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# The Life of a Ritual Repertoire and its Aesthetic: Cem Ceremonies in Tekke Köyü, the Village of Abdal Musa

Jérôme Cler

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# Aesthetic and Performative Dimensions of Alevi Cultural Heritage

Edited by **Martin Greve**  
**Ulaş Özdemir**  
**Raoul Motika**





Aesthetic and Performative Dimensions  
of Alevi Cultural Heritage

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# The Life of a Ritual Repertoire and its Aesthetic: *Cem* Ceremonies in Tekke Köyü, the Village of Abdal Musa

Jérôme Cler<sup>1</sup>

## *Preamble*

### *a. 'Long-running' Field Research<sup>2</sup>*

Twenty years ago, while I was conducting field research in the Sunni *yörük* environment of the *yayla* in Western Taurus, I began regularly visiting the village of Tekke Köyü, which hosts a Bektashi community claiming to be part of the 'Kaygusuz Rite', *Kaygusuzun erkani*. The beauty of the ritual music I discovered in 1997 encouraged me to return there every winter, especially from 2003 onwards. I limited my research and enquiries to ritual and musical life and I investigated their content, simply captivated by a living and singular tradition, a musical tradition that seemed unlike any other in the surrounding area, not to mention religious life and institutions. From 2011, two fellow researchers joined me in this field research: Nikos Sigalas, an historian and Nicolas Elias, an anthropologist. The social organization of the village as a religious brotherhood (*tarikât*), as well as its history, would come to the forefront of our investigation, the first presentation of which was released in 2017 in the *Turcica*, in the form of a three-part report, 'Tekke Köyü, a Bektashi village in Western Taurus' (Cler, 2017; Elias, 2017; Sigalas, 2017).

In this report, music made only a filigreed appearance – when using the word 'music', I include the sound material, its function, its performers and their status, and the ritual repertoire. As in any Alevi-Bektashi community, this kind of repertoire includes *semab*, sung-danced poems and *nefes*, which are sung poems 'intended to be listened to. Tekke, however, enjoys a relative cultural autarchy: its community is even referred to as a place of pilgrimage for the whole Alevi world and during an annual gathering which occurs every June, its ritual singularity and repertoire are restricted to within its boundaries. But above all, the main difficulty during ethnographic investigation lies in the paradox of music. Placed at the service of an overabundant hymnography, omnipresent in the ritual, structuring its time, it is never the subject of discourse and commentary. The officiat-

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from French: Maud Caillat.

<sup>2</sup> This research was conducted under the aegis of the Laboratoire d'Excellence (Labex) Res-Med, Religions and Societies in the Mediterranean, and of the CETOBAC, Centre for Studies on Turkey, Ottoman Empire, Balkans and Central Asia (CNRS).

ing musicians disappear behind the grandeur of the musical and ritual architecture, considering themselves only a tiny element of it.

*b. Musical Collection and Recordings.*

For ethnomusicologists, recordings are a primary necessity, which enables them to study music. Long before thinking about cultural heritage archiving or capturing the fleeting moment, it is first of all a matter of remedying the lack of exposure to such music among researchers, who have missed out on the passive cultural transmission that comprises village life. Recordings allow repeated listening, which is indispensable in the process of familiarisation with the repertoires. Year after year, my repeated stays, always occurring in the middle of winter, when the ritual season is in full swing, aimed first and foremost to succeed in the protracted learning process of a perfectly organized musical and self-sufficient world, which appears as a detached, ‘minor’ world in the sense already mentioned in a previous article (Cler & Messina, 2007). Since 1997, when I recorded my first *cem*, and later when I attended all other *cems* in the village, I was never asked what I was planning to do with the recordings. This was not a matter of concern for the villagers who demonstrated unusual and touching confidence. This allowed me to compile a sound database, and then to distribute numerous CDs within the community. In addition, I planned to pay tribute to this musical community by releasing a CD in the Ocora-Radio-France collection where I had already featured the repertoires collected during my previous research. In March 2011, during the *Nevruz*<sup>3</sup>, my colleagues and I wanted to gather good singers from the village in the house where we were staying in order to record a *mubabbet* evening. This project immediately ‘deviated from its target’ at our interlocutors’ initiative, who jumped at the opportunity to propose that we made our own *cem*. This would be termed a *Balim mubabbeti* because it lacked a *semah* of Forty or a *kurban* (at most, we would cook *cebrail*, i.e. chickens). It was the recording of this *cem* that provided the future CD with its core material. In order to honour the *güvende* of the other *cem* house, I added the twelve Imams’ hymns, the initial and final *semah* of a *cem* held in 2003, for their particularly good singing quality. The following pages will partly rely on this recording for musical analysis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nevroz is a celebration on 21<sup>st</sup> March, marking the Persian “new year”, and in *Tekke Köyü* is also Ali’s birthday.

<sup>4</sup> A significant overview is given in the CD *Turquie: Cérémonie de Djem Bektasbi: la Tradition d’Abdal Musa* (CD *Turkey: A Bektasbi Djem Ceremony: Abdal Musa’s Tradition*), I published via Ocora-Radio-France (C560248) in 2012. The following analyses will sometimes refer to it.

- All original recordings together with transcriptions can be found online at:  
[www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet\\_and\\_all\\_examples.zip](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet_and_all_examples.zip)
- Videos of various parts of the cem can be watched in:  
[vimeo.co](https://vimeo.co) › [jerome cler](#) › [Abdal Musa](#).

c. *The Cem.*

I will not provide details regarding the ritual of Abdal Musa's *cem* or *birlik*, as they were already described in the report released by *Turcica*. I will limit myself to the main musical phases to facilitate the understanding of this article:

1. Opening:

- initial hymn to the twelve Imams
- *Babalar semahı*, the *semah* of the *baba*.

2. *Sofra* (meal) :

- *dem nefesi*
- *oturak nefesleri, kathismas*<sup>5</sup>
- *Kerbelâ* song

3. End of the *sofra*. The assembly leaves.

- *Semah* of Forty
- 2 or 4 'additional' *semah*. These *semah* cannot be danced if the *cem* is to be finished earlier, which is often the case when spring approaches and brings the first agricultural work.
- *gözcü semahı*, *semah* of the *gözcü*
- *lokma*, new agape meal, hand washing and leave of services.

The duration of a *cem* is generally between five and seven hours. The ritual functioning of the brotherhood requires that each *talip* (disciple, faithful) owes one *cem* to his community annually, and that each *cem* corresponds to two *talips*, i.e. two married couples. In this village, which hosts two ritual houses (*cem evi*) and where religious authority is entrusted to five *baba*, each one being responsible for one group, ritual life is extremely intense during the off-season, which occurs between November and March, where several *cem*s are held per week. In terms of musical repertoire, it is easy to understand how this abundance of *cem*s makes the musical life similar to a living language.

<sup>5</sup> I borrow this term from the vocabulary of Byzantine liturgy, because it translates with accuracy the original Turkish expression which means 'songs [to be listened to] when seated'.

## *The Musicians' status*

### 1. *Aşık and Güvende.*

During my very first stay, I clumsily asked if there were any *aşık*s in the village and I was answered that there were no such musicians at this site. However, the *cem* I attended a few days later gathered a choir of six singers and two or three *saz* players! Consequently I came to understand that the word *aşık* in Tekke Köyü is identified with famous musicians or with the renowned Alevi who come for the festival. In Tekke, the names of the officiating musicians are *güvende baba*, from *goyande*, i.e. 'spokesman' in Persian. The villagers are unaware of this etymology and the word remains associated with the stem *güven* – trust and security – in the sense that the musician is the guarantor of a safely conducted ritual.

It is obvious that a *güvende* cannot be more than his function requires. Nor can he use his talent to reach fame: listening to himself sing, considering himself as an *aşık* is *benlik*, it involves ego(t)ism, which is a major sin. Nuri K., an outstanding singer whom I had heard in the very first *cem* I attended in 1997 and whose name will be mentioned later in this article, had disappeared from performances in later years. However, I saw him sitting at the village's café. When I asked about his absence from the *güvende* choir, I was told that he had been excluded. Why? '*Benlik*', was the reply without further details, but letting me understand that he had given himself too much importance.

Behind the distinction between *aşık* and *güvende baba*, the relationship between the 'outside' and the 'inside' is at stake. The word *aşık* refers to the world of 'global' Alevism that comes every year to Tekke Köyü for the Abdal Musa festival, involving renowned *aşık*s. As for the *güvende baba*, he is no more than the officiant of the ritual, or a mere peasant performing his duties with dignity, accompanied by a small team of singers and *saz* players. He has nothing to do with music releases or deterritorialization: tradition and the local rite (*erkan*) are deeply rooted in this place and cannot be exported outside the strict regulation of rituals. From this point of view, the village's *güvende* are careful not to show themselves during the festival, but rather let the *aşık* visitors display their musical art and artistry. Finally, let us not forget that if foreign visitors, i.e. ethnomusicologists, tend to favour local musicians because they appreciate 'autochthonous voices', this fact is not always understood. The villagers remain convinced that they don't have much value compared to the *aşık* from the outside. This modesty is notable when juxtaposed with their concurrent tendency to declare that their tradition is central, unique and centuries-old.

