Şahın doğdu deyü
Bol ırahmet yağdu deyü
Kutlu günler doğdu deyü
Şa şâd ola bir gün

Mehdi Dedem gelse gerek
Ali divan kursa gerek
Haksızları kırsa gerek
İntikamın ala bir gün

Pir Sultan’ın işi ahtır
İntizarım güzel Şah’tır
Mülk iyesi padişaatır
Mülke sahib ola bir gün

---

That the Shah’s rose was born
That abundant mercy rained down
That happy days were born
May such a world rejoice one day

My dede Mahdi must come
Ali must establish the court
He must break down injustice
May he wreak vengeance one day

Pir Sultan’s work is but a sigh
I am in expectation of the beautiful Shah
The administration that is sovereign
May he be its master one day

---

Hazret-i Ali’nin devri yürüye
Ali kim olduğu bilinmelidir
Alay alay gelen gaziler ile
İmamların öcü alınmalıdır

Kendin teslim eyle bir serçeşmeye
Er odur ki yarın senden şaşmaya
Bir münafık bin gaziyeye düşmeye
Din aşkına kılıç çalınmalıdır

---

May the time of Lord Ali advance
It must be known who Ali is
With row after row of advancing warriors
The revenge of the Imams must be taken

Surrender yourself only to the commander
A man who tomorrow shall not desert you
One hypocrite shall not bring down a thousand warriors
The sword must strike for the love of faith

---

418 Serçeşme has a number of meanings including in Ottoman historical contexts an officer commissioned to raise irregular troops. In the Alevi-Bektaşi context, it also refers to the spiritual leader or source. It may refer to any of the great leaders of the tarikat (way); and may also be used to specifically refer to Hacı Bektaş Veli.

419 Fuat (1999, 102-103) gives, perhaps, a more logical version of this line that transposes the force of numbers and the weight of meaning – “bin münafık bir gaziyeye düşmeye” (a thousand hypocrites shall not bring down one warrior) – stressing the invincibility of the holy warrior and the wider state of corruption.
Yer yüzün kırmızı taçlar bürüye  
Münafık olanın bağrı eriye  
Sâhib-i zamanın emri yürüye  
Sultan kim olduğu bilinmelidir

Çağırırlar filân oğlu filâna  
Ne itibar Yezid kavlı yalana  
Kılıcın Arş'tadır doğru gelene  
Ya ser verip ya ser alınmalıdır

Pir Sultan Abdal’im ey dede himmet  
Kendine çevremle âleme rahmet  
İstanbul şehrinde ol sahib devlet  
Tâc-ı devlet ile salınmalıdır

5.5.30 Hazret-i Şah’ın avazı

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 113).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929) and Derviş Ruhullah’s Bektaşi nefesleri.

Hazret-i Şah’ın avazı  
Turna derler bir kuşatdır  
Asâsi Nil denizinde  
Hırkası bir derviştedir

Nil denizi umman oldu  
Sararp gül benzim soldu  
Bakışı arslanda kaldı  
Doğuşu dahi koçtadır

Ali’ım istemez benliği  
Yürekte tutmaz kinliği

The red caps cover the face of the earth
May the hypocrite’s heart pine away
May the command of the master of these times advance
It must be known who is sovereign

They call out such and such to the sons of so and so
What regard is due the word of the lying Yezid
His sword raised on high at the one advancing
The head must be devoted or seized

I am Pir Sultan Abdal hey there Dede Himmet
Don’t torment yourself show compassion for the world
In the city of Istanbul that monarch of the state
And the power of the crown must be shaken down

The voice of the great Shah Ali
Is in that bird they call the crane
His staff is in the depths of the Nile
His cloak is that of the dervish

The depths of the Nile became ocean
My face became a wan and faded rose
His aspect dwells in that of the lion
So too his fight is in that of the ram

My Ali has no wish for conceit
In his heart there is no malice

Fuat (1999, 103) suggests that this, and the later reference to ‘Dede Himmet’ refers to the Mahdi (Mehdi), the twelfth imam. Himmet – which also conjurs in name Pir Sultan’s younger contemporary Kul Himmet – conveys a meaning of ‘zeal’ and the ‘moral support’ of a sainted figure.
Zülfikarın keskinliği
The edge of Ali’s sword is keen
Zerrecesi kılıçtadır
There is not such a sword as this

Özen pirim oğlu özen
Strive son of my master, strive
Var kendine bir yâr kazan
Win for yourself the beloved one
Hayrım şerrini yazan
Writing down the good and evil
Sağ yarında feriştedir
The angel is at his right hand side

Nerde Pir Sultan ’im nerde
Where oh where, I am Pir Sultan
Özümüzün aslı dârda
Standing transfixed in our true self
Yemenden öte bir yerde
In a place beyond the Yemen
Hâlâ Düldûl savaştadır
Ali’s horse is yet in battle

5.5.31 *Ilgıt ilgıt esen seher yelleri*

Turkish text: Avcı (2006, 634-635).

*Ilgıt ilgıt esen seher yelleri*  Gently the morning breeze blows
*Doğru gelir doğru gider mi yâr yâr*  Directly it comes and directly so it goes, Beloved?
*Hakkın emri ile çürüyen canlar*  Wearing away poor souls with God’s command
*Verdiği ikrarda durur mu yâr yâr*  Does the Beloved stand by the vow given, Beloved?421

*Pazarlık mı olur adîl dâkkanda*  Was there a bargain in the shop of justice?
*Meylim muhabbetim kaldı insanda*  My affection and love remained in the human422
*Bu diwan olmazsa ulu diwanda*  If impossible in this council then in the great council
*Dost benim sualim verir mi yâr yâr*  Friend, did the Beloved give my petition, Beloved?

421 I have sought to retain a deliberate ambiguity in the translation of the third person, particularly in the last line of each verse. There is a temptation – and a good argument – for turning this into a direct question in the second person: “did you stand by your vow, Beloved?” The implied understanding is an address to the second person but this is kept poetically distant. Making this understanding explicit in translation may be preferable to another option, to assign a gender: “did he/she stand by his/her vow, Beloved?” However, my objective and choice is to retain something of the mystical distance I detect in the original. Repeating the word ‘Beloved’ not only echoes the repetition in the original but seeks to suggest the ambiguity of the beloved by including it as the third person subject of the line and as a personal and direct interrogative.

422 The version on the Muhabbet 3 (Sağ et al. 2009c) recording sung by Arif Sağ has this line as “meyli muhabbetim kaldı yar sende” – the interpolation ‘de’ gives the line a spurious syllable – while Kivrıcık Ali (Various 2004) sings “neydi muhabbetin kaldı yar sende”. Both versions make explicit the second person ‘sende’ – the beloved as ‘you’ – that is not explicitly addressed in the fuller version given by Avcı.
Verdiği sözlerine inandım kaldım  
İkrara bağlandım iman buldum  
Erenler yolunda ser-sefil oldum  
Dost fâkir hâlimi görür mü yâr yâr

Bahçende açılmış yâr gonca gâller  
Gülün figanından sefil bülbüller  
Aşıktan maşuka sarılan kollar  
Bin yıl yerde yartsa çürür yâr yâr

Pir Sultan Abdal'ım kalbi zâr olan  
Döner mi sözünden gerçek er olan  
Senin gibi ahdı sadık yâr olan  
Verdiği ikrardan döner mi yâr yâr

5.5.32 İptida bir sofu Şah’a varınca

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 39-40).

Cited source: Banaz oral traditions (şifahî rivayetleri).

İptida bir sofu Şah’a varınca  
Niye geldin derler Urum sofrusu  
Çevre çevresi dört yanna bakınca  
Niye geldin derler Urum sofrusu  
Ateşin yanmadan dumanın tüter  
Murtaz’Ali katarırdı bu katar  
Bunca Evliyaya hizmetin yeter  
Niye geldin derler Urum sofrusu  
Çok uzak ilerden özendin geldin  
Şol tozu yollara bezendin geldin  
Urumdan ne günah kazıdan geldin  
Niye geldin derler Urum sofrusu

At first when the dervish reaches the Shah  
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum  
Looking every which way about them  
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum  
Fire does not smoke before it is alight  
This caravan is the caravan of Ali Murtaza  
Your service for the saint is sufficient  
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum  
You took pains to come from distant lands  
You came equipped for those dusty roads  
What guilt did you earn that you came from Rum  
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum

423 Performed versions of this deyiş generally have the mahlas as Abdal Pir Sultan’ım.  
424 That is Anatolia, specifically central Anatolia. I have retained Rum here mostly for the more poetic  

sound.
The nightingale needs the rose branch to alight
As Shah Ismail needs the semah dance to turn
Do you have no companion to pour out your troubles?
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum

I am Pir Sultan Abdal, if they would only write it
If they would seek out and travel the lands
If they would hang the one who is not true to the way
They say: why have you come dervish of Rum

5.5.33 Kahpe felek sana n’ettim n’eyledim

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 48-49).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Deceitful destiny, what have you gone and done?
You turned the world upside down
What became of the old justice of former days?
You turned the whole world to ruin

Though in the presence of Sultan Süleyman
Though in the person of pure power
Though every bird is taken under its wing
The great owl destroyed the falcon

To the unbearable suffering of the dervishes
Reason does not suffice for recitation and prayer
The mean wish to settle on the land of the generous
The fox repelled the lion from it’s land

425 A rare explicit reference to the historic Safavid Shah Ismail by name rather than simply as Shah or Hatayi.
426 In what is a semantically very difficult lyric, this is a particularly difficult verse and is fact is not included in a number of the collections in which this lyric is found. In order to render a meaningful sense I have read iken as ‘though’ rather than ‘while’. I have struggled somewhat with the second line reading dest in its sense of ‘power’ rather than the more literal ‘hand’ or ‘grasp’ and zât as ‘person’ although it could mean ‘essence’. While kuş means bird, it may also mean more specifically ‘falcon’ as does şahan, that is şahin. Sarı gebe is sarkebe the great or brown owl bubo maximus. I have understood the verse to imply an ominous warning that seems in keeping with the lyric’s sense of disorder.
Anca bu yaraya dayandı Eyyup
Hüdânnın cefasını safaya sayıp
Cahiller kâmile sen bilmen deyip
Ann için kaybettiler ifrâni

Pir Sultan’ım niye geldin cihana
Kurşun senin imiş etme bahane
Evvel kullar yalvarırdı Sultana
Şimdi minnetç’ ettin kula Sultanı

But Job endured his suffering
He took no regard of the torment of God
Ignorant ones, you do not know completeness, he said
Therefore they lost their spiritual knowledge

I am Pir Sultan, why did you come into the world
It was your fault, make no excuses
At first slaves entreated the Sultan
Now you’re a supplicant to the Sultan for the slave

5.5.34 Karşıda görünen ne güzel yayla

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 37-38).
Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asr sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929), Banaz oral traditions (şifâhî rivayetleri), and Gölpınarlı cönk.