Nevertheless, musical art is an essential part of ritual life where, like alcohol consumption, music is regulated by the religious system. Hence, no 'secular' practice seems to be maintained in the village, and it is not something about which to

boast<sup>6</sup>, although some musicians have played at weddings (*düğün*) in the past. They used to team up with Abdal, Alevi communities related to the Gypsies living in nearby villages, particularly in the coastal lowlands of Finike. They were often professional musicians and they performed in small bands including a violin, clarinet and *darbuka*. But once they pronounce their vows (*ikrar*, initiation), they give up this activity, becoming *güvende* exclusively for the ritual. I have been told that stranger musicians were hired for weddings at Tekke Köyü, more particularly Abdal<sup>7</sup> musicians.

The use of the violin during *cem* ceremonies was common until the recent past. In the years 2003-4, when I asked if I would ever be lucky enough to attend a *cem* with a violin, I was always told that such an opportunity had passed: either the violinists had died or they were no longer playing because of their age. However, one day in the winter of 2004, I attended two successive *cem*, each one featuring a different violinist. Hüseyin *dede* had managed to convince these ‘retired’ violinists to join the group of *güvende* to satisfy my curiosity. One of them was an elderly violinist from the nearby village of Akçaeniş<sup>8</sup>: his physical appearance showed more Gypsy (or Abdal) than Yörük/Turcic ancestry. I met him only once for he did not visit again and died two years later. Ahmet, the second violinist, was living in Tekke and I saw him again in March 2019. He was alive, but told me that he was unable to play his instrument.

Nowadays, the only instrument used during *cem* ceremonies is the *saz* in a standard format, i.e. with a long neck. This use seems to be an acculturation to the ‘outside world’ dating back to the 1970s at the earliest. Instead of playing this instrument, the masters of the previous generation used the small three-stringed *saz cura*, which they played without a plectrum, in contrast to its use in all the surrounding Yörük environments.

Finally, charisma and religious authority can be coupled with musical proficiency and the mastery of the ‘bülbül’, nightingale – as one of the village’s elderly

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<sup>6</sup> Thus I paid a visit to an Alevi *dede* from an Abdal community in Finike in winter 2008. He never mentioned to me that he was also a good violinist, going so far as to deny it – even though the whole neighbourhood had praised his talent. But this occurred ‘in former times’, before he became a *dede*, when he played at local weddings (as *maballe sanatçısı*, ‘local musician’).

<sup>7</sup> Referring to the Abdal/Gypsies who were living in this region in the past, Xavier de Planhol (1958: 372) emphasizes that they could be hired as musicians ‘in village weddings’ or ‘in the meetings and feasts organized by the Alevi communities’. My hosts sometimes told me that some *cem* were once accompanied by the *cümbüş* and the violin, which perhaps indicates Abdal/Gypsies’ skills. Was there a time when ritual musicians were not only solely village natives to the village?

<sup>8</sup> Akçaeniş is an Alevi (Tahtacı) village, but it hosts a Bektashi minority considered part of Tekke Köyü, as well as a Bektashi *cem evi*, in addition to a recently built Alevi *cem evi* (although we have always been told that the Tahtacı Alevi performed their rituals at home in the greatest secrecy, the villagers, however, followed the ‘trend’ of building a separate venue in the village, probably inspired by Istanbul).

*baba* used to tell me when he was designating the *saz*. The two *mürşids*, Ali *baba* and Hüseyin *dede* the *balife*,<sup>9</sup> distinguish themselves by their musical skills: each one is present at *cem* ceremonies where the groups are placed under their guidance, and they inevitably intervene when it is time for the *sofra* (*kathismas*). Endowed with exceptional subtlety when playing the *saz*, Hüseyin *dede* displays deeply personal interpretations when he performs the village's *nefes*; moreover, he often chooses rarely featured texts from the repertoire, which he can sing during the *kathisma*. In his youth, Hüseyin had a short career as a wedding musician before he entered the order. He performs several types of tunings on the *saz*, and, unlike the village's *güvende*, he cares about sound quality, searching for new timbres. His musical and poetic culture extend far beyond the narrow frame of the village, even though they cannot be simplified by stereotypes or imitation. Finally, all Hüseyin's brothers are *güvende*: they are either good instrumentalists or singers. Their father was the village's former *türbedar* and *bafız*, the only person who could actually read the Arabic alphabet. So there is obviously a family 'stamp' of which Hüseyin is undoubtedly the most accomplished representative.

As for Ali Baba, the older *mürşid*, he is respected for his traditional *saz* playing, which is a reminiscent of the 'T.R.T.-orthodoxy'<sup>10</sup> of the 1960s. He is especially respected for his knowledge of the poetic repertoire. A shrewd musician, he embodies a more conservative tendency, convinced that he is a true representative of an ancestral tradition, which he views rather as a heritage designed to be preserved as such, often deploring its decline.

Consequently, although the function of *baba* or *mürşid* is not directly related to that of musician or *güvende* with regard to the rank and hierarchy of/in the twelve services (*on iki hizmet*), this function seems to depend quite extensively on individual charisma.

## 2. *Cosmos and Harmonia*

Every *semab* begins with a preparation in which *niyaz* and prayers follow one another. Women gird their husbands with a cord, which symbolizes the torn turban of the Prophet with which the Forty gird themselves, according to the *miraç* founding story. Meanwhile, the *güvende* make the *semab* rhythm audible on the *saz*, relying on an ostinato. They don't sing until the *gözcü* gives the signal for a simultaneous start to the singing and dancing. However, during one evening in the winter of 2006, as soon as the *semab* had begun, I saw the *güvende* getting up and leaving the *meydan* – the ritual room – very quickly; I didn't even have time

<sup>9</sup> Concerning the religious authorities of the village, see the report published in the *Turcica* journal (Cler, 2017; Elias, 2017; Sigalas, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> This expression refers to the *saz* promotion programme, led by national radio and television as well as conservatories (cf. Cler, 2000).

to understand that they had made a prosody error, missing the first syllable of the song. Consequently the *semab* could not begin and the choristers, feeling undoubtedly the greatest shame, had to leave. An old *baba* then replaced the *güvende* and accomplished the task of the choir in good order, on his own. Once the *semab* was completed, the *baba* called the choristers back, judged and reprimanded them, then each *güvende* received a fine before joining their place and their office for the rest of the ritual. This was the only time when the role of musicians was publicly explained: ‘you have the easiest and most pleasant function, you sit there singing and drinking the *dem* at will, while the others are preparing the meal and the room, how dare you?’, etc. The ritual sequence relied on them and this heavy responsibility was compensated by a certain comfort within the *cem*, as well as certain privileges. Since the *semab* represents a perfect coincidence between time, rhythm, sung poetry and choreography, the *güvende baba* are the guarantors of the whole ritual in its very texture. On them depends the cosmos in the etymological sense of order and ornamental beauty. Both masters and servants of time, they provide *harmony* throughout the ritual – also in the etymological sense – of a perfect *adjustment* of ritual temporalities. And all this happens in the rejection of the *ego/benlik*.

## *Musical language*

### *1. The Repertoire*

The repertoire of *cem* ceremonies includes two types of songs: some are fixed while the other ones left to the *güvende*’s choice. The fixed hymns feature as follows: *düvazdeb-imam* of Şah Hatayi, the solemn opening of the ritual, the main *semabs* known respectively as ‘of the *baba*’, ‘of the Forty’ and ‘of the *gözcü*’, the song of the *dem* (*dem nefesi*). The flexible songs are *kathismas*, *oturak nefesleri*, i.e. songs designed to be listened to when seated: they are indeed repertoires to be listened to, *sama*, this time in the etymological sense of ‘listening’. The meal continues, the *kadeb* (*cups*) circulate, everyone listens and sometimes meditates with closed eyes on the songs while a slight inebriation arises. At that time, it often occurs that inspired villagers, i.e. a fervent singer, a *baba* or the *baba güvende* himself, will sing their solo part, burning with fire from this banquet of Forty and from the communion. All the audience listens to them with a reverential attention to the verses. The singers can then really ‘express their musical selves’ in selected *nefes*, of which three, six, nine etc. must always succeed each other.

Similarly, Kerbelâ’s *ağıt* (threnody), which will be sung at the end of the meal, and before the *semab* of the Forty, is left to the free interpretation of a soloist of the choir, – who can then be accompanied by the audience’s cries when Imam Hüseyin’s martyrdom is evoked. From a formal viewpoint, this song will preferably be an unmeasured and melismatic one (‘long’ aria, *uzun hava*).



Through these general considerations, readers can easily imagine the rich and indigenous aspects of the poetic and musical repertoire. The village of Tekke Köyü acquired its own cultural autonomy, so it remains firm in resisting all forms of ‘globalization’, even a relative one within the scale of the country, which reproduces a very small part of Alevi music all over the country. Now let us tackle in more detail the music performed in itself.

## 2. Music, Semah Dance and Sung Poetry.

### a. A specific melodic and rhythmic universe?

When ethnomusicologists are already familiar with a specific region and its musical art, they will gradually learn how to distinguish local styles, which appear most often as variations of a more geographically widespread style. Similarly, it is possible to summarize in a few main points the style of the region containing the areas between Denizli and Korkuteli in the North, and Antalya and Fethiye in the South, which corresponds to old Lykia :

- contrast between two forms: the first one, *kırık hava*, is a measured form associated with dance and sung poetry, which adapts itself to them according to laws close to the *syllabic giusto*, a concept described by Brailoiu that I chose to adapt to *aksak* rhythm and not only octosyllabic lines; the second one, *uzun hava*, is an unmeasured form, which instead fits expressive poetry or laments, such as the exile songs called *gurbet havası*.
- predominance of the ‘D mode’ scale, with a ‘neutral’ E (between E flat and E, notated E ‘flat 3’ by Turkish folklorists) – the same occurs for the letter note B (*makam bayati*).
- as for the *kırık hava* form, there is a predominance of the *aksak* rhythm, type  $9/8=2+2+2+3$  (and permutations:  $3+2+2+2$ ,  $2+3+2+2$ , etc., cf. my previous works on *aksak* rhythms). It is as much a dance rhythm as a metrical structure where sung poetry can be inserted, most often in heptasyllables (*mâni*) or hendecasyllables.

The musical repertoire of Tekke Köyü exclusively fits ritualistic contexts: the festive musical world is part of the outside world, of *zâbir*, and consequently has no place in the village. Unlike secular music, ritual music in itself remains totally unknown outside of the village. This of course does not prevent it from sharing several common features with the music performed in the surrounding areas, but in a transformed or reworked style.

Moreover, this ritual music is richer and more variegated in terms of modes and rhythms than the festive music of the surrounding locality. In addition to the much anticipated importance of *aksak* rhythm  $9=2+2+2+2+3$ , rite musicians also master other ‘basic’ *aksak* meters, such as  $5=2+3$ , or  $7=2+2+3$ . They show a

scholarly knowledge of prosody, which they adapt to this musical rhythm. They also perform *uzun hava* during some *nefes*, especially the *ağıt* –threnodies– of Kerbelâ, when concluding each *semah*.

*b. Generalities: Modes and Rhythms.*

The predominant modal scale is therefore, as in most of Anatolia, that of the D mode, in other words the *makam bayati* scale. But the musical note E, which is the second degree of the D mode, generally moves towards E flat, especially when the song descends to the tonic, or when the *saz* dictates the rhythm in ostinato before the beginning of the *semah*. This principle can be verified for all the tunes transcribed in the booklet (see [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf)): this is really a local characteristic, which corresponds to the notion of the ‘upper leading note,’<sup>11</sup> which is itself subject to the power of attraction of the tonic.

We may also find, though more seldomly, two situations where the mode corresponding to the *hicaz* of Ottoman classical music theory can be noticed: the second version of the *dem nefesi* (cf. booklet, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf), p. 8) and a modulation in the *semah* of Forty (p. 15).

The unmeasured tunes are sung after a melodic pattern of regional ‘long tunes’, which are called *avşar makamı* at Tekke Köyü. The word *makam* means ‘tune’ or ‘melody’ in the village area: it is a mere (standard) melody i.e. it is not a ‘mode’ in the sense provided by classical Ottoman theory. As for *avşar*, it is an ethnonym that refers to a famous Turkmen/Turkish<sup>12</sup> ethnic group located between Iran and Anatolia, which took possession of these Western Taurus territories during the fourteenth century. Among other things, the legendary victory of the Avşar over the Germiyan is celebrated between Burdur and Acıpayam in a song called ‘Avşar Beyleri’, ‘Lords of the Avşars.’ It is both a kind of regional anthem for all musicians in this geographical zone, and provides a model for a long tune (Cler, 2012: 208ff), very different from laments and exile songs. However, the same melodic style is used to sustain lamentation texts, such as Kerbelâ’s threnodies performed at the end of *cem* ceremonies. This melodic style can also be used when the last two lines of the fast section *krvrak* of the *semah* are repeated, while the *baba* recites the prayers.

Here is the melodic profile of these unmeasured songs, characterized by the use of a glissando, which occurs during the phrase, starting from the highest de-

<sup>11</sup> The concept of the upper leading note, specific to descending modes, is explained by Samuel Baud-Bovy, 1972.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth recalling that, since the Middle Ages, the word *türkmén*, translated as Turkoman, has referred to nomadic groups that refused the yoke of the central state.

gree (7th). This glissando is the stamp of the *gurbet* style (exile songs) in the entire *yayla* region from Burdur to Denizli. Such is the second glissando, which often begins on the ‘upper leading note’, when the tonic (Eb<sup>3</sup><sup>13</sup> – Eb – D) approaches.

*Avşar makamı*: cf. Ex. 14, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_14\\_avsar\\_makami.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_14_avsar_makami.mp3) (the note E is slightly lower than the natural E, it is the second degree of the *makam bayati* or *hüseyni* of the classics):

We can also notice that this melodic profile is found in a large number of songs in this repertoire.

The rhythms: the *aksak* rhythm 9=2+2+2+3 dictates the dance movements on 4 steps, corresponding to the ‘4 *aksak* beats’: q q q q. This custom is followed in festive music throughout the Southwest of Turkey and in regional *semah* among the Alevi Tahtacı. The tempo is lively, i.e. e = about 210.

Sung verses can fit the same prosody within this dance rhythm, but they are most often articulated in the form 3+2+2+2+2.

Other configurations of this *aksak* rhythm can be found in *kathismas*, particularly in the form 2+2+2+2+3 (cf. [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_08\\_goenuel\\_calamazsan.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_08_goenuel_calamazsan.mp3), Ex. 8/transcription booklet, p.16 ‘*gönül çalamazsan...*’). Finally, in addition to simple binary rhythms (2/4, 4/4), the *aksak* rhythm which appears in the form 7=2+2+3 or 3+2+2 is very common among *kathismas*. The form 5=2+3 is also possible.

### c. Poetry+Melody+Dance Configuration: The Architecture of Semah.

Each ritual includes three, five or seven *semah*, three being the mandatory minimum number for a whole ceremony. The first *semah*, which is referred to as *babalar semahı* (the *baba*’s *semah*), invariably opens the *cem* just after the invocatory hymn addressed to the twelve Imams and before the ‘banquet.’ Then come *kırklar semahı*, the *semah* of Forty, which concludes the banquet, and finally the *gözcü semahı*, the *semah* of the *gözcü*, which precedes the leaving of the faithful after the twelve services. These three *semah* constitute an established repertoire, including text and music. It occurs in all *cem* houses which belong to Tekke. This number can be increased to five or even seven *semah*, when the assembly decides to perform a longer *cem*, especially in the middle of winter when no agricultural work awaits the participants the next morning. In this case, the two or four additional *semah* would precede the *gözcü semahı*, and would be chosen from within a larger repertoire of poems or melodies.

With the exception of the *semah* of Forty, where the assembly dances around the ritual room along with a single poem attributed to Şah Hatayi, all *semah* consist of two parts, each one corresponding to two sung poems: the first part is said

<sup>13</sup> Eb<sup>3</sup> means, according to the Turkish notation, a 3-commas-flat E, hence between Eb and E.

to be 'slow' (*ağır*), the other one is referred to as 'fast' (*kıvrak*). These adjectives are also commonly used in connection with festive music, where *ağır* is the common name of *zeybek*, and *kıvrak* is the name of the piece that always follows, performed in a fast tempo: '*her ağırın bir kıvrığı var*' as it is said in the Denizli's area – 'each slow piece has its fast one.' But in this case, it is not the tempo that accelerates, rather it is the choreographic performance itself, i.e. the dancers' trajectories. This feature is particularly noticeable during the transition between two sung verses, where the two couples turn around the ritual area (*meydan*).