Karşıda görünen ne güzel yayla
Bir dem süremedim giderim böyle
A la gözlü Pirim sen himmet eyle
Ben de yayladan Şah’a giderim

How beautiful the plateau opposite appears
I could not continue happy so I will go
My hazel eyed master may you give support
I will go from this plateau to the Shah

Eğer göğürüben bostan olursam
Şu halkin diline destan olursam
Kara toprak senden üstün olursam
Ben de yayladan Şah’a giderim

If I were a garden sprouting with produce
If I were a ballad on the tongue of these people
If I could issue from out of your black earth
I will go from this plateau to the Shah

Bir bölük turnaya sökün dediler
Yürekteki derdi dökün dediler
Yayladan ötesi yakın dediler
Ben de yayladan Şah’a giderim

The red crane suddenly appears they said
Pour forth the sorrow in your heart they said
The other side of the plateau is near they said
I will go from this plateau to the Shah

Dost elinden dolu içmiş deliyim
Üstü kan köpükli meşe seliyim
Ben bir yol oğluyum yol sefiliyim
Ben de yayladan Şah’a giderim

I am crazed having drunk from the friend’s hand
I am an oak forest flood of foaming blood
I am the son and humble dervish of the way
I will go from this plateau to the Shah
Alınmış abdestim alırsarlarsa
Kılınmış namazım kıldırırsarlarsa
Sizde Şah diyeni öldürürlerse
Ben de yayıldan Şah’a giderim

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım dünya durulmaz
Gitti giden ömür geri dönülmez
Gözlerim de Şah yolundan ayrılmaz
Ben de yayıldan Şah’a giderim

I am Pir Sultan Abdal the world does not cease
The departing life has gone and does not return
My eyes do not depart from the way of the Shah
I will go from this plateau to the Shah

5.5.35 Koca başlı koca kadı

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 53).

Cited source: Collected by Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan from Veli Ağa of Alaçayır, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Koca başlı koca kadı
Sende hiç din iman var mı
Haram helâlı yedi
Sende hiç din iman var mı
Fetva verir yalan yulan
Domuz gibi dağı dolan
Sırına varurum palan
Senin gibi hayvan var mı
İman eder amel etmez
Hakkın buyruğuna gitmez
Kadılar yaş yere yatmaz
Hiç böyle kör şeytan var mı
Pir Sultan’ım zatlarınız
Gerçek tir söhretleriniz
Haram yemez itleriniz
Bu sözümde ziyan var mı

The fat headed old judge
Do you have no convictions?
He eats the lawful and forbidden
Do you have no convictions?
He gives judgements falsely and such
Like a pig and its swelling mound
I’ll put the saddle-pack on his back
Is there such an animal as you?
He doesn’t do the deeds of conviction
He is not fit for God’s command
Judges can’t lie straight in bed
Has there ever been such a blind devil?
I am Pir Sultan these are our affairs
Our reputation is the real deal
Our dogs never eat forbidden food
Is there any issue with these words of mine?

427 This is a somewhat free, but irresistible, reading of an idiomatic line that implies a position of deception.
428 This rather colloquial rendering seems in keeping with the tone of the lyric.
5.5.36 Koyun beni Hak aşına yanayım

Turkish text: İbrahim Aslanoğlu (1997b, 135-136).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun.

Koyun beni Hak aşına yanayım
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan
Yolumdan dönüp mahrum mu kalayım
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan

Benim pîrim gayet ulu kişidir
Yediler ulusu kırklar eşidir
On İki İmamın server başıdır
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan

Kadılar müftüler fetva yazarsa
İşte kement işte boynum asarsa
İşte hançer işte kellem keserse
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan

Ulu mahşer olur divan kurulur
Suçlu sussuz gelir anda derilir
Pîri olmayanlar anda bilinir
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan

Pir Sultan’ım arşa çıkar ünümüz
O da bizim ulumuzdur pîrimiz
Hakk’a teslim olsun garip canımız
Dönen dönsün ben dönmezem yolumdan

Permit me go to burn for God’s love\(^{430}\)
Let the turncoat turn I will never turn from my way
Were I to turn from my way would I not be destitute?
Let the turncoat turn I will never turn from my way

My master is one of the greatest of people
Greatest of the Seven, fellow of the Forty
The princely head of the Twelve Imams
Let the turncoat turn I will never turn from my way

If judges and muftis write judgements
If they hang me by the neck, behold the noose
If they cut off my head, behold the dagger
Let the turncoat turn I will never turn from my way

The court established, great judgement will occur
Guilty and innocent will come and be sorted there
Those without master will be known there
Let the turncoat turn I will never turn from my way

I am Pir Sultan our voice will rise to the heavens
And he who is our great one and our master
Let our estranged life be surrendered to God\(^{431}\)

\(^{429}\) Ziyan means loss or injury or harm; however variants of this lyric have yalan (falsehood) in place of ziyan. I have settled on a reading that keeps it ambiguous and sustains the lyric’s defiant tone.  
\(^{430}\) Or, “for the love of Truth/Right”.  
\(^{431}\) Or Truth or Right.
5.5.37 Kul olayım kalem tutan eline

Turkish text: Gölpinarlı and Boratav (1943, 36-37).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929) from and Banaz oral traditions (şifahi rivayetleri).

Kul olayım kalem tutan eline
I shall be at the mercy\(^{432}\) of the hand holding the pen

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

Şekerler ezeyim şirin diline
I would crumble sugar onto his sweet tongue

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

Allahi seversen kâtip böyle yaz
Scribe, write of me thus, if you love Allah

Dünü gün ol Şah’a eylerim niyaz
Day and night I make entreaty to that Shah

Umarmı yükselsen şu kanlı Sivas
I yearn for the collapse of bloody Sivas

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

Sivas illerinde zilim çalınır
Within the lands of Sivas my knelt\(^{433}\) is rung

Çamlı beller bölük bölük bölünür
The pine covered passes\(^{434}\) are parted in two

Ben dosttan ayrıldım bağrım delinir
Separated from my friend my heart will break

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

Münafıkın her dediği oluyor
All is happening as the hypocrite says

Gül benzimiz sararuban soluyor
My rose coloured face turns pale and wan

Gidi Mervân şâd oluban gülüyor
The pimp, the bastard\(^{435}\), he rejoices and laughs

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım hey Hızır Paşa
Hey there Hızır Pasha, I am Pir Sultan Abdal

Gör ki neler gelir sağ olan başa
See what things befall such a living soul

Hasret koydu bizî kavim kardaşa
It has left us longing for our kith and kin

Kâtip ahvalimi Şah’a böyle yaz
Scribe, write thus of my condition to the Shah

\(^{432}\) Literally ‘the slave’.

\(^{433}\) A reference to the wearing of bells to identify someone condemned to hang. This line is usually altered in the versions performed from the second half of the twentieth century, following Aşık Veysel and Feyzullah Çınar, to “Sivas illerinde sazım çalınır” (In the lands of Sivas my saz [lute] is played).

\(^{434}\) I have rendered this literally although it also would seem to refer to the specific mountain pass through the Çamlıbeli mountains between Sivas and Tokat (and to the west of Banaz) called the Çamlıbel Geçidi.

\(^{435}\) The Umayyad Mervan (Mu’awiyah), like his son Yezid (Yazid), being an opponent of Ali (and the ehlîbeyt), epitomise for Alevi the wrongdoer and the despised and the name is used as the ultimate perjorative.
5.5.38 Medet ya Muhammet medet ya Ali

Turkish text: Arif Sağ, from Eastern Anatolia. Taken from the first of the Muhabbet series of recordings originally released on audio cassette in 1983 (Sağ, Akarsu, and Eroğlu 2009a)\(^{436}\).

Help me Muhammad help me Ali!

Oh Muhammad I came to you for consideration\(^ {438}\)

I piled up sin like snow covered mountains

Oh Muhammad I came to you for consideration

[Hey dervishes I came to you for consideration]

The gate of heaven is lined with marble\(^ {439}\)

Its wall is of pearl, wisdom is its work

One hundred and twenty-four thousand its prophets

Oh Muhammad I came to you for consideration

[Hey dervishes I came to you for consideration]

Muhammad is the mirror of the prophets\(^ {440}\)

Let us offer prayers, his voice will be radiant

Eighteen thousand of the world’s elect\(^ {441}\)

Oh Muhammad I came to you for consideration

[Hey dervishes I came to you for consideration]

\(^{436}\) The text of this deyiş is not found in this form in any of the collections of Pir Sultan lyrics. Aslanoğlu collected a variant beginning Medet senden medet ey mürvet kamı / Yâ Muhammet sana imdada geldim (Aslanoğlu 1984, 127-128). The first two lines of the second verse and the four lines of the third verse of the text given here correspond closely, with some minor variation, to the third and second lines of the third verse and the full second verse as given by Aslanoğlu who presents six verses for this lyric. The mahlas verse differs between versions with Aslanoğlu including it among the texts he attributes to the ‘first’ Pir Sultan with the mahlas line reading ‘Pir Sultan’ım adayanlar buldular’ (I am Pir Sultan, those making vows have attained). I have worked with the performed version of the lyric in this case because the published variant is substantively different.

\(^{437}\) Text included in square brackets represents performance additions to the formal text including repeated refrains with minor variation and expressive interpolations.

\(^{438}\) Mürvet (mürüvvet) translated here as ‘consideration’ presents some difficulty in translation. It has a fundamental meaning of ‘generosity’, ‘munificence’ and even ‘blessing’. Özbek (2009) and Korkmaz (2005a) both suggest meanings of ‘humanity’ and ‘greatness’.

\(^{439}\) Aslanoğlu’s (1984, 127) version reads ‘Angels open the gate of heaven’ (‘Cennet’in kapısın açar melekler’).\(^{440}\) Aslanoğlu (1984, 127) reads ‘Muhammad is the mirror of our hearts’ (‘Muhammet’ir gönlümünüzün aynası’”).

\(^{441}\) ‘Mustafa’ meaning ‘chosen’ or ‘elect’ is also a name for Muhammad as the chosen of God.
Abdal Pir Sultanım ben şama geldim
Şam eliğize [hey dost] yana yana geldim
Bingan ettim ... [Ali Ali Ali Ali Haydar
Haydar Haydar hey dost hey dost hey dost]
... kapına geldim
[Hey erenler size mürvete geldim]
Ya Muhammet sana mürvete geldim
[Hey erenler size mürvete geldim
Dost mürvete geldim Ali Ali]

I am Abdal Pir Sultan I came to Damascus
I came ablaze to our land of Damascus
I was concealed and came to your door
Oh Muhammad I came to you for consideration
[Hey dervishes I came to you for consideration]

5.5.39 Ötme bülbül ötme şen değil bağım

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 123).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Ötme bülbül ötme şen değil bağım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
Tükendi fitilim eridi yağım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
Deryada bölünmüş sellere döndüm
Vakitsiz açılmış güllere döndüm
Ateşi kararmış küllere döndüm
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
Haberim duyarın peyikler ile
Yaramı sararsın şehitler ile
Kırk yıl dağda gezdim geyikler ile
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana
Pir Sultan Abdal’ım doldum eksildim
Yemekden içmekden sudan kesildim
Hakki pek seviğim için asildım
Dost senin derdinden ben yana yana

Don’t sing nightingale don’t sing, my garden is cheerless
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you
My wick is extinguished and my oil used up
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you
I have turned to turbid torrents in the sea
I have turned to roses opened before their time
I have turned to ashes of an extinguished fire
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you
You will get news of me with the brave ones
You will swaddle my wound with the martyred ones
I have roved forty years with deer on the mountain
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you
I am Pir Sultan Abdal finished and gone
I was sapped without eating without drinking
I was hung because I loved the Truth too much
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering through you

442 I have read ‘bingan’ not as ‘pingân’ (a small cup or bowl) but as ‘pinhan’ meaning hidden, clandestine or, as I have rendered it, ‘concealed’.

360
5.5.40 Safasına cefasına dayandım

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 104).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s *XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden* Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929) and Gölpınarlı cünk.

Safasına cefasına dayandım  I endured his pleasure and his pain
Bu cefaya dayanmıyansın gelmesin May they not come, those who cannot bear suffering
Rengine hem boyasına boyandım I was dyed in his colour and hue
Bu boyarda boyanmıyansın gelmesin May they not come, those not dyed in this colour

Rengine boyandım meyinden içtim I was dyed in his colour and I drank of his wine
Nice cantlar ile Didar görşehtim I came face-to-face with how many fellows
Muhabbeti eyleyip candan seviştim I performed the congregation of love
Muhabbeti küfür sayan gelmesin May they not come, those who deem love blasphemy

Muhabbet eyleyip yokla pirini Making the place of love, search after your master
Yusun senin nâmus ile ârını Wash away your shame with rectitude
Var bir gerçek ile kal pazarmı Strike your deal with one who is genuine
Kıldığın pazardan ziyan gelmesin May no harm come from the bargain you make

Kırklar bu meydanda gezer dediler They said the Forty move in this place
Evliyayı yola dizer dediler They said he aligns the saints to the way
Destini destinden üzer dediler They said he restrains your grasping hand
Neşaniyetine uyan gelmesin May they not come, those who pursue plain pleasure

Pir Sultan’ım eydûr dünyaya fânidir I am Pir Sultan Abdal, he says the world is fleeting
Kırların sohbeti aşk mekânidir The gathering of the Forty is the abode of love
Kusura kalımyan kerem kândır Those not wanting are the source of munificence
Gönülde karası olan gelmesin May they not come, those with darkness in their heart
### 5.5.41 Seher vakti kalkan kervan

**Turkish text:** Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 114-115).

**Cited source:** Ahı oğlu, Hamdi Baran, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seher vakti kalkan kervan</td>
<td>Day dawns and the caravan sets out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İniler de zaralanır</td>
<td>Moaning and lamenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bir güzele düşen gönül</td>
<td>The heart falling for a beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çiçeklenir korulanır</td>
<td>Blossoms and is safely tended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahçenizde güller biter</td>
<td>In our garden roses bloom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalında bülbüller öter</td>
<td>On the branch nightingales sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engel gelir bir kal katar</td>
<td>A rival comes and adds his piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olan işler gerilenir</td>
<td>The one who is occupied remains behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bülbül geldi konda dala</td>
<td>The nightingale comes to land on the branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bülbülden hata yok güle</td>
<td>The nightingale has no reproach for the rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engel bir taş atar göle</td>
<td>The rival casts a stone at the lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yüzen ördek yaralanır</td>
<td>The duck swimming there is wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir Sultan Abdal göçelim</td>
<td>Pir Sultan Abdal let us pass over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir elinden bad’ içelim</td>
<td>Let us drink wine from the hand of the master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İnkâr olandan kaçalım</td>
<td>Let us flee from the one who refutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İnkâr bir gün paralanır</td>
<td>One day the denier will be torn to pieces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.5.42 Serseri girme meydana

**Turkish text:** Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 109).

**Cited source:** Menâkıbu’l-Esrar Behçetü’l-Ahrâr.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serseri girme meydana</td>
<td>Vagrant, do not enter into the meydan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşıktan ahval isterler</td>
<td>They want to know the affairs of the dervish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kallâşlık ile urma dem</td>
<td>Don’t come the high and mighty with deceit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasdik ehli kal isterler</td>
<td>They want affirmation for the outward show</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Awake from this somnolent stupor
They require proof of the inner person
For every dervish from his meeting
They require declaration of the way

Dervishes who attain truth play a sure bet
There is no trick attached to this way
Here there are no baubles peddled
They require the ruby and the pearl

They go through bit by bit splitting hairs
They take up the way of the fine one
They don’t think much of mere talk
The condition they require is within

Pir Sultan Abdal what do you do?
You say you have done the hard yards
You are a bee working over the flower
Tomorrow they will require honey from you

5.5.43 Sultan Suyu gibi çağlayıp akma

Turkish text: Öztelli (1971, 275-276).
Cited source: Collected by Pertev Naili Boratav in the Çukurova region.

Don’t gush on burbling like the Sultan Stream
It will calm down, don’t worry foolish heart
Mist settles on the guide, winter on the mountain peak
It will be reached, don’t worry foolish heart

---

443 The Turkish bâtın translated here as ‘inner person’ has the sense of spiritual essence, esoteric knowledge and understanding of the tarıkat (the spiritual path).
444 Sohbet meaning conversation or friendly gathering in the context of Alevi ritual has the sense of muhabbet.
445 ‘İkrar’: that is, a confirmation, vow or confession of allegiance to the tarıkat.
446 A translation of ‘Erenler’ here, in the descriptive sense of those who reach or attain the esoteric understanding (bâtın), seems apposite although more typically in my translations I have preferred simply ‘dervishes’.
447 In translating ‘birin’ (i.e. birini) here I have expanded the literal meaning of bir (one) in order to convey the sense of selection and relate it to the metaphor of the previous line.
Bizden selâm söylen dosta gidene  
Yuf yalancıya da, lânet nâdene  
Bunca düşman ardimızdan yeltene  
Yorulur, gam yeme divane gönül

A greeting from us to the one going to the friend  
Damn the liar and damn the ignorant  
How many enemies there are to ambush us  
They will tire, don’t worry foolish heart

Şah-ı Merdan öünümdede kılavuz  
Yikılır mı Hakk’ın yaptığı havuz  
Üç günük dünyada her yahsı, havuz  
Dirilir, gam yeme divane gönül

Worthy Ali of the Seven Guides is before us  
Do you think the work of God could collapse?  
One’s short span in the world has ups and downs  
Vigour will return, don’t worry foolish heart

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım sirdan sirda  
Bu iş böyle oldu, kalsın burada  
Cümlemizim yeltendiği murada  
Erilir, gam yeme divane gönül

I am Pir Sultan Abdal for the secret way  
What has befallen us, let it remain here  
Hope is that towards which we all strive  
It will be reached, don’t worry foolish heart

5.5.44 Şu kanlı zalimin ettiği işler

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 49).
Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

Şu kanlı zalimin ettiği işler  
Garip bülbül gibi zâreler beni  
Yağmur gibi yağar başıma taşlar  
Dostun bir fiskesi paralar beni

Those deeds of the blood tainted tyrant  
Make me moan like a lonely nightingale  
Stones rain down on my head like a torrent  
But it is the friend’s mere pinch that breaks me

Dâr günümde dost düşmanım bell’oldu  
On derdim var ise Şimdi ell’oldu  
Ecel fermanı boyununa takıldı  
Gerek asa gerek vuralar beni

In my dire days my friend and foe are revealed  
My troubles that once were ten are now fifty  
The order for my death is fixed to my neck  
So let them strike me down or let them hang me

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım can göğe ağılmaz  
Hak’tan emr olmaza irahmet yağmaz  
Şu illerin taşı hiç bana değmez  
Ille dostun gülü yaralar beni

I am Pir Sultan Abdal the soul does not flee  
If not decreed by God mercy does not rain down  
The stones of those strangers will never touch me  
But it’s the rose of that friend that wounds me

448 This could rightly be given as ‘my soul’ assuming ‘can’ to refer to Pir Sultan’s soul irrespective of the absence of possessive suffix. However, as is my approach to the mahlas verse generally, I have preferred a more literal rendering that neither asserts nor disclaims the ownership of the ‘soul’.
5.5.45 **Şu karşı yaylada göç katar katar**

Turkish text: from Öztelli (1971, 216-117).

Cited source: İbrahim Aslanoğlu.

---

**Şu karşı yaylada göç katar katar**
On the high lands opposite they depart in lines

**Bir güzel sevdası serimde tüter**
The love of a beauty fumes in my mind

**Bu ayrılık bana ölünden beter**
This separation is worse than death to me

**Geçti dost kervanı eğleme beni**
My beloved’s caravan has passed, don’t delay me

---

**Şu bemin sevdiğiim başta oturur**
The one that I love sits at the head

**Bir güzelin derdi beni bitirir**
The pain of that beauty destroys me

**Bu ayrılık bana zulüm getirir**
This separation brings a cruelty upon me

**Geçti dost kervanı eğleme beni**
My beloved’s caravan has passed, don’t delay me

---

**Ben gidersem Sunam bana ağlama**
If I disappear, my little pheasant, don’t weep for me

**Çiğerimi aşk oduna dağılama**
Don’t burn my heart in love’s fire

**Benden başkasına meyil bağlama**
Don’t forsake me for some other

**Geçti dost kervanı eğleme beni**
My beloved’s caravan has passed, don’t delay me

---

**Gider isem bu il sana yurt olsun**
If I go let this land be your home

**Munafıklar aramıza kurt olsun**
Let the wolf at the hypocrites among us

**Ben ölürsem yüreğine dert olsun**
If I die let the pain be in that one’s heart

**Geçti dost kervanı eğleme beni**
My beloved’s caravan has passed, don’t delay me

---

**Pir Sultan Abdal’im dağlar aşalım**
I am Pir Sultan Abdal let us pass over mountains

**Aşalım da dost iline düşelim**
Let us pass and come to the beloved’s land

**Çok nimetin yedim helallaşalım**
I have had much of your favour let us forgive all

**Geçti dost kervanı eğleme beni**
My beloved’s caravan has passed, don’t delay me
### 5.5.46 Türbesin üsüne nakş eylediler

Turkish text: Öztelli (1971, 122-122).

Cited source: From the notebook of Vahit Dede (Vahit Lütfi Saleç).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Türbesin üsüne nakş eylediler</td>
<td>They decorated the top of the tomb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Âşık olan canı şaz eylediler</td>
<td>They spoke of the rare soul of the dervish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seni dört köşeye baş eylediler</td>
<td>They bowed to you in every direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akan sular gibi akasım gelmez</td>
<td>I do not care to flow like running water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şehrine giresem çıkasım gelmez</td>
<td>If I enter your city I do not care to leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yezid’in yüzüne bakasım gelmez</td>
<td>I do not care to look upon the face of Yezid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senin abdalların yanar yakılır</td>
<td>Your dervishes are alight and enflamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katarımız On İki İmama katılır</td>
<td>Our caravan joins with the Twelve Imams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bundu Yezid’lere lânet okunur</td>
<td>Here is the curse for the unbelieving Yezids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İmam Hüseyin’in yolları bağlı</td>
<td>The ways of Imam Huseyn are bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Âşık olanların çiğeri dağlı</td>
<td>The hearts of the dervishes are branded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazret-i Ali’nin sevgili oğlu</td>
<td>The beloved son of Lord Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senin âşıkların semâın dutar</td>
<td>Your dervishes hold your ritual dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadir geceleri şem’alar yanar</td>
<td>Candles burn for the nights of power⁴⁴⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezhebim İmam Cafer’e uyar</td>
<td>My creed follows Imam Cafer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir Sultan’ım eydûr, erenler nerde</td>
<td>I am Pir Sultan, he says, where are the dervishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çalısız, kayasız bir sahra yerde</td>
<td>In a wilderness place without shrub or rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerbelâ çölünde, kandilde nurda</td>
<td>In the desert of Kerbela, in the lamp and the light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gel dinim, imanım İman Hüseyin</td>
<td>Come my creed, my faith is Imam Husayn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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⁴⁴⁹ The Night of Power (the 27 of Ramazan) when the Qur’an was revealed.
### 5.5.47 Uyur idik uyardılar

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 61-62).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s *XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden* Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929), Derviş Ruhullah’s *Bektaşi nevesleri*, Besim Atalay’s *Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı* and Maraşlı İsmail Efendi collected by Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan in Ankara.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish phrase</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uyur idik uyardılar</td>
<td>We were in a stupor and they aroused us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diriye saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us undercooked&lt;sup&gt;450&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koyun olduk ses anladık</td>
<td>We were as sheep that understood a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sürüye saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us a herd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sürülp kasaba gittik</td>
<td>We were driven forward and went to town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanarada mekân tuttuk</td>
<td>We settled ourselves in the slaughterhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didar defterine yettik</td>
<td>We attained a state of grace&lt;sup&gt;451&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ölıye saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hâlimizi hâl eyledik</td>
<td>We made our condition true ecstasy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolumuzu yol eyledik</td>
<td>We made our way the true way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her çiçekten bal eyledik</td>
<td>We made honey from every flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arıya saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us bees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşk defterine yazılıdık</td>
<td>We were inscribed in the register of love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir divanına dizildik</td>
<td>We were ascribed to the rank of Pir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bal olduk şerbet ezildik</td>
<td>We were honey and powdered sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dohuya saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us liquor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pir Sultan’im Haydar şunda</td>
<td>I am Pir Sultan that is Haydar&lt;sup&gt;452&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Çok keramet var insanda</td>
<td>There are many marvels in mankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O cihanda bu cihanda</td>
<td>In that world and in this world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali’ye saydılar bizi</td>
<td>They consider and deem us Ali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<sup>450</sup> Diri carries the sense of freshness or energetic or indeed ‘alive’. It also has a meaning of ‘undercooked’ which I have chosen here given the common conception of the novice dervish as raw and requiring ‘cooking’ to mature or ripen as a dervish of the way.