Another significant feature shared by the villagers with their Tahtacı<sup>14</sup> neighbours is the transition to the so-called fast part, which is marked by a modulation and a change of drone, always transposed up a minor third. In this region of ancient Lycia, such drone shifts are specific to Alevi, Tahtacı and Bektashi *semahs*. They are not performed by musicians from the Yörük villages (Cler, 2012), whereas they are found in Thrace or Balkan music, – similar to Byzantine *ison*. The mode established on this new drone becomes either a 'major' mode (the *rast* type in the classical theory) or a 'minor' mode (*nihavent* type). On one of the *kıvrak semah*, there is even a second drone shift, which reaches the note G (*kıvrak* of the *gözcü semahı*). This combination of effects generated by the rising to the high notes, the changing modes and the acceleration of the choreographic rhythm are felt as a fast part, so the intensity of dance is experienced as 'speed.'

Finally, in the village of Tekke a third part is added to *semah*: once the verses of the poem are sung, the dancers will adopt the same pose as the *dar*<sup>15</sup> in front of the dignitaries who say their prayers. The *güvende*, on the other hand, directly follows the *semah* rhythm, which sounds like an unmeasured prelude (close to the *gurbet hava* or *avoşar makamı* types), repeating the last quatrain in this *uzun hava* form until the end of the prayers. He can then also start singing a *nefes* to conclude the whole part.

In essence, every *semah* consists of a perfect coincidence between a poetic form – which is most often composed of four hendecasyllabic quatrains – and dance: the anecdote of the 'missed syllable' explained above fully confirms this assertion. These poems are called *beyt* (distich) in the village, and most often belong to the *mesnevi* tradition, a *genre* largely mastered by members of the community who still compose such poems today and sing them during the *sofra* (banquet) as *kathismas* (*oturak nefes*).

<sup>14</sup> This may also explain why the Alevi of Istanbul refer to the inhabitants of Tekke Köyü as Tahtacı, or why a local *semah* was published in 1997 in the archive CD *Tahtacılar* (Kalan Müzik) by folklorist Melih Duygulu. However, the inhabitants of Tekke insist on strongly distinguishing themselves from this Tahtacı universe, which is the culture of the neighbouring village of Akçaeniş.

<sup>15</sup> The *dar*'s attitude corresponds to a posture of contrition, the right foot covering the left foot, hands crossed on the chest or belly, head inclined.

Each distich corresponds to a dancing ‘rotation:’ the two couples are placed in a square in the centre of the *meydan*. At the very beginning of the *semah*, after a preparation phase when men are girded by their wives, and when several ritual gestures are performed, the *gözcü* gives the inaugural signal, exclaiming: ‘Şah !’ The first hemistich (2 bars) has to be heard before the dance movements can really begin. This gap between the verse and the beginning of the dance is also due to the gap existing between two metric orders. As a dance, if the *semah* is always thought of as 2+2+2+3 (i.e. 4.5 beats out of 9 pulses), the verse is articulated differently with a predominance of the structure 3+2+2+2, and in some cases, 2+3+2+2, as shown in the diagram below<sup>16</sup> :

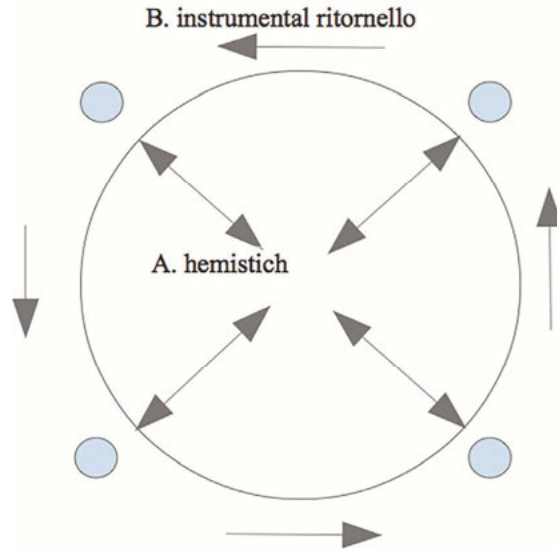


When the *semah* begins the dancers first ‘get into the movement’ as the first hemistich is being sung. They do this either on the spot, discreetly, with their feet, or by starting the dance movement with a slight momentum in order to mark the advance towards the centre of the area: then four steps (forward and backward) are regularly performed towards the centre. There are namely two musical bars for one hemistich, and thus eight bars for a distich, i.e. four cycles of forward and backward steps.

Let’s take the example of *babalar semahı*, the first one in each *cem*:<sup>17</sup>: at the end of the first distich (see letter A on the diagram below), the exclamation ‘*medet Şah!*’ (‘help us, O Shah!’) – which was added to the poem itself – completes the dance cycle by a backwards turn, before the four dancers change their disposition as they move around the dance area. They perform a quarter turn, as indicated by the letter B in the diagram below: at that precise moment, the *gözcü* renews his exclamation (‘*Şah!*’), and the two pairs of dancers change their disposition on for the length of a 2 bars length. Thus the whole performance of the *semah*, based on a poem composed of quatrains, enables the four dancers to switch regularly and eventually to come back to the first disposition at the end of the quatrain. Then the forward backward movements continue until the end of the sung poem.

<sup>16</sup> This proves once again the general truth, that the notion of ‘first beat’ is rarely relevant: see my work on the *aksak* rhythm and the detailed regional study regarding the form  $9=2+2+2+3$  in my book Cler, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> We refer to the Ocora CD version (track 3). The whole *babalar semahı* can be watched in: Vimeo › Jerome Cler › ‘Tekke Köyü, le 01/01/2008’ <https://vimeo.com/346619635>



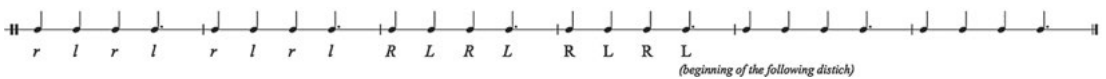
The figure below explains the link between dance and distichs. In capital letters and italics, feature the Right-Left steps during the advance towards the centre, and in straight font the return towards the back of the ritual area.

Small letters show the transition between two distichs, where the dancers perform a quarter turn on the dance circle. This lasts only two bars, and the dance ‘towards the centre’ starts immediately again, even before the end of the instrumental ritornello, which does not occur in all *semah*.

A. Distich sung over eight measures:



B. Instrumental ritornello on four measures (the dancers change their disposition)



When the end of the first poem arrives, the last sung syllable does not rely on the tonic. Instead, it inaugurates a tonic change by going up a third, in order to introduce the fast *kıvrak*: this transition can be found in every *semah*<sup>18</sup>. The four dancers find themselves in the initial disposition, in a square, face-to-face, two by two, while the *baba* recites his prayers over eight bars, the tempo being given only by the *saz*. Then the *semah* restarts at the signal of the *gözcü* (who again exclaims ‘Şah!’; he does so at each transition between sung units). This time the

<sup>18</sup> Except the ‘*semah* of the Forty,’ which holds a special status.

choreographic rhythm changes: the unit is the verse, one verse corresponds to six bars, and each bar is followed by two bars for the exclamation *'medet Şabl.'* Then six bars of instrumental *ritornello* appear: the two couples perform two complete turns around the dance area, and each time they find their initial place. If the second part is said to be a *kıvrak*, it is not due to tempo acceleration contrary to what one might think, but to choreographic movements that become more rapid and intense.

The *semah* continues in this way until the end of the second poem. It ends with prayers, while a singer repeats the last distich in the form of unmeasured singing. This *uzun hava* conclusion seems to have the function of regulating the energy spent during the *semah*, where the climax is reached during the second part.

This is the procedure of the *babalar semahı*. At the end of the *cem*, the *gözcü semahı* [cf. [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_06\\_goezcue\\_semahi.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_06_goezcue_semahi.mp3), Ex. 6] does not offer exactly the same symmetrical structure: during the first part, the dance towards the centre of the circle was performed on distichs, but this time, it extends over ten bars (= five forward and backward movements), where two bars enable the two couples to change their position. In the fast section, the forward and backward movements encompass fourteen bars; the transition, which is announced by the instrumental *ritornello*, includes six bars. Those bars are followed by a single bar allowing the four dancers to get their balance, before performing again the poem as well as the forward backward movements towards the center of the dance circle. The same type of analysis could be applied to all additional *semah*, with some light minor differences.

So it is obvious that the *semah* are elaborated performed according to an extremely precise architecture: from an overall formal perspective, the poetic structure and the dance movements must perfectly coincide, given that dance alternates between the balance of forward and backward movements towards the centre and 'spinning' movements (we say *semah dönmek*, 'spinning the *semah*'). If the etymology of the word *semah* is the Arabic stem *sama*, which means listening, this dance is thus based on listening to the poem that accompanies it and to which it gives a spatial and kinesthaetic consistency.