<sup>451</sup> Literally, “we attained the register (defter) or blessed countenance (didar)”.

<sup>452</sup> Haydar here may be understood as Pir Sultan’s real name or as a reference to Ali in keeping with the refrain line; or, indeed, the happy confluence of both.
5.5.48 **Yine dosttan haber geldi**

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 95-96).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s *XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden* Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929), Besim Atalay’s *Bektaşilik ve edebiyatı*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yeni dosttan haber geldi</td>
<td>News again comes from the friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalgalandı taştı gönül</td>
<td>The heart grew in waves and overflowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yâr elinden kevser geldi</td>
<td>The Kevser comes from the beloved’s land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derya gibi çoştu gönül</td>
<td>The heart rose up like the ocean depths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kılavuzum Şâh-ı Merdan</strong></td>
<td>My guide is Ali Master of the Seven Guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her yerı dop dolu nurdan</td>
<td>Every place is drenched with the light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Şûnda bir herçayi yârdan</strong></td>
<td>There from the inconsistent beloved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N’eylersin vaz geçti gönül</strong></td>
<td>The heart has abandoned whatever you do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şûr Ali’nin surri idi</td>
<td>The mystery was Ali’s mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyredeni sever idi</td>
<td>He loved the one who moves to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben kulu da kemter idi</td>
<td>I was his slave and humble servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pir aşkına düştü gönül</strong></td>
<td>The heart fell for the love of the Pir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Açtıldı bahçenin güllü</strong></td>
<td>The rose in the garden has opened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Öter içinde bülbülü</td>
<td>The nightingale sings within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dost elinden dolu dolu</td>
<td>There is liquor from the friend’s hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sarhoş oldu içti gönül</strong></td>
<td>The heart drank and was intoxicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pir Sultan’ım bir gün gider</strong></td>
<td>I am Pir Sultan one day he will pass on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er olan ikrarın gider</td>
<td>The dervish observes his vow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceset bunda seyran eder</td>
<td>The mortal body merely wanders here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Çûn Hakka ulaştı gönül</strong></td>
<td>Since the heart has met with God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

453 Gölpınarlı and Boratav have ‘yeni’ (new) while most sources, including Ergun, have ‘yine, (again). The meaning is not substantively altered.

454 The name of the river in Paradise, symbolic of abundance.

455 Both Ergun and Atalay have ‘dosttan’ rather than ‘yârdan’ although in the version on Muhabet 5 (Sağ, Akarsu, Eroğlu, and Top 2009e) Arif Sağ sings ‘yârdan’.

456 Ergun has “Pir Sultan’ım bir gün göçer” while this half of the line is missing in Atalay. In the recorded version by Arif Sağ (see previous note) the mahlas line is “Pir Sultan Abdalım nider”. Aslanoğlu, who includes this among the texts for ‘Pir Sultan’ and gives Atalay as his source, provides another version of this line “Pir Sultan’ım bir gün geçer” (Aslanoğlu 1997b, 204).
5.5.49 Yürü bire Hıdır Paşa

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 59).

Cited source: Aşık Ali İzzet Özkan, Öyük village, Şarkışla, Sivas region.

You there Hızır Pasha march on
The wheels have fallen off your scheme
Your Sultan the one in whom you trust
One day will be overthrown

Like Nimrod what become of the Phoenix?
Since the gnat was despatched
Our trial waits for the judgement day
Tomorrow this will be asked of you

Is it a crime for me to love the Shah?
You have spoken badly of me to the ruler
I do not beg you for my life
The Shah of Shahs will be angry with me

I am pure from the Prophet’s line
Come Yezid butcher my Husayn
I am Mansur hang me on the gallows
When I die this land will be quiet

I am Moses and you are the Pharoh
Faithless and accursed devil
My third death is this treachery
Pir Sultan dies and is raised

---

457 The Ottoman Sultan.
458 The Safavid Shah or perhaps Ali.
459 Yezid, a profound perjorative, and reference to the Umayyad opponents of Ali and the ehlibeyt.
460 Or possibly understood as “me, who is Husayn”.
461 That is, Pir Sultan is understood as a martyr in the lineage of Husayn and Mansur al-Hallaj. In performances this is sometimes changed from üçüncü (third) to kaçınca (how/so many).
5.5.50 Yürüyüş eyledi Urum üstüne

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 60-61).

Cited source: Sadettin Nüzhet’s XVII’inci asır sazşairlerinden Pir Sultan Abdal Pir Sultan Abdal (Ergun 1929).

Yürüyüş eyledi Urum üstüne
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor
İnİp temennâ eyledim destine
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor

He made a march upon Anatolia
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming
I came down and kissed his hand
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming

Doluları adım adım dağıdır
Tavlâsında küheylânlar bağdır
Aslını sorarsan Şah’ın oğludur
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor

He dispersed liquor at each step
Arab horses tied in his stable
If you ask his origin he is the son of the Shah
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming

Tarlaları adım adım çizili
Rakibin elinden ciğer sızılı
Al yeşil giyinmiş köçek gazili
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor

His fields are marked out step by step
From the hand of his rival his heart grieves
Dressed in green the young novice warrior
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming

Meydana çıkar görünü görünü
Kimse bilmez Evliyanın sırrını
Koca Haydar Şah-t i cihan torunu
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor

Emerging in the open again he appears
No-one knows the secret of the sainted one
Descendent of Old Haydar mortal Shah
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming

Pir Sultan Abdal’ım görsem şunları
Yüzün sürsem boyun eğip yalvari
Evvel baştan On İk’ İmam serveri
Ali nesli güzel imam geliyor

I am Pir Sultan Abdal if I see those things
If I pay humble respect entreating
First again the prince of the Twelve Imams
The beautiful successor of Ali’s line is coming

462 İmam translated here as ‘successor’ as in successor to Muhammad’s family, specifically the İmam Ali, also has the sense of ‘guide’ and ‘leader’. Fuat suggests this refers to the Shah of Iran, specifically Shah Tahmasp (Fuat 1999, 105).
463 Kühelyan is a type of purebred Arab horse.
464 Being dressed in green (yeşil) headgear is associated with the seyyid, descendents of Muhammad and so Ali.
465 A variant of this line reads “Mağrîb’tan çıkar görünü görünü” suggest he emerges from the west (magrib). Indeed this lyric is one that Kaygusuz suggests refers to the Kalender Çelebi uprising in the late 1520s arising not out of the east but out of the western region of Anatolia (Kaygusuz 2005, 311-312).
466 Fuat suggests this refers to Sheik Haydar, Shah Tahmasp’s grandfather, Shah Ismail’s father (Fuat 1999, 105).
467 That is, Ali.
5.6  Pir Muhammed

5.6.1  Pir elinden elifi tac urundum

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 40-41).

Cited source: From the village of Gürenleri in the Divriği region from a mecmua belonging to Nebizade İsmail Baba.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pir elinden elifi tac urundum</td>
<td>I wore the upright cap received from the Pir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kubbesi dü vazde İmam Ali’dir</td>
<td>Ali is the crown of the Twelve Imams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasibim ol verir andan barندim</td>
<td>It fell to my lot to be separated from him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İki cihanda da varm Ali’dir</td>
<td>Whether I am in this world or the next it is Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lâ diyemez buna her âlim hoca</td>
<td>My Ali is ever the teacher, this I can never deny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gözlüye bir olup dip kapu baca</td>
<td>To the perceptive baseness is laid open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Âleme şek verit dün erte gece</td>
<td>The one who is ardent for the world day and night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Görür gözlerinde nurum Ali’dir</td>
<td>Sees in my eyes that my light is Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarikat dediler bir yol sürüler</td>
<td>They spoke of the tarikat and advanced the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getirdiler elimize verdiler</td>
<td>They brought it and gave it into our hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mervân’ı Zülfikar ile kırdılar</td>
<td>With Zülfikar the sword they destroyed Mervan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yezidleri karan erim Ali’dir</td>
<td>Ali is my brave one who slays the Yezids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sürdüm ötesin evlâda yetirdim</td>
<td>I advanced on and reached the true descendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohbetimde can terceman getirdim</td>
<td>In company I yielded the initiate’s prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

468 The elifi tac is one of the head-pieces worn by Bektaşi dervishes; a conical high cap without pleats except on two sides. As Birge explains, according to the Vilayetname of Haci Bektaş it was “given by Gabriel at God’s command to Muhammad who turned them over to Ali together with a knowledge of mystic rites”. Birge also notes its spiritual symbolism of light in resembling the shape of a high burning lamp (Birge 1994, 37-38).

469 Literally ‘dome’ although as Birge (1994, 37) notes the kubbei elif is another name for the elifi tac and I have followed this meaning.

470 Gölpınarlı published this deyiş again in his book Alevî-Bektâşi nefseleri (1963, 176-177) with a number of mostly minor differences. In the later work in place of “barındım” (“I found shelter”) he has “yarındım” (I was separated). I have followed the sense suggested by the later version.

471 This line has required some interpretation in translating. Sohbet does not translate happily in its meaning ‘to converse’ or ‘chat’ or be in a conversational situation. This does imply an informality that is perhaps misleading and so I have chosen render this as ‘company’. Terceman (or tercüman) has a common meaning of “translator” but here it quite evidently has the specific Bektaşi meaning of a special prayer recited by those of rank other than the baba (dede) in the formal rites (cem) (Birge...
Anın emri ile durdum oturдум
Gönlümde gayrı yok varım Ali’dir

Aşk odıyle çiğerlerim dağlıyım
Boş değilim bir ikrara bağlıyım
Abdal Pir Sultan’ın Abdal oğluym
Adem Pir Muhammed Pirim Ali’dir

With its command I stood and abided
In my heart is nothing else but Ali

My poor heart is branded with the fire of love
I am not empty I am bound to a vow
I am Abdal Pir Sultan’s abdal son
My name is Pir Muhammed my Pir is Ali

5.7 Aşık İsmail

5.7.1 Aradılar Pir Sultan’ın asılı

Turkish text: Gölpınarlı and Boratav (1943, 42-44).
Cited source: Banaz oral traditions (şifahi rivayetleri).