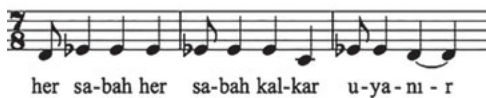
However, we can find other metric organizations of the sequence such as in the '*semah* of Forty,' where the melody and poetic rhythm are organized according to the meter 2+3+2+2, while the dance still follows the pattern (2+2)+(2+3) (and therefore begins on the sixth pulse of the sung melody); the same occurs for the *semah* '*gider iken yolum...*' p. 20 of the transcription booklet (see [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf)). The latter case is rare, but all this shows that this ritual music subtly exploits all the resources provided by regional rhythmical habits, those characteristics I have already described in the context of celebration music and weddings.

Consequently, each *semah* has its own character and follows its own laws. It is indeed a dance performed by the ‘initiated’, because no one can perform it without being perfectly aware of its structure, its order, the sung text that controls the choreographic order, – as much as because no mistake is allowed during the performance of the ritual. The faithful told us how they learned the ritual content before their initiation, at home, within families.

No mention of symbolism, no interpretation was made about of the *semah*, although elsewhere in Turkey, it is referred to as the motion of the planets or the nuptial dance of the grey crane. When one asks the meaning of the dance, words such as rapture, slight inebriation, exultation and joy immediately come. When our friend Kâzim Dede saw himself dancing the *semah* in the pictures, he vividly said: ‘can you see how I fly?!’. The most appropriate verb to explain the *semah* is *coşmak*, which evokes intense joy, inebriated rapture and ecstasy in Sufi vocabulary.

### 3. Sung Prosody, Syllabic Giusto and Melismatic Emphasis.

Throughout the Western Taurus region, poetic creativity is or was of great intensity, considering the great transformations due to rural exodus: *mâni*, *tekerleme*, *koçma*, all these forms produced constrained models where assonances and paradigms generated multiple poems that were moulded into the musical rhythms. I have already detailed the principles of this poetic-musical production and I will recall here one of its aspects, namely the adaptation of the syllabic *giusto* (Brailoiu, 1973) to the *aksak* musical world. The essential characteristic of the *aksak* rhythm is the ‘irregular bichrony’, i.e. the distribution of two units of duration respectively equal to 2 for the short and equal to 3 for the long. The long value generally appears as a break in a series of shorts<sup>19</sup>. As for the syllabic *giusto*, it rather consists of a ‘regular’ bichrony, where the long is equal to two shorts. So that frequently, when the tempo is not too fast, the group of three provided by the *aksak* rhythm will appear as 2+1 or 1+2 on two syllables: we can easily check this in the transcription booklet, for example in the case of the *nefes ‘her sabah, her sabah’* (see Ex. 7, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_07\\_her\\_sabah\\_her\\_sabah.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_07_her_sabah_her_sabah.mp3)):



This *aksak* rhythm notated 3+2+2 represents the group of 3 divided into two syllables, 1+2, as it occurs there, or 2+1 (which is more frequent).

<sup>19</sup> The case of ‘3’ as a break in a series of ‘2’ is the most frequently observed in the Balkans and ‘in Turkey; see Brailoiu, 1951 and Cler, 1994.





In the first verse: *şükür olsun yaradann demine* ('thanks be to the Creator's breath/wine'), we first notice a caesura that breaks the unity of the core word, *yaradan/yaratan*, the creator: *şükür olsun yara / dann demine*. The verse is divided into 6+5, while the usual poetic division in these forms (see the *koçma*) is actually 4+4+3 (Boratav, 1964), as it is the case here: *şükür olsun / yaradann / demine*. This process is common when the musical (choreographic) metric prevails over the textual coherence, in other words it is a typical case in danced musical-poetic repertoires.

If the structure of the sung verse had followed the pattern of the syllabic *giusto* usually used in this region (adjustment of the poetic meter to the *aksak* musical rhythm in 3+2+2+2), we could have expected, so to speak, 'mechanically:'

*Şükür ol sun ya - ra / da - nn de - mi - ne*  
u u u - - - / - u - - -

or:

*Şü - kür ol - sun ya - ra / da - nn de - mi - ne*  
u u u - - - / u u u - -

However, the first hemistich covers the next bar via the elongation of the *a* of *-ra*. The process is repeated in the next hemistich, where *de-mi-ne* becomes:

*de-mi - i - i - i - ne - e - e*  
u u u u u u u -

If we continue listening to this same *semab*, we will notice that this phenomenon is repeated in the second verse:



The second syllable of *düşmüüü* also extends, as if to 'force' the hemistich to go beyond, which allows the poetry to adjust itself to the dance steps at the end of the hemistich. In addition, it is worth noting that these melismata rather occur at the end of segments – hemistich, verse – whereas the beginning corresponds to the syllabic *giusto* pattern.

In the absence of anything better, this process will be named 'melismatic emphasis:' these long melismata correspond neither to the natural language accentuation, nor, obviously, to an expressive emphasis on the meaning of words. Stretching a hemistich over two bars seems rather to comply with a choreographic logic: in other words, the fact of doubling measures aims at to ensure the movements' parity, forcing a 'stretching' of the verses. The key thing is that this particular drive of melismata is perfectly 'regulated,' repeating itself without change from *cem* to



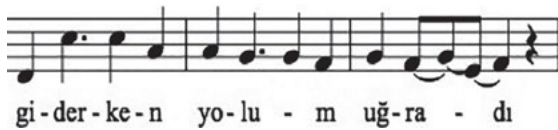
All these melodic drives are extremely atypical. To me, they seem to be part of the same ‘emphasis,’ the same expressive intensity and perhaps of a *tekke*-like aesthetic.

We can find such astonishing interval jumps in pieces from various *semah*: in particular in the *dem nefesi* (cf. below), which begins in a rather ‘regular’ way, in joint intervals. Then when the second verse is repeated in bars 16 to 19 – *bir de ceme ver* –, an ascending fourth jump occurs on *ceme*, then as in response we have: *bir de ayni ceme ver* (‘gives to the assembly of *cem*’). It is an hemistich added to the poem, a sudden descending movement of six degrees, which reaches immediately the final note D:



Here again, it is difficult to find equivalents in regional repertoires. This style belongs specifically to the village.

Or, at the beginning of the ‘*gider iken*’ *semah*, which opens with a seventh jump:



Moreover, interval jumps, or more precisely disjunct interval motions are found many times in the texture of the melodies themselves. Another example is provided by the *babalar semahı*, which is one of the most spectacular in this respect. Just before the ‘*medet Şah !*’ call already mentioned, we have:



These interval jumps can certainly be found in regional repertoires, but they are rather adventitious ornamentations (Cler, 2012: 248-257). In *Tekke*, everything happens as if usual ornaments of regional ‘secular’ festive music have ‘frozen’ into melodic elements. This phenomenon reminds us what may have happened with Ottoman classical music. Over the centuries, ornaments of the past combined with simple melodies have established themselves as devices in scholarly composition (Feldman, 1996: 330ff). Therefore I have chosen to include all these phenomena under the category of ‘melodic emphasis,’ since I remained unable to find a more appropriate term.

Through the examination of all these cases, one wonders how the poems in general have been adapted to music, particularly those featuring in the *semah*. The same melismatic emphasis will always be found, without varying between brotherly groups or rituals. This assertion is supported by a 20-year attendance of Tekke Köyü's *cem*. This invariance has undoubtedly been crystalized by habit over time, but since when? Given that the gathering of the village's traditions and institutions took place between the end of the nineteenth century and a more recent past, which modalities were adopted in the ritual's musical repertoires? For now it has been impossible for me to gather any clues about this. The older members of the community often tell me that the main *semah*, as well as some *nefes*, already existed in their youth, i.e. in the 1950s and 1960s, but also claim that they have 'always' existed. If a ritual repertoire was ever created, it was long before the 1950s. In order to deepen our knowledge of these repertoires, perhaps we should also investigate the other Bektashi villages in the area, such as those located in the Denizli region, where an important lineage of Tekke originated, not to mention Hüsnü, the author of the poem sung during the *baba's semah*, who also lived in Denizli at the beginning of the twentieth century. Another explanation for repertoire invariance could be that it was created collectively, gradually and practically because, at that time, the community consisted of only one 'group.' This could have occurred before the village was divided in the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Once the repertoire was fixed, each new group would only reproduce the same model, without changing anything. It is difficult, however, to imagine that this repertoire could have been partly composed by highbrow elements, or "experts" from the ancient world of tekkes. It seems more relevant to link this music to a more general category of '*Semah* of Lycia (Tahtacı),' considering the rhythms to which melodic and melismatic drives could have been added and were stylistically inherited from the former *tekke*.

I have also identified the melodic patterns of three other *semahs*,<sup>21</sup> which are intended for various texts: two of them are transcribed here on the texts *yalancı dünya*, 'lying world,' and *gider iken*, 'on the way.' In addition, the melodies of the two main *semah* don't exclusively fit those specific texts: identical melodies can also be used as melodic patterns for other texts. The poem, *karşıda göründü dostum bağları*, which was recited on with a specific tune in 2016, features on the *Tahtacılar* CD,<sup>22</sup> where it was performed by Ali Koca, Mehmet and Ali Eriş on the same melody as the *babalar semahı*. A relative freedom therefore rules the association between texts and melodic patterns, except for the two main *semah*, which are never performed on another melody.

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<sup>20</sup> See the *Turcica* articles (48/2017)

<sup>21</sup> In this context, 'melodic pattern' refers to a standard tune, i.e. a 'melodic mould,' which is likely to fit several poems.

<sup>22</sup> Kalan, *Arşiv Serisi*, CD 057, 1997. It was collected by Melih Duygulu, who does not provide information regarding the date, although the collection probably occurred in the 1980s.

c. *Second Part of the Semah: “Kıvrak”*

Regarding the *kıvrak* part, the same is true, but the choice is much more limited, since I have never heard more than three different tunes. Transcribed after the *babalar semahı* (*‘Abdal Musaya bende olalım’*) the first tune is stylistically related to it. Both the melodic emphasis in interval jumps and melismas can be noticed again. The second tune, that of the *gözcü semahı*, which, like all Tekke’s *kıvrak*, dwells upon a new tonic (F), begins in the same way as the *babalar semahı*, but evolves differently: while the second was ascending, step by step, towards the high notes (1-4-5 for the first verse), before descending in joint intervals towards the first degree (F), the *kıvrak* of the *gözcü semahı*, stopped after the same ascending movement (1-4), then descended a third by chromatic degrees – in a quasi-glissando movement – to dwell upon a new tonic, the note G. It is true that the text which was then sung and notorious in the whole Alevi world, was attributed by tradition to Pir Sultan Abdal, just before he was hanged, after the vizier Hızır Paşa had asked him to sing a *nefes* in which the word *Şah* would be omitted – i.e. without any reference to Ali. Pir Sultan is then said to have sung this poem, purposely featuring the word *Şah* in the refrain *‘açılın kapılar, Şaba gidelim,’* ‘let the doors be open, let us go to the King,’ as a sign of his firm consent to martyrdom. The dramatic tension, which, let us not forget, corresponds to the last sung verses of the *cem*, is thus reflected by a more original and subtle melodic drive, where perhaps Tekke Köyü’s musical-poetic artistry is most apparent.

d. *A ‘One Part’ Semah: The Semah of Forty, Kırklar Semahı. (see Ex. 5<sup>23</sup>)*

When the banquet has come to an end and the tablecloths have been folded, it is the moment for the whole assembly to dance the *semah* around the ritual area. The so-called *semah* ‘of Forty’ owes its name to the earthly representation of the celestial dance where the Forty were led during the Prophet’s celestial journey, the *mibradj*, *miraç* in Turkish. Men and women arranged in two consecutive lines, perform turns in this way while Şah Hatayi’s poem is sung. The melody is built on 4 bars corresponding to a distich: the *d-bayati* tetracord, which ascends on two bars, is followed by a *bicaz* tetracord, which descends on the next two bars. When the first verse of the second distich is performed, the ascending movement of the beginning mutates, since the melodic pattern is repeated on the seventh degree – in this case it is again a melodic emphasis. Once the quatrain has been sung on the alternation of these two sentences, a refrain invokes Ali, Hasan, Hüseyin and Balim Sultan, the founder of the *bektaşî* order. But this time, it does not correspond to a choreographic rearrangement as in the *semah* previously ana-

<sup>23</sup> [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_05\\_kirklar.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_05_kirklar.mp3)

lysed, since during the *semah* of Forty, the whole assembly performs turns around the ritual room.

#### 4. Nefes and ‘Kathismas’

##### a. *A Hymn Addressed to the Twelve Imams.*

If *semahs* are unified by rhythms and by a form imposed by the choreographic order, which alternates movements from backward to forward and movements around the area, the hymns and *oturak nefes* – songs to be listened to – display a great variety of meters and melodic characteristics. Actually, one *nefes* stands out from the whole repertoire: it is the hymn addressed to the twelve Imams, the first *nefes* to be sung in all the *cem* ceremonies. This piece displays the slowest tempo in the whole repertoire. Consequently it inaugurates the ritual ceremony with solemnity, before the first *semah* can begin. This hymn shows a subtle cyclical structure: its metric is based on seven steps organized 3+4 for the sung section. As for the instrumental *ritornello*, based only on one bar, it opens the hymn and comes back at the end of each distich, so it is not easy to determine a segmentation, which can be heard as 4+3, 2+3+2, as well as 3+4, depending on the articulation. It often happens that in slow tempos, the *aksak* division is not immediately perceptible, except in terms of singing prosody, because the syllabic articulation on 3+4 beats is obvious. Here again, the melismatic emphasis is strong, since invariably each fourth syllable of hemistich is elongated and sung as a long melisma, after a regular syllabic rhythm occurs (this rhythm features one syllable per beat, if the crotchet is considered as the first beat). A singular fact characterizes this cyclical and strophic structure: the eighth bar is shortened to 5=3+2, in order to punctuate the end of each distich with the addition of ‘*hii!*’ (‘He!’). This happens before the repetition of the whole second verse of the distich, which ends in the same bar containing 5 beats. This *nefes* is perfectly atypical in the region and even in the *cem* repertoire in general. This is the reason why it raises, more than any other, the hypothesis of a relic of *ilabi*, i.e. a possible remnant of the ancient dervish *tekke*.

Moreover, some similarity between the beginning of this hymn and the beginning of the following *semah* is noticeable in terms of their respective melodic characteristics (cf. Ex. 1, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_01\\_duevazdeh.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_01_duevazdeh.mp3))

Mu-ha-med A - - li-yi can-dan-se-ven - - ler hü  
 şü - kür-ol - sun ya-ra - a da - nın de-mi - ne-e - e

Thus the beginning of the *semah* seems to echo the melody of the hymn that was performed prior to it: in fact, both ‘launch’ the ritual in a mood of solemnity, and they seem closely linked to each other.

### b. Dem Nefesi.

Another fixed *nefes* is the one of the *dem*, which follows the moment of the *üçleme* (i.e. drinking *dem* three times in the name of Allah, Muhammad and Ali), ‘*güzel Şabtan bize bir dolu geldi*,’ ‘by the beautiful Shah a cup was given to us:’ the transcription booklet shows that it can be performed on two different melodic patterns. One is the ‘usual’ *bayati*-like *makam* (D scale described above), the other is based on the *hicaz* scale.

The first version (Ex. 3, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_03\\_dem\\_nefesi1.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_03_dem_nefesi1.mp3)) uses text-music composition devices similar to those of the *semah*, with a division of the verse into 6+5 syllables (cf. *babalar* and *gözcü semahı*), and with an insertion of an instrumental bar after the first hemistich. The first quatrain is divided into two musical strophes: on the first musical phrase (bars 6-8 of the transcription), the first two verses are sung according to a ‘syllabic *giusto*’ prosody:

*Güzel Şabtan bize / bir dolu geldi (bis)*  
*Bir sen iç saki eh / bir de ceme ver (ter) – bir de aynı ceme ver*

[By our beautiful shah a cup was given to us  
 Drink, you cupbearer, and give it to the assembly]

The second verse is repeated twice again (bars 9-15), this time with a melismatic emphasis until the conclusion, noticeable for its descending jump of sixth, in transition to the tonic (already mentioned above). This verse serves as a refrain, ‘drink a cup of it, and give it to the *cem*, – give it to the *cem* assembly.’ Here we reach the climax of the ritual, the assembly having just drunk three times ‘in the name of the three.’ This poem expresses the sharing of the ‘nectar’ given by Ali and the holy founder of the Hacı Bektaş order, it expresses the full communion of the assembly, hence the strong emphasis and the melodic accentuation.

The same structure is repeated in the second distich of this poem (the second verse, i.e. the fourth verse of the quatrain is identical to verse 2).



From the second quatrain on, the four verses follow each other separately on the same melodic model instead of the distichs:

*Payım gelir eren-/lerin payından (bis)*  
*Muhammet Mehdinden / Ali soyundan*  
*Kırkların Kırkların / engür suyundan*  
*Bir sen iç saki eh / bir de ceme ver (ter) / bir de aynı ceme ver*

[From of the perfect ones a slice is granted to me,  
 From Muhammad from the Mehdi, from Ali's lineage  
 A juice made of grapes squeezed by the Forty  
 Drink, you cupbearer, and give it to the assembly

Even if this construction does not correspond to the choreographic structure of a *semah*, it is not very far from it and is of a comparable aesthetic.