Aradılar Pir Sultan’ın asılı
Görelim ki ne söyletir Yaradan
Dinleniz de şerheleyim vasını
Zuhur oldu Kâzım Musâ Rızâ’dan

They sought the true lineage of Pir Sultan
Let us see what the Creator describes
Listen and I will explain the details
It was revealed by Musa Kazim and Riza

Evvel Ali yerin göğün binası
Kudret kandilinden çalınmıştır mayası
Kâzım atasıdır Rıza dedesi
On İki İmam ile geldi sıradan

First is Ali edifice of earth and sky
The essence was stuck from the almighty lamp
Father of Kazim and grandfather of Rıza
He came from the line of the Twelve Imams

Şeyh Cüneyd’dir Âşıkların atası
Yine Şah’tan Pir Sultan’ın putası

Sheik Juneyd is the father of dervishes
Pir Sultan is yet an arrow from the Shah

1994, 167). In this context ‘can’ (literally ‘soul’) can be understood to refer to the ‘initiate’ (Birge 1994, 258).
472 Otherwise Pir Mehmet or Pir Mehmet. Scholars are divided as to whether this deyiş should be attributed to Pir Sultan’s actual son Pir Mehmet or just a ‘son of the way’ (yol oğlu). As Avcı notes, in Alevi-Bektaşi society Muhammad’s name (Muhammed or Muhammet in Turkish) is generally in the form Mehmet when not referring to the Prophet (Avcı 2006, 376). On disputed views about the poet’s identity see Avcı (Avcı 2006, 231; 376), Aslanoğlu (Aslanoğlu 1994, 79-82) and Gölpınarlı and Boratav (Gölpınarlı and Boratav 1943, 40-41).
473 This line would appear to refer to the sixth imam, Imam Cafer-i Sadık (Ja’far al-Sadiq) father of Musa Kâzım and grandfather of Ali Rızâ.
474 Shah Ismail’s (Hatayi) grandfather (d. 1459) credited with altering the nature of the Safavid movement “from that of a conventional brotherhood to a ghulât movement” particularly from 1448 until his death during which time he engaged in activities establishing a kızılbaş base in Anatolia and Syria that would provide Ismail with the foundation to establish the Safavid empire (Babayan 2002, 139)
Ummandır derdayır nurdur ötesi
Is the ocean and sea and light and beyond
Bilir misin kındır närı nur eden
Do you know who makes hell fire divine light?

Hem Rızâ hem Hâşim hem Seyyid
Rıza and Hashim and Seyyid
Bir başında vardır hem Ebû Tâlib
Are of one mind and also Ebû Tâlib
Bektaş-i Veli’de yazılı kayıt
In Hacı Bektaş is the written document
İnanmyan haber alsun oradan
Let the non-believing get the news from there

Seksen bin er Horasan’dan koptular
Eighty thousand men set out from Horasan
İmam-ı Rızâ fırm and sound
They held Imam Rıza firm and sound
Suluca Kar’ Öyük’te sohbet ettiler
They conversed in Suluca Kar’ Öyük
Erler meşverette kaldı orada
The men remained there in deliberation

Güvercin donunda havadan indi
The partridge in its finery came down from the air
Darı çeçi üsünde namazın kıldı
It performed prayer on the heap of winnowed grain
Doksan bin evliyaya serçeşme oldu
Became the source for ninety thousand saints
Mevlâm ksmetlerin verdi orada
My lord delivered his destinies there

Uçurdular Pir Sultan’ın kuşunu
They set Pir Sultan’s bird to flight
Seyrangâh eyledi Yıldız başını
They made a place of pleasure on the peak of Yıldız
Hub gösterdi toprağına taşını
They showed love of the earth and rock
Mevlam ksmetini verdi orada
My lord delivered his destiny there

Şah Yıldız dağında semâ’ eyledi
The Shah made the ritual dance on Yıldız
Bir ayak üstünde bin bir kelâm söyledi
Quickly he spoke a thousand and one words
İndi Banazı hoş vatan eyledi
He went down and made Banaz a happy land
Haylı devr ü zaman geçti orada
He passed a great period of time there

Koca Şah Uruma bir elma saldı
The great Shah despatched an apple to Anatolia
Dolandı Uruma Banaza geldi
It went around Anatolia and came to Banaz
Pir Sultan elmaya bir tekbir kaldı
Pir Sultan gave affirmation to the apple
İnsan taaccüpte kaldı orada
People remained in wonder there

475 References to ‘Horasan Erenleri,, dervishes from Khorasan.
476 The place that legend relates was assigned by Ahmet Yesevi to Hacı Bektaş when he set out for the land of Rum (Anatolia). That is, what is now the town of Hacıbektaş north of Nevşehir.
477 That is Yıldız Dağı (Star Mountain) visible to north-east from the hill above Banaz village.
478 Interestingly, Hasluck reports a ‘Mohammedan’ festival on Yıldız Dağı held in August, probably a kızılbaş one kept on fifteenth of the month (Hasluck 1929, 101).
479 The apple represents a plea and summons in the name of Ali. Considered sacred because apples were given as a sacrifice or prayer (terceman) from Paradise to Ali, such summons using the symbolic apple was made to important people only (Avcı 2006, 110). The point therefore in Ismail’s song is not only that Pir Sultan took up the call of the Safavid Shah but that it was in the name of Ali and that Pir Sultan himself was a person of note.
Exalted, he saw the way of the martyr

Like Mansur he accepted his gallows fate

He smelled the apple and devoted himself to it

My lord set his cloak to right there

Eighty thousand men appeared from Horasan

He came to Anatolia and completed word and deed

The mace put aside he at last departed

He went to the fourth of the four ways there

The followers came together

They deliberated saying who was of descent

They sent İnce Mehmed to the Shah

They took twelve deeds from the Shah there

I am Ismail, they do not go beyond the bounds

They do not give deeds to those not of descent

They do not just depend on deed and seal

Anyway they do not arouse suspicion and doubt

5.8 Kul Himmet

5.8.1 Her sabah her sabah ötüşür kuşlar

Morning after morning the birds sing together

Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

The nightingale begins a lament for the rose

Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

I have moved the verse beginning “İmam Zeynel paralandı, bölündü” to the fifth from the penultimate position as Öztelli gives it, so that it more correctly aligns with the chronological order of the Imams. This order of verses is also the order of the versions recorded by Arif Sağ and Tolga Sağ. Aslanoğlu (1997a, 84-85) who gives the source of his text as Besim Atalay has this as the third last verse and the verse that appears as the penultimate verse in the version given below as the third verse.
Kıblemizden kısmetimiz verile
Veysel’kara gitdi Yemen iline
Arıyız uçarız kudret balına
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Biz çekelim İmamların yasını
İštit gerçek erenlerin sesini
İmam Hasan içdi ağu tasını
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Tâlib olan ince elekden elendi
Mümin olan Hak yoluna dolandı
Şah Hüseyin al kanlara boyandı
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

İmam Zeynel paralandı, böllündü
Ol İmam Bâkî’a yüzler sörüldü
Cafer-i Sadık’a erkân verildi
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Gönül kuşun Kalb evinde yuvası
Virdimize dışdâ Şah’ın havası
Kâzım, Musa, Ali Rıza duası
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Şah Taki’yle Nakî nur oldu gitti
Hasan-ül Aşker el oldu gitti
Mehdî mağarada sir oldu gitti
Allah bir Muhammed Ali diyerek
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Kenber, Selman, Fatma durdu duaya
Şehrbanan soyundu, bindi deveye
Shahrbanan 481 was stripped and rode upon the camel

480 A follower of the Prophet Muhammad. The phrase ‘Yemen ellerinde Veyselkarani’ has an idiomatic meaning of being completely lost or utterly at a loss.
481 Şehrban (Shahrbanu or Bibi Shahrbanu) a daughter of the Zoroastrian Sassanid king Yazdîgird III in traditional belief is said to have married Husayn thus linking the Alid and Persian (Zoroastrian) and a shared injustice at the hands of the Umayyads. On Shahrbanu see Bab ayan (2002, 132-137), Vaziri (Vaziri 1992, 110-112) and Boyce (1967). The line remains somewhat obscure in the mention of being stripped and riding the camel. The former could relate to the injustices endured. It might also be possible to interpret soyundu as meaning ‘of the blood’ or ‘lineage’ rather than ‘stripped’, although I think the latter is the most suitable reading.
Jesus was distressed and passed unto the air
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

Four books were written and passed to four faiths
The Kuran became Muhammad’s prayer
Kul Himmet fell into the trouble of his master
Saying Allah is one, Muhammad, Ali

5.8.2 Hükmünü geçiren hep cümle nâsa

Turkish text: Öztelli (1996, 95-96)

Having authority over all mankind
Those holding your cloak did not see sorrow
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you help
True companion conqueror of Anatolia
His hidden power ever holds the sword to the throne
Pillar of the universe Shah Kızıl Deli
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you help
The true men support themselves at the threshold
In supplication face down to the ground in rows

482 Aslanoğlu counts this deyiş as among those that cannot be attributed to Kul Himmet but rather to Kul Himmet Üstadım (Aslanoğlu 1997a, 28) though the lyric was not included in his earlier work on Kul Himmet Üstadım (Aslanoğlu 1995).

483 See the note 342 under the deyiş Ben dervişim diye göğsün açarsın (5.5.3) on the meaning of etek tutmak in the context of the talip’s initiation.

484 The names mentioned in the lyric are those of legendary and seminal Alevi-Bektaşi figures and early halife-s (successors, disciples, supporters) who established the influence of Haci Bektaş Veli particularly in western Anatolia and the Balkans. Abdal Musa is believed to be a halife of Ahmet Yesevi like Haci Bektaş who established a tekke near Elmalı where he trained dervishes; Kaygusuz Abdal is thought to be one of his halife (Tümer 2005, 248; Köprülu 2006, 49; Birge 1994, 55). Kızıl Deli who is also known as Seyyid Ali Sultan established his mission in the important dervish centre of Dimotika (Dhindimotikho, south of Edirne, now part of Greece) (Norris 1993, 125; Birge 1994, 51f; Tümer 2005, 248). Sultan Şaça Baba (otherwise Seyit Sultan Şücettin Veli or Sultan Sucuh) is thought to be a contemporary of Haci Bektaş who established himself near Seyitgazi (Demirtaş 1996). Seyyid Gazi refers to Seyyid Battal Gazi whom Haci Bektaş considered his pir and is associated with both Malatya (his birth) and Eskişehir (his tomb) (Köprülu 2006, 249-50; Clarke 1999, 57). Hacım Sultan, another halife of Haci Bektaş was sent to the Uşak-Kütahya region for his mission (Birge 1994, 40-42). Yatağan which gives the name to the somewhat more mysterious Büyük and Kütük Yatağan is also located in south-western Anatolia.
Rumeli’nde yatan erenler, pîrler
Zâhirde, bântında sen imdat eyle
Laying low in Anatolia, dervishes and pirs
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you help

Evlâd-ı Ali’nin oluĎ şahbazi
Cümle erenlerin şahbazi, bázı
Sultan Şucâ Baba, Seyyid-i Gazi
Zâhirde, bântında sen imdat eyle
Champion of Ali’s descent
Champion and fellow of all the dervishes
Sultan Şucâ Baba, Seyyid Gazi
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you help

Eydür Kul Himmet, üstadım Pîr Sultan
Hem Küçük Yataşan, Büyük Yataşan
Erenler cellâdâ yâ Hacım Sultan
Zâhirde, bântında sen imdat eyle
So says Kul Himmet, my master Pir Sultan
Both Küçük Yataşan and Büyük Yataşan
Dervishes’ scourge Hacım Sultan
In word and deed, in the inner man, may you help

5.8.3 Bu gün bize Pîr geldi

Turkish text: A. Celâlettin Ulusoy ([n.d.], 217-218) and Veliyettin Ulusoy (2010, 54-56).