The second version (Ex. 4, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_04\\_dem\\_2.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_04_dem_2.mp3)) of this *nefes* is much simpler and more regular: each verse is repeated over three bars alternating between even and uneven rhyme schemes, according to a melodic logic based on antecedent-consequent phrases. The only originality of this 'melodic pattern' is the *hicaz* mode, which does not modulate.

### c. Kathismas, Oturak Nefesleri.

During the *sofra*, – the banquet –, the *güvende* chooses three *nefes* at their convenience, which are always repeated without pause until the *baba* recites a prayer after the third *nefes*. There are either 'classical' poems attributed to the local saints, Kaygusuz Abdal in particular, or poems attributed to the ancient poets of the Alevi repertoire, such as Şah Hatayi, Pir Sultan Abdal, Kul Himmet, or more recent poets. For example in the released CD (Ex. 8, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_08\\_goenuel\\_calamazsan.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_08_goenuel_calamazsan.mp3)) and in the booklet of transcriptions (p. 15), the wonderful *nefes* '*Gönül çalamazsan aşık sazım,*' 'my heart if you can't play the love *saz...*,' was composed by Hüdayi who lived during the second half of the twentieth century. The melodies can be in 7/8 or 5/8. They possibly originated from the wide repertoire of Alevi songs broadcasted nationally, so they can be used in turn as 'melodic patterns' in other tunes (for example, the album and the CD features the 7/8 melody '*her sabab her sabab sabab*'), or they can be used as 9/8 'melodic patterns,' such as '*Gönül çalamazsan*' that I have already cited.

Some 'melodic patterns,' however, are referred to as 'old' and local. They present melodic singularities such as the one mentioned in the transcription booklet (see [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf)) from the recording of an evening working session with Nuri K., whose name will appear below: '*Ey erenler çün bu sırrı dinledim,*' 'o perfect ones, because I listened to this secret...' by Serezli Pir Sultan. This melody, which can

fit other poems, can be heard in all *cems*, so Nuri K. declared that it was one of the oldest in the repertoire.

In summary, the style of ‘melodic patterns’ matches three categories:

- *sui generis* melodies, specific to the village itself, which may also reflect memories of the songs of the old *tekke*, among others, because of their long melismata, which occur at the end of the hemistich or verses.
- pieces related to the Tahtacı repertoires, particularly to *semah*.
- appropriations from regional ‘secular’ modes, such as the long *avşar* arias
- *aşık* songs renowned at a national level and reproduced according to the widespread model, or, more frequently, on a local ‘melodic pattern.’

### *Liturgical Ordo and Variability: The Poetic Repertoire*

During the many years I have been travelling to Tekke alone, and then, after 2011 when I was there as part of a team, the hymn to the twelve Imams, the *baba’s semah*, the song of the *dem*, the *semah* of Forty and the *semah* of the *gözcü* were invariably the same. They were sung in the same ‘melodic pattern’ (except for the two possible versions of the *dem nefesi*). Everyone told us that ‘they have always been performed this way.’ But patience during prolonged field research always proves rewarding: one single exception was needed to refute our interlocutors’ statements, and this was provided by one of the most outstanding musical personalities in the village, namely Nuri K., the *güvende* I mentioned above in reference to his temporary exclusion. I had heard him in 1997 when I first came. His singing<sup>24</sup> struck me then for its originality, its intensity, the use of a vocal drive rather unfamiliar in this region, which rather imitated the style of Central or Eastern Anatolia. Then he sang again,<sup>25</sup> during the *Balim muhabbeti* organized in 2011 by and for our researchers’ trio. He had been stripped of his function as a *güvende* for *benlik*, ego(t)ism. In 2005, I attended a negotiation at the beginning of *cem* where the *baba* İsmet Baba asked the assembly if he could be reintegrated into the rituals: indeed, Nuri K. no longer appeared in *cem* ceremonies, not even as a mere *talip*. The community decided to open its doors to him while continuing to forbid him to sing in the choir. But from stay to stay, after 2011, we were the witnesses of his gradual rehabilitation. By 2015, the *celebi* Kâzım Dede decided to hire him as a *güvende* in his own newly created group.<sup>26</sup> Fully aware of his new *güvende’s* strong personality, Kâzım knew how to give him space and freedom in the *cems* we attended in 2017 and 2019.

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<sup>24</sup> cf. Ocora CD, track 11

<sup>25</sup> cf. Ocora CD, track 7

<sup>26</sup> Regarding the different groups in the village sharing the two ritual houses, see the report published in *Turcica*.

### 1. *A Musical 'Evening Working Session': The Strong-Headed Nuri K.*

We attended our first *cem* in Kâzım's group in 2017, with Nuri featuring as *güvende* and we noticed at least one innovation: to accompany the prayers preceding the *babalar semahı*, instead of simply marking the rhythm on the *saz* while waiting for the 'start' of the poetry+dance episode, the new *güvende* sang a *nefes*, 'armut ağacı,' borrowed from the Tahtacı of Mut (Mersin), as he would later tell us. A few days later, whereas my past attempts to gather musicians in my hosts' home had always been taken back to the celebration of rituals and to *cem*'s house, Nuri K. spent an evening at *mürşid* Kâzım's home, our host. He was accompanied by another choir member whom we praised as one of the best and most fervent chorister of the village, Süleyman C., his son-in-law. Nuri K. confidently told us, 'Ask me anything you want to know, and I'll tell you.' Our interview mainly focused on the *semah* performed in Tekke and on 'old' *nefes* melodies – i.e. those he claimed to have heard in his youth during the 1950s and 1960s. Visually impaired, Nuri holds in his memory hundreds of songs – for which he cannot rely on written material. In his youth he lived for a while in Gaziantep, which hosted the first school for the blind in Turkey, actually the only one for a long time. In this distant province, he learned 'exogenous' stylistic elements, in particular the way of making the voice 'burst out' or 'sob' in melismas. His mastery of the *saz* was in addition to an encyclopaedic knowledge of all repertoires he claimed to know, encompassing secular as well as Bektashi repertoires. For a long time, he had belonged to a festival musicians' ensemble as a *darbuka* and then as a *saz* player. This trio was composed of a violinist and a clarinetist, and closely resembled the *tamçalgi*, a 'comprehensive instrument' owned by the gypsies or the Abdal, common in marriage ceremonies of the past until the appearance of the *elektro-saz* and *org* (synthesizer). Nuri K. concluded: 'I am the only artist (*sanatçı*) living in the village, the others are only peasants.' Beside him sat his son-in-law Süleyman, one of these 'peasants.' He kept the passive and humble attitude required of all *güvende*, and waited for questions before being allowed to express his views, modestly explaining how he had been initiated to *nefes* by his father during childhood and how the latter had developed his taste.

### 2. *Nuri, a Reformer?*

During our most recent stay, which occurred in March 2019, i.e. two years later, we met Nuri several times at the village's café, but he was no longer available because he had family problems. And when we asked him if he had time to continue the interview we had started two years earlier, he simply replied that we should go to the *cem* – a common response of every *güvende* since I had been visiting Tekke. However, the *cem* conducted by Kâzım Dede's group confirmed that Nuri had really taken the opportunity offered to him since he was given freedom.

For the first time in 21 years of regular attendance at Tekke's rituals, I heard the inaugural hymn of invocation to the twelve Imams sung differently. Instead of the usual melody, another unmeasured melody was performed in the *uzun hava* style; when it came to singing the *babalar semahı*, his 'assistant,' Süleyman, asked: 'Are we opening the ceremony with *şükür olsun*?', and Nuri replied: 'No, because *şükür olsun* is sung by everyone and everywhere. We will open the ceremony with *yalancı dünya*.' This is exactly what he did, introducing the *semah* with a chant from the 'armut ağacı' quatrain, as in 2017. Similarly, regarding the *gözcü semahı* he did not sing the usual '*salavat getirin...*', but '*gider iken yolum uğradı*' instead (see Ex. 13, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_13\\_giderken\\_yolum\\_ugradi](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_13_giderken_yolum_ugradi), booklet, p. 26). Although the liturgical ordo seemed to have been fixed 'since always' – as we had been told –, it was however subject to variations, at least in the group recently formed by Kâzım Dede. During the following days, when we asked in the village if the poems sung for the most important *semah* – *babalar* and *gözcü semahı* – had always been '*şükür olsun*' and '*salavat getirin*', the answer was no. Actually the freedom to choose was offered to performers of the poem and melody and this has always been the case in the past. These ritualistic elements must therefore have somehow become fixed prior to my first visit in 1997. Even though I had not attended all the *cem* ceremonies given in Tekke and the neighbourhood for twenty years, I can surmise that the two well-known texts were invariable. It was only when Kâzım Dede's group became effective and Nuri K. was rehabilitated into the community, that a return to the former freedom was made possible.