Bu gün bize Pîr geldi
Gülleri taze geldi
Önü sıra Kanberi
Ali Murtaza geldi
(Ła İlâhe İllâlah)
Today the Pir came to us
Fresh came his roses
Ali Murtaza came with
Kanber his groom before him485
(Ła İlâhe İllâlah)

Ali Murtaza Şahm
Yüzüdür kıblegâhım
Miracdaki Muhammed
Âlemde padişâhım
Ali Murtaza is my Shah
His is the direction to which I face
My sovereign in this world
Is Muhammad of the Miraj

Padişâhım yaradan
Okur akdan karadan
Ben Pîrden ayrıldı
Yüz yıl geçti aradan
My sovereign is the Creator
Reader of the black and white
One hundred years have passed
Since I was separated from the Pir

Aramı uzattular
They prolonged my separation

485 I have as far as possible tried to translate and align the translations line for line. The short verses in mani form for this tevhid consistently suggest translating the third and fourth lines together usually resulting in the fourth line in English corresponding more generally to the third line in the Turkish.
They pressed salt into my wound
They sold the slave come to Fazl
They sold him in the marketplace
He gives voice in the rose garden
The gift found in the Lion
Is the seal of Muhammad
My gift is in the Lion
Pir, your image is my eyes
I am yet in expectation
Every longing is met
I endure this expectation
His lips of honey my sweet
I shed tears when I
Came to part from the Pir
I shed tears when I
Look at the work of the Lord
The priest made a sacrifice
Of the head of the seventh son
The priest made a sacrifice
The infidels shed blood
Angels came down from the sky
And made lament on the earth
The angels made lament
Let requests be agreed
The Yezid caused such
Suffering that destroyed me
Yezid caused such suffering
The dervishes recited prayer
My Pir built a city

486 The Turkish line is one syllable too long. Öztelli (1996, 176) resolves this with dört replacing yedi while Aslanoğlu (1995, 124) and Atalay (1991, 166) have oğlun instead of oğlunun. Sercihan Dehmen (Nimri Dede’s grandson) when he wrote this tevhid out for me elided the ‘i’ in yedi, writing “yed(i) oğlunun başını” (personal communication, 1993).
Kapısun dört eyledi
He made your gates four
Dört eylemiş kapısun
Your gates he made four
Lal-ü gevher yapısın
As a work you are a rubied gem
Yezidler şehid etti
The Yezids made a martyr
İmâmların hepisin
Of all of the Imams
Hasan’a ağu virdiler
They gave poison to Hasan
Hüseyin’e kıydular
They slaughtered Husayn
Zeynel ile Bakır’ı
They sent Zeynel
Bir zindana koydular
And Bakır into prison
Zindanda bir ezâdır
In prison there was torment
Cafer yolu gözedir
Cafer protected the way
Cafer’ın de bir oglu
And one of the sons of Cafer
Müsa Kâzım Rıza’dır
Is Musa Kazım and his is Rıza
Taki Nakı ağlarım
I weep for Taki and for Naki
Sinem yara dağlarım
I grieve for my wounded heart
Askeri ye Mehdi’ye
I bind Askeri and Mehdi
On ikiye bağlarım
To the Twelve Imams
On ikidir katarım
I follow the Twelve Imams
Türlü matah satarım
I sell all manner of goods
Yüküm lâl-ü gevherdir
My cargo is the rubied gem
Müşteriye satarım
I sell to those who will buy
Satarım müşteriye
I sell to those who will buy
Kervan kalsın geriye
Let the caravan remain behind
Cebrail hûş eyledi
Gabriel gave prudence
Cennetteki hûriye
To the houris in heaven
Cebrail hûş eyledi
Gabriel gave prudence
Hatrırım hoş eyledi
And I was pleased
Kanat verdi kuluna
He gave wing to his slave
Havada kuş eyledi
He made a bird of the air
Kuş eyledi havada
He made a bird of the air
Gezer dağda ovada
Travelling over mountain and plain
El kaldırımış melekler
The angels raised their hands
Saf saf durmuş duada
In rows standing in prayer

El kaldırılmış Hakk'ına
With hand raised to God

İsm-i âzam okuna
May his name be exalted

İsm-i âzam duası
His name exalted in prayer

Tatlı cana dokuna
Sweetly may it touch the soul

Dokunur tatlı cana
Sweetly it touches the soul

Ağlaram yana yana
I weep and bitterly cry

İmâamların davası
The claims of the Imams

Kaldı ulu divâna
Remain for the great council

Ulu divân kuruldu
The great council was established

Cümle mahlûk derildi
All creatures were assembled

Yezdân işaret etti
God made a sign to sound

Sûr-u mahşer vuruldu
The trumpet for Judgement Day

Pîr dediler Ali’ye
Pir they called Ali

Hacı Bektaş Veli’ye
And Hacı Bektaş Veli

Hacı Bektaş tâcını
The crown of Hacı Bektaş

Vurdu Kızıl Deliye
They gave to Kızıl Deli

Kızıl Deli tâcımız
Kızıl Deli is our crown

Şeyh Ahmet miracımız
Sheik Ahmet our Journey of Ascent

Karaca Ahmet gözcümüz
Karaca Ahmet is our watchman

Yalıncak duacımız
Naked and alone our humble servant

Kul Himmet Üstâdımız
Kul Himmet our master

Bunda yoktur yadımız
We are not strangers here

Şâh-i Merdan aşkına
For the love of Ali of the Seven Guides

Hak vere muradımız
Our hope is that God may deliver
## 5.9 Aşık Veysel

### 5.9.1 Beni hor görme kardeşim

Turkish text: Alptekin (2004, 172)$^{487}$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beni hor görme kardeşim</td>
<td>Don’t look down on me, my brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen altınsın ben tünç muyum</td>
<td>You are gold – so am I then bronze?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aşmış vardan var olmuşuz</td>
<td>We are of the same stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen gümüşsün ben saç mıym</td>
<td>You are silver – so am I then thin metal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne var ise sende bende</td>
<td>Whatever exists is in you and in me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aynı varlık her bendende</td>
<td>The same existence in every body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarın mezara girende</td>
<td>That tomorrow is headed for the grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen toksun da ben ac mıym</td>
<td>You are full – so am I then empty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimi molla kimi derviş</td>
<td>Some are mullahs, some dervish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah bize neler vermiş</td>
<td>God, it seems, gave to us whatever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimi arı çiçek dermiş</td>
<td>Some might talk of the bee and the flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen balsın da ben cec mıym</td>
<td>You are honey – so am I then a heap of grain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topraktandır cümle beden</td>
<td>All of our bodies come from the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nefşini öldür ölmeden</td>
<td>Kill off the carnal self before the dying$^{488}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Böyle emretmiş yaradan</td>
<td>So the creator seems to have commanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen kalemsin ben uç mıym</td>
<td>You are the pen – so am I then the nib?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabiata Veysel aşık</td>
<td>Veysel is disposed to be a lover$^{489}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topraktan olduk kardeşik</td>
<td>We are brothers made out of the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aynı yolcuız yoldaşık</td>
<td>We are the same as fellow travellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sen yolcusun ben bac mıym</td>
<td>You are the traveller – so am I then the toll?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{487}$ The text published by Altekin is the same as recorded by Aşık Veysel (Şatıroğlu n.d.).

$^{488}$ Translation of the line “nefşini öldür ölmeden” causes some challenge to include the concept it evokes in the space of a short line. The phrase references the concept of killing off the earthly, base and carnal aspects of the self including envy and malice so that the true essence of self or soul may survive and ascend to the higher level. This earthly, carnal self is the nefs (or nefis) which is seen as a barrier or curtain between man and God (Özbek 2009, 368).

$^{489}$ A literal translation which loses the sense of dervish and aşk.
5.10 Nimri Dede

5.10.1 İkilik kirinin içimden atıp

Turkish text: Buran (2006, 111-112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>İkilik kirini içimden atıp</td>
<td>Cast out this filthy duality from within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Özde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the true self I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gümüleli arıfların gönlüne</td>
<td>Since it was buried in the heart of the mystics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sözde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the word I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meğerse aşk imiş canın mayası</td>
<td>Whatever love is, it is the essence of the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ona mihrab olmuş kaşın arası</td>
<td>The way to this lies between the eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakkın işlediği kudret boyası</td>
<td>The work of truth is the tint of strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yüzde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the face I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bütün mürşitlerin tarif ettiği</td>
<td>All that the guides have described</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadıkların menziline yettiği</td>
<td>The halting place that the true ones have reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enbiyanın evliyanını gittiği</td>
<td>Where the Prophets and Saints have gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>İzde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the footsteps I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakkı arayanlar gönülde buldu</td>
<td>Those seeking Truth found it in the heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hak gönülden taşış cihana doldu</td>
<td>Truth overflowed the heart and filled the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bütün yüzler benim aynımdan oldu</td>
<td>All faces became the mirror of me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sızde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In you I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bir bahçeem var her dikenden arıca</td>
<td>I have a garden clean of every thorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girip çığnamlar yarı yarsıncı</td>
<td>They enter and trample it until rendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gözleri kapalı Aşık Sarıca</td>
<td>Aşık Sarıca with the closed eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kızda ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the daughter I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben de bir zamanlar baktım bakıldım</td>
<td>At times I have examined and been examined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice yıllar bir kemende takıldım</td>
<td>How many years I have been attached to a noose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O aşk-ı mecazla yandım yakıldım</td>
<td>I have set alight the way of love and been set alight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Közde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim</td>
<td>In the ashes I have come to become Master</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

490 Buran includes the text twice in his book with a minor editorial difference in the opening line. His text also includes a minor error, with meğer rather than meğerce in the second verse. I have referred to a typescript of the deyiş given to me by Nimri Dede’s grandson, Sercihan Dehmen, in 1993 to clarify and verify the text.
Süre geldim aşk meyini içerek
Her bir aki karasından seçerek
Varlık dağlarını delip geçerek
Düzde ben Mevlana oldum da geldim

Gör ki Nimri Dede şimdi neleyip
Gerçek aşkı her yönüle söyleyip
Artık meyle neye veda eyleyip
Sazda ben Mevlana oldum da geldim

5.10.2 İnsan olmaya geldim

Turkish text: Arif Sağ (1983)

İkilik kirini içimden atıp
Özde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Taht kuralım arıfların gönlüne
Sözde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim

Meğerse aşk imiş canın mayası
Ona mihrab olmuş kaşın arası
Hakkın işlediği kudret boyası
Yüzde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim

Bütün mürşitlerin tarif ettiği
Sadıklarının menziline yettiği
Enbiyanın evliyanın gittiği
İzde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim

Ben de bir zamanlar baktım bakıldım
Nice yıllar bir kemende takıldım
O aşk mecazla yandım yakıldım
Közde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim
Süre geldim aşk meyini içerek
Her bir aki karasından seçerek
Varlık dağlarını delip geçerek
Düzde ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim

Gör ki Nimri Dede şimdi neyleyip
Gerçek aşkı her gönüle söyleyip
Her türlü sefaya veda eyleyip
Sazda ben bir insan olmaya geldim
Serimi meydana koymaya geldim

5.11 Muhlis Akarsu

5.11.1 Açığım yok kapalım yok dünyada
Turkish text: Zaman (2006, 79)

Açığım yok kapalım yok dünyada
Ne ise ahvalım sorsunlar beni
Bir kimseye vebalım yok dünyada
İster sevip ister kırsınlar beni

Dilim dönmez nedir gavur
Müslüman
Duman ateş demek ateş de duman
Enelhak bağına girdiğim zaman
İster kesip ister yüzünler beni

Allah kul yaratmış biri de benim
Kimden kaldı benim imanım dinim
Ne şeytan tanırım ne de peri cin
Konuşan insanım gürünüler beni

Okudum Kur'ânı edep erkân
Yaptığım scedenin kablesi canlı
Gerdeksiz gecede gecede bir delikanlı
Ölü bir geline versinler beni

At last I have come drinking the wine of love
From out of the the darkness selecting all the white
Piercing through and passing the mountains of existence
On the level I have come to became a human
I have come to lay myself open

See then what things Nimri Dede now has done
Singing of all aspects of the true love
Bidding farewell at last to wine and whatever
On the saz I have come to became a human
I have come to lay myself open

I have nothing to reveal nor conceal in the world
Whatever my condition, let them ask me
I bear no sin to answer to anyone in the world
Whether they love me or whether they injure me

I can’t get my tongue around what is an unbeliever
or Muslim
Smoke means fire and fire means smoke
When I entered into the bond of lineage
Whether they slaughter me or they flay me

God gave existence to creatures and I am one
From who did my belief and religion come?
I acknowledge neither the devil nor the jinns
Let them see me, I am a person who can speak

I read the Quran, the rules and customs
The kibla at which I prostrate is the living
A young man at night without consumation
Let them give me to a dead bride
5.11.2 Gurbet ben mi yarattım

Turkish text: Zaman (2006, 103)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turkish text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akarsu’yum boşa güldükten sonra</td>
<td>I am Akarsu, later laughing at the void</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azrail yok imiş öldükten sonra</td>
<td>After death I hear there is no angel or account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gönül tahtım harap olduktan sonra</td>
<td>Afterwards the throne of my heart is in ruin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boş kuru hasıra sarsınlar beni</td>
<td>Let them lay me on an empty dry mat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yokluk beni mecbur etti                                                      Being absent\(^{491}\) has compelled me
Gurbet ben mi yarattım                                                      Was it I who created the exile?
Gençliğimi aldı gitti                                                       It came and took my youth
Gurbet ben mi yarattım                                                      Was it I who created the exile?

Ne mektup ne haber aldım                                                    I received neither letter nor news
Yurдумdan yuvandan oldum                                                      I was away from my country and home
Her şeyime hasret kaldım                                                    I felt the loss of all that was mine
Gurbet ben mi yarattım                                                      Was it I who created the exile?

Akşam olur gölge basar                                                      Evening comes and the shadow settles
Umuduma yeller eser                                                         Winds blow against my hope
Yokluk imkânımı keser                                                        Absence constrains my chances
Gurbet ben mi yarattım                                                      Was it I who created the exile?

Akarsu sılayı anma                                                           Akarsu, don’t think about returning\(^{492}\)
Bu ayrılık geçti sanma                                                        Don’t believe this isolation has passed
Çaresizdim geldim anma                                                       How I fell upon helplessness
Gurbet ben mi yarattım                                                      Was it I who created the exile?

\(^{491}\) Yokluk also means more specifically ‘poverty’, although the context here clearly suggests the meaning as ‘absence’ including the suggested sense of ‘non-existence’.

\(^{492}\) Sıla conveys the idea of being reunited with ones friends or family or native place and thus expresses the antithesis of the main theme of gurbet or absence from ones native place and all associated with it.
5.12 Aşık Mahzuni Şerif

5.12.1 Fırıldak adam

Turkish text: Şerif (2001)

Yüz karası bu alemin şaşkınlı | The stupidity of this world is shameful
Baykuş gibi viranede işin ne  | Like the owl’s watch on the ruins, what’s it to you?
Cemlerin şeyatansın yollar düşkünlü | You are the devil in the congregation’s fallen ways
Ey utanmaz meyhanede işin ne  | Shameless, what business have you in the tavern⁴⁹³?

Fırıldak adam  | Tricky tricky dicky⁴⁹⁴
Ben seni nedem  | What have I to do with you
Gelme dergaha  | Don’t come to the dervish lodge
Hainsin madem  | While you’re a traiter
Zalimsin madem  | While you’re a tyrant

İkrar verdin ikrarını çığnedin  | You made your vow and you trampled on it
Hayatinda helal lokma yedemidin  | You have never in your life eaten lawful sacrament⁴⁹⁵
İnsanım demedin kulum demedin  | You never said ‘I’m a human’, ‘I am a mortal’⁴⁹⁶,
Hacı Bektaş Mevlana da işin ne  | What business have you with Hacı Bektaş, Mevlana?

Actin Mahzuniye yürek yarası  | You have opened a wound in the heart of Mahzuni
Dünyanın fitnesi yüzler karası  | The world of sedition and shamefulness
Süfyanın torunu Mervannın hası  | Offspring of the fanatic and essence of the despicable
Hüseyinde Kerbelada işin ne  | What business have you with Husayn and Kerbela?

⁴⁹³ Meyhane is an allusion to the dervish tekke (lodge).
⁴⁹⁴ Fırıldak adam refers to a person of deceptive, wavering or tricky character. The political overtones of this and the poem lead to the translation given here.
⁴⁹⁵ Lokma meaning morsel also refers to the communal meal shared at the end of the cem ceremony.
⁴⁹⁶ Kul, literally ‘slave’ refers to man as a mortal creature in relation to God.
6. CONCLUSION: ‘I AM PIR SULTAN ABDAL’

This research project arose from my personal encounter with the songs of the great Alevi master Pir Sultan Abdal, specifically in my encounter with the bold declaration of persona and presence found within the lyrics and associated with the mahlas – the convention of including the poet’s name in the lyric – as ‘I am Pir Sultan Abdal’. The inclusion of the poet’s ostensible signature within the song being almost mundane in its ubiquity in Alevi song has inspired little scholarly attention in regard to the mahlas other than as a typological device to classify and categorise putative authorship – an inherently textual endeavour. In this context the inclusion of the mahlas and the form it takes is at the centre of scholarly objectives in establishing the eponymous and authorial identities of major Alevi poets such as Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Himmet. Yet it is the assertive aspect of the inclusion of the mahlas that sets up the challenge to understand, more deeply, how it means – or its potential to provide meaning – as an expressive element in the context of the deyiş which, after all, is an expressive form constructed and maintained in oral, not textual, tradition. While Alevi song is defined in large part by its textual nature and characteristics, the task I set myself was to find a way to study the text but as expressive culture. To this end I employed an interpretive strategy influenced by Rice’s tripartite model for ethnomusicology, Ricoeur’s hermeneutical arc and Foley’s concept of immanent art. Such a strategy certainly leads to a subjective encounter and, indeed, my encounter with this expressive culture is as an etic participant observer, and as such obviously can and should be challenged. However I hope I have succeeded in my principal objective of casting some light upon a remarkably rich oral lyric culture as it finds expression in popular and public cultural spaces and, specifically, in highlighting the
mahlas as a nuanced, adaptive and critical component of this rich lyric and expressive tradition.

I began by considering Pir Sultan Abdal in respect to the historical context that formed the perception of his identity, specifically as a seminal representative of Alevi identity. In understanding Pir Sultan Abdal in the context of Alevi identity I also highlighted fundamental characteristics of Alevi belief including the primacy of lineage, authority and charisma; and the transmission processes of such beliefs through the person and creative abilities of the aşık. While the songs attributed to Pir Sultan Abdal – those in which his identity is proclaimed through the assertion of the lyric persona – certainly attest generally to historic construction and retain certain historic reference, I have suggested that his legend together with the content of the songs point more particularly to personal meaning. That is, the songs and the legends associated with Pir Sultan Abdal are evidence of the interpretation of those engaged with the tradition and the expression of Alevi beliefs. Put another way, the mahlas provides the expressive spark of life and force to the songs but since this is realised through the meaningful transmission of the song the mahlas persona is transformed from simply authorial identity to an immanent integer of authority, lineage, community association, personal example and commitment. I further demonstrated this process of creative engagement and interpretation in the transmission of persona through the case of Kul Himmet and Kul Himmet Üstadım in which a strong case can be established for distinct identities living centuries apart and yet the lyrics attributed to them readily coalesce. While scholarly attention has sought to disentangle these identities, I have suggested that in the practical function of the lyrics this is neither necessary nor an objective since understood together they express the continuity of the tradition through creative and interpretive actions.
focused on the associative qualities of the persona of the ‘master’ (‘üstad’) Kul Himmet.

I then examined the deyiş lyric form more closely and established that it may be understood as the principal Alevi expressive form and that it functions most fundamentally in the context of ritual, for which specific deyiş forms can be described. However the structural form of the deyiş does not restrict its use to Alevi ritual nor indeed Alevi subjects, but is a lyric form able to embrace a broad scope of theme and subject, a characteristic that permits creative and interpretive activity. However the defining characteristic of the deyiş is its purpose as a ‘statement’, a position that takes on authority through the critical traditional integer of the mahlas.

In examining the meaning suggested by the way in which the mahlas is adopted I identified important elements of authority, lineage and transcendence associated with the taking of a mahlas. It is clear that the taking of a mahlas can be intrinsically linked to the preparedness and suitability of an aspiring aşık to take up the responsibilities of the role. In the example of Dertli Divani, the aşık demonstrates his genuine inspiration in extemporising a lyric before authoritative elders able to confer the mahlas as a seal of authority and warrant. Yet it is clearly not this straightforward, since it is also perfectly possible for the poet to assume a mahlas himself or, as in the case of Zakiri (Noksani), discard a mahlas conferred by a master for one of his own choosing to avoid confusion with another aşık. While there are ideals in respect to the taking of the mahlas that emphasise particular warrant and an elite class of inspired poets deeply connected to authoritative lineage, in practice the tradition allows for more open engagement including self-attribution. It is this combination of ritualised and meaningful processes together with more ambiguous
possibilities that in fact provides a certain dynamic to the tradition and certainly allows for more poets to engage and connect with the tradition. And this, indeed, I would conclude, is one of the important functions of the mahlas: that, as a simple textual integer it permits participation and connection to a community through creative and interpretive (including appropriative) contributions. By adopting a mahla and composing (or interpreting or adapting) deyiş the poet acknowledges, participates in, and enervates the tradition. The mahla pertains to, and represents, not merely the individual lyric contributions of the ostensible authors but also forms the infrastructure or nodes of a network that constitutes the ontology of Alevi expressive culture. Indeed I have suggested that the ambiguity and non-fixity of form of the mahla is a critical element in this process. On one level it may be seen as a formulaic construction and mere convention. However, the fact that the mahla may appear with different grammatical functions (with or without the verb to be for example), or that it may appear in a paratactic position in relation to the verse line, or that the poet may use different forms of the mahla or multiple mahlas that may even cross gender lines (as in the case of Melûli and Harabi), suggests the interpretive possibilities of the mahla. It challenges us to think beyond the meaning and function of simple authorial signature. The ontology of the mahla, including the apparent appropriation, changing of attribution, or even the deliberate absence of the mahla from performances, may be understood as much as demonstrations of its ability to impart meaning as it does of evidence of errors requiring correction.

I further considered the deyiş (and the mahla) as experienced in expressive culture through three perspectives: that of a series of recordings produced in the 1980s by one of the most influential performers of Alevi music, Arif Sağ; a performance at the Pir Sultan Abdal festival in Banaz in 2002 by his son, Tolga Sağ; and a critical
reflection on four of my own performances of Alevi deyiş in a range of contexts. In the recordings of Arif Sağ I found the application of interpretive strategies by a master individual performer that used the immanent and associative aspects of repertoire and performance technique to promote the primacy of Alevi song within broader Anatolian Turkish traditional culture. By emphasising an intimate style focused on the primacy of the bağlama using motifs and thematic material that acknowledged fundamental Alevi ritual culture, and a repertoire of deyiş ranging from the seminal masters to modern aşık-s, he achieved a new focus for Alevi song that set it as the primus inter pares of Anatolian folk song. In the Muhabbet series of recording which Sağ led, along with Muhlis Akarsu, Musa Eroğlu and Yavuz Top, this strategy is most fully realised because of the collective weight of the repertoire filling five recordings within a concise timeframe. Thus I was able to demonstrate how the ontology of the Alevi culture can be seen as expressed through the community of identities and associations of the attribution of works through the mahlas to authoritative aşık-s, old and modern. This analysis demonstrated a dynamic live tradition, represented by the presence of the aşık Muhlis Akarsu; how the identities of the performers are engaged through the personal and regional association of repertoire; and how interpretive coherence is rendered through the evoking of thematic material and associations in expressive discourse.

I conceived an entextualised reading in my analysis of the performance of Tolga Sağ at the 2002 Pir Sultan Abdal festival that revealed a sophisticated interpretation and use of material that suggested a perspective on a world incorporating not only the context of the performance but also a more complex revealed world. I interpreted Sağ’s performance as a masterful evocation of his position in respect to his culture, that is Alevi culture and Turkish culture more generally, including the centrality of
Alevi ritual, of Alevi themes of resistance and martyrdom, of the importance of regional identity as well as the presence (and entertainment aspects) of popular culture. In analysing Sağ’s performance in both my contextual presence at the event and in my entextualised reading of the performance I was engaged as a participant. That is, as part of the audience I was part of the performance process and how I received the performance and interpreted it was (and is) formed from the perspectives and processes through which I have sought to understand. For me the coherence, success and power of the performance arose from the immanent world Sağ evoked through names – those of the mahlas as well as other names of metonymic force – associations of locality and popular culture, and of thematic material both lyrical and musical.

In the critical reflection upon my own performances I sought in part to reveal my own method and strategy for understanding and interpreting the expressive world inhabited by Pir Sultan Abdal. In this respect it represents the experience and expression of my hermeneutic objective of appropriation in Ricoeur’s sense of finding understanding through self-interpretation of the world (the subject) that is revealed. The key for me was understanding that the songs are not isolates; that the world of the aşık-s, that the mahlas in particular reminds us of, is an immanent and interpretable world connected through experience, lineage, authority and expressive culture. In this respect, reflecting upon my own performances I observed an ambition to express an interpretive coherence and honesty rather than, perhaps, a contextual and explicatory clarity – that is, an objective of ‘experiencing’ rather than ‘explaining’.
My ambition in this research project has been twofold. Firstly, it has been to reveal
the mahlas self-naming convention, so ubiquitous in the Alevi lyric song, as a critical
expressive device worthy of more scholarly attention than it has hitherto received.
That, in the context of the oral traditional culture in which it is used, it functions as a
textual integer more faceted than simply an authorial signature; that in fact it plays an
important role in the coherence and expressive interpretation of Alevi culture. My
second ambition was to contribute to the resources available to the scholarly
community in English of a rich traditional lyric culture that has received
comparatively little attention, particularly in respect to Pir Sultan Abdal, the greatest
of the Alevi master dervishes and poets. To that end I included a representative
collection of fifty translations of Pir Sultan Abdal deyiş in the fourth chapter of this
study. In the context of this study these translations, like my critical reflection,
represent evidence of my interpretive method and strategy. Moreover, in the context
of the hermeneutical approach and structure of this thesis they are artefacts of the
hermeneutical challenge and, while I hope they prove useful for other scholars, they
are a reminder of the inconclusiveness of that challenge rather than a claim for
definitive versions.

Finally, I would conclude that what the mahlas ultimately challenges us to do in our
interpretive and expressive encounters with the deyiş is to sing the words ‘Pir Sultan
Abdal’ım’ – ‘I am Pir Sultan Abdal’ – as declaration that I am engaged in the act of
understanding.
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The spelling of some Turkish names, particularly in older works, can vary. For example Vahit Lutfi Salcı’s name may also appear as Vahid and as Lütfü, or Lütfi or as Vahid Dede; and Sadettin Nüşhet may also appear as Sadeddin Nüzühet. In the case of some early works the writer’s surname may not appear on publications at all as in the case of Ergun’s 1929 monograph on Pir Sultan Abdal which appears under the name Sadettin Nühzet. For the sake of clarity in bringing works by the same author together in the bibliography I have settled on one form of the name; and in the case of Ergun I have followed the common practice of including his surname in the citation.

I have followed the English alphabet for filing rather than Turkish despite the abundance of Turkish language works included. So names beginning with Ç will file under C, both the dotted İ and un-dotted I under I, Ö under O, Ş under S, and Ü under U.

The bibliography includes cited works as well as the major reference works used (e.g. dictionaries, grammar studies) and those works that, if not specifically cited in the text, have particularly informed my understanding for the purposes of this study. The separate discography includes only those audio (and few visual) materials cited.


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APPENDIX A

Track listing of accompanying CDs

DISC 1

Tolga Sağ – Pir Sultan Abdal Festival 2002 performance

First phase:

1. Opening açış (bağlama improvisation)
2. Dünya arsızında (Davut Sulari)
3. Yarım için ölüyorum

Second phase:

4. Medet ya Muhammet Medet ya Ali (Pir Sultan Abdal)
5. Rehberi Ali’nin devri yürüye (Pir Sultan Abdal)
6. Türbesin üstüne nakş eyledim (Pir Sultan Abdal)
7. Medet Allah medet medet ya Ali (Aşık Muhammet)

Third phase:

8. Açış (bağlama improvisation)
9. Bu nasıl işidi bu nasıl hisım (uzun hava)
10. Gömdüm oğul seni toprağa gömdüm (Mustafa Atıcı)
11. Dilo (Mehmet Koç)

Fourth phase:

12. Semah – Açığım yok (Muhlis Akarsu)
13. Başım açık yalın ayak yürüttün (Aşık Sıdkı)
    Kerbela çöldünden sakin mi geldi (Dedemoğlu)

Fifth phase:

14. Gurbeti ben mi yarattım (Muhlis Akarsu)
15. Mevłam gul diyerek iki göz vermiş (Mahzuni Şerif)
16. Ben ölüyom sen ölmüyom (Ruhsati/Aşık Îhsani)

Sixth phase:

17. Esheği saldım çayra (Kazak Abdal)
18. Bacacılars yüksek yapar
19. Kostak yeri
20. Mor koyun
21. Göleli gelin – Şu dağlar karlı dağlar
22. Closing remarks
DISC 2

Paul Koerbin – Performances

1. Sonic Circus, Sydney, 2002
2. National Folk Festival, Canberra, 2005

DISC 3

Paul Koerbin – Performances (continued)

1. National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2005
APPENDIX B

PowerPoint slides from the performance at the National Library of Australia, November 2005
*Alevis* – who are they?
   About 1/4 Turkish population (20 million)
   Turks and Kurds
   Diaspora – Germany, Australia

*Alevilik* – religion? philosophy? culture?
   Heterodox
   Syncretistic
   Islam – Shi’ism; Turkish ‘folk Islam’; Sufism
   Humanism
   Socialism
   Hereditary
   Saints and elders – Häri Bektaş Veli; dede-s

*Bektaşı* – urban Sufi order

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**Three Alevi ritual songs**

1. *Boğın Bize&Pir Geldi*
   “Today the Pir (patron saint, spiritual guide) came to us”

Tevhid or song of unity: From Cevat village, Malatya, Eastern Anatolia. Attributed to Kilis Hummet, 16th century CE (or possibly ‘Kul Hummet Cumaş’, 19th century CE).

2. *Boğın Matam Giani Geldi*
   “Today the day of mourning has come”

Mersiye: Lament on the death of the Imam Huseyin at Kerbelah in 680 CE. Attributed to Hafizi (Shah Ismail, 1st Safavid Shah of Iran, early 16th century CE).

3. *Duası Imam*
   “The Twelve Imams”

An invocation of the twelve Imams of Shia tradition. The Imams are announced with associated epithets. Attributed to Ayk Muhammad, probably 15th century CE. From Kisa village near Urfa in Southwestern Anatolia.

   ‘Bizi dergahdan, hu
   Möhrum eylene, hu’

   ‘Do not keep us, hu!
   From the meeting place, hu!”
Turna Semahi
Sacred crane dance

Semah being ‘turned’
Pir Sultan Abdal Festival
Benaz (Sivas), June 2002

Turhal Semahi
From Saha Dogru Giden
& by Cemal Senar
Scales

Bağlama tuning

Divriği (Sivas Province)

Nimri Dede
İsmail Dehmenoğlu
1909-1986

Photo from Şeyh Hasan
Aşiret by Ismail Onural
İnsan Olmaya Geldim
‘I have come to be a human being’

Cast out this filthy duality from within,
In the true self I have come to be a human being,
Establish the throne for the heart of the true ones,
In word I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open,
I have come to be a human being.

Whatever love is, it is the essence of the soul;
The direction to it lies between the eyes.
The work of truth is the test of strength.
On the face I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open,
I have come to be a human being.

What all the teachers have described;
The falling place that the true ones have reached;
Where the Prophets and Saints have gone.
In these footsteps I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open.

At times I have considered and at times been considered.
How many years have I been attached to a noose?
With the passage I have set alight that love and been set alIGHT.
The ashes I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open.
I have come to be a human being.

At last I have come, drinking the wine of love.
Every bit of whiteness I have selected from the darkness.
The mountains of existence I have pierced and passed over.
On the level ground I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open.
I have come to be a human being.

See now what Nimr Dede has done.
Of the true love to every heart he has sung.
To all manner of corruption he has bid farewell.
On the lute I have come to be a human being.
I have laid myself open.
I have come to be a human being.

Aşık Nesimi Çimen
Killed in Sivas 2 July 1993
Participating in the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival

Photo from Kalan CD 283-284
Sivas, 2 July 1993

Tolga Sağ
Pir Sultan Abdal Festival
Banaş (Sivas), June 2002

Pir Sultan Abdal
Don’t sing nightingale, don’t sing
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering you caused
My wick is extinguished and my oil used up
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering you caused
Haydar Haydar Haydar I burn and I burn
Ali Ali Ali I burn and I burn

I have turned to turbulent torrents in the sea
I have turned to roses opened before their time
I have turned to ashes of an extinguished fire
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering you caused
Haydar Haydar Haydar I burn and I burn
Ali Ali Ali I burn and I burn

You will get news of me with the brave ones
You will avaddle my wound with the martyred ones
I have never forty years with deer on the mountains
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering you caused
Haydar Haydar Haydar I burn and I burn
Ali Ali Ali I burn and I burn

I am Pir Safiyya Abdal finished and gone
I was sleeping without eating, without drinking
I was hung because I loved the Truth too much
Friend, I burn and burn from the suffering you caused
Haydar Haydar Haydar I burn and I burn
Ali Ali Ali I burn and I burn

Grave of Aşık Mahzuni Şerif
Çilehane, Hacibektaş, July 2002

Aşık Mahzuni Şerif
1943-2002
Last recording ‘Firtıldak Adam’
Firddak Adam
‘Mister Tricky Dicky’

This world’s stupidity is shameful
What business have you like the owl
watching over the ruins?
You are the devil in the congregation
The ways have fallen on hard times
Shameless, what business have you in
the Mezhranie?

Mister tricky tricky dicky
What should I say to you
Don’t come to the Dergah
While you’re a traitor
While you’re a tyrant

You made your vow and you trampled on it
You have never in your life eaten lawful sacrament
You have not said ‘I am a human being’
You have not said ‘I am a slave’
What business have you with Mehdani,
with Hase Bektay? [with Pir Sultan?]

You have opened a wound in the heart of
Mehrdani
The world’s sedition and its shamefulness
Offspring of the fanatic and essence of the
derelicted
What business have you with Husayin,
with Kerbelah?

Ayub Mehdiwani Sarif (1943-2002)