However, when we asked a former *güvende* who had become a *baba*, Muzaffer G., if '*şükür olsun*' and '*salavat getirin*' were mandatory, he responded by arguing over aesthetic and semantic criteria: 'No, you can sing the *semah* you want. However no *semah* is more beautiful than the one describing the *türbe* and evoking the traveling disciple (*seyybat talip*), nothing is more beautiful than *salavat getirin*, the invitation to bless Muhammad Ali, and nothing is more beautiful than the verses '*bizim dinden özge din bulunurmu*' (can we find another religion than ours, referring to the *gözcü semahı*)?' He justified the 'fixing' of the repertoire by the text's high quality, which he considered perfectly adapted to a particular ritualistic moment, namely the opening and the closing of the ceremony. He thus implied that there was no need to change them. But Nuri did not want to limit himself to such conformism and thus acted as a liturgical reformer.

### 3. The 'Illiterate Scholar' and Poetic Sources.

Apart from Ottoman inscriptions on the stelae and the well, the village displays no traces of writings from ancient times. The Tekke library and all its belongings were confiscated after 1826. The only writings we can rely on in our field research are the large *güvende* notebooks, which often consist of old diaries, although those

diaries are quite thick, unlike school notebooks. The thickness of these notebooks as well as the large number of recopied poems they contain, show the villagers' profound devotion to their poetic tradition. They provide at the same time material for the ritual, the expression of doctrine, and reflection on the great moments experienced in the village. Generally, the notebooks would start with a *semah*, each one being two pages long<sup>27</sup> (*ağır* and *kıvrak*). They can then be grouped into several sections: *dîvazdeh* (hymns to the twelve Imams), *dem* (songs 'of the nectar,' in other words mystical drinking songs), *oturak* (*kathismas*), *Kerbela/matem* (threnodies evoking Imam Hüseyin's martyrdom). They then feature the great annual feasts: *nevruz* (21 March, which is Imam Ali's birthdate), *bidrellez* (5 May, which marks the beginning of the pastoral summer). Finally, several *beyit* composed by the owner of the notebook can be found; though most of the time, the faithful would come to the *cem* with their own poem written on a sheet of paper, to intervene during the *sofra*, the listening episode and the *oturak nefes*.

Consulting various *güvende*'s notebooks proved that their contents were essentially the same. The lists containing poems reminds us of the practice of the *cönk* or *mecmua* from the Ottoman era (Köksal, 2016). However, in the absence of any other source in the village, it is difficult, if not impossible to know how these anthologies were compiled and on whose initiative. We cannot discern if the religious order has undergone an era of institutional re-building within the village – and it is particularly difficult to find available sources.

Most of the village's *güvende* have no more than elementary schooling, as commonly occurs in the rural world. The only Tekke official who studied at university is Hüseyin Dede, the current *balife*: his position in the hierarchy is undoubtedly linked to his education level; he is the only one who is interested in academic papers, colloquiums, and who owns books in his home. Consequently, for the others, instruction and scholarship are based solely on poetic tradition and albums each one creates by copying those of another. We admire the deep poetic knowledge of the peasants from Tekke, since the poetry they often know by heart is not always written in an easy language and responds to an esoteric code that makes it difficult to translate or understand.

One day in 2004, while working with one of the *güvende*, Muzaffer G., I asked him the meaning of a verse. He asked me to show it to him in his notebook. Then he looked at it silently for a few seconds, repeated it by singing and he concluded: this is it (*işte böyle*), without going further into exegesis. This little anecdote may raise several comments. First of all, the identification of the text with the music that fits it. This is a cognitive process, or a habitus, according to which the text is primarily sung, since it is perceived as a song and not as a 'said' text. As

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. the end of the transcription booklet ([www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf)) that features the photos of one of the transcribed *semah*.

such, it is disconcerting for a practitioner to be asked: ‘What does this mean?’ Nothing had prepared him to comment on the text or to explain it in and of itself, because this metalinguistic situation never occurred. On the contrary, a specific verse or distich can be quoted during a conservation to illustrate a subject, using it as if it were a proverb. Though in colloquial language the quoting of a poem usually intended for the liturgy is very unusual, because of its religious status, and thus cannot be explained *in abstracto*. What do our *güvende* peasant friends understand from poems composed in the sixteenth century, in an archaic language where Persian vocabulary is abundant, even if their texts were simplified or modernized in some sections? More generally: what does it mean to understand a poem that is heard only during its liturgical use?

A parallel question is that of the relationship between the written and oral in the Turkish rural world. The linguistic aspect of Alevi-Bektashi religiosity, whose mystical poetry, from the beginning, developed in Turkish to the detriment of Koranic Arabic, has often been emphasized, as much as because the Koran is absent from the ‘holy writings’ in this community where the lute *saz* is referred to as *telli Kur’an*, i.e. ‘stringed Koran’. In Sunni circles and in the Yörük villages where I have worked for a long time, the word *boca*, which can be translated as ‘master’, refers to both the imam and the school teacher, since they both have writing competencies: Arabic and Koran for the former, the usual Latin script taught in school, for the latter. On the musicians’ side, the same is true: *boca* is mainly the one who knows how to read, how to write notes, he is the one who teaches from written materials. As for the one possessing pure musical artistry, he is called *usta*, using the same term applied to a craftsman, mechanic, watchmaker, etc. Regarding Tekke and its oral/written tradition, an obvious gap occurs with the surrounding Sunni environment, due to the exceptional poetic erudition among Bektashi peasants – who are convinced they are the holders of the gnosis, the *marifet*, which is one of the four doors<sup>28</sup>. Written remnants therefore reveal themselves in a negative way: they are as indecipherable as the convent ruins, consisting of many *yazılı taş*, ‘written stones’, and the well and steles in the cemetery surrounding the mausoleum. The last person who knew how to read the Ottoman language was the father of the current *halife* who died in 1998. Actually, he knew the Arabic alphabet because he had been a *bafız*; therefore he could read the inscriptions in Ottoman, but we don’t know if he really had the competence to understand this language beyond the ability of average Turks, or even educated ones. Finally, several people in the village told us about an ‘autograph manuscript of Abdal Musa’, which the foreign occupying powers allegedly ‘stole’ and took to Europe after the 1914-18 war, more precisely to France. This rumour had been going around in the village for a long time and I was aware of it from my first visits.

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<sup>28</sup> Let us recall that the doctrine is based on the ‘four doors’: *seriat*, the law, *tarikât*, the way/brotherhood, *bakikat*, truth, reality, and *marifet*, knowledge, gnosis.

Since I was French, I was entrusted with the mission to find this manuscript. Ali baba, the *mürşid*, added: whatever the price is, we will buy it back. I explained that probably no such manuscript ever existed. If so, it would have been confiscated in 1826 with all the property of the convent.<sup>29</sup> But this legend persisted and is still repeated today, the written element being the relic rather than the document.

The arrival of foreigners – one of whom could read the Ottoman steles and was delving into the archives – suddenly facilitated access to traces of a past that the village had been deprived of by the reform of the alphabet, but that had been preserved in its memory through oral transmission (Sigalas, 2017: 35). Today this material break with the Ottoman past is over, so it is worth noting that the *halife*, specifically the son of the last *türbedar* ‘knowing the Ottoman’, is also a *hoca*, in the sense of secular and republican education, having studied and graduated to be a teacher. Later, his commitment to the order and his service to the community that employed him full-time, led him to give up his initial professional career. However he remains a true scholar, evoking Victor Hugo, Tolstoy and placing these authors on the same level as Mansur Halladj or Kaygusuz Abdal. Moreover, an outstanding musician, he once confessed to me his desire to implement new elements borrowed from ancient traditions. Having read the description of the convent given by Evliya Çelebi in the seventeenth century, who had identified framed drums, *def*, he would have liked to reintroduce these percussion instruments into *cem* ceremonies.

There are thus potentially two levels of knowledge and proficiency in the village, which reproduce the classical disjunction between *hoca* and *usta*,<sup>30</sup> but differently to in a Sunni environment. Whereas the *halife* belongs rather to the *hoca* category, the village *güvendes*, as well as the other *mürşid*, Ali baba, belong rather to the *usta* category: they are endowed with (remarkable) musical and ritual expertise. Even if the latter copied the hymnographic repertoire into makeshift notebooks, their use of written material is close to a kind of ‘degré zéro’. The material operates as an aide-memoire,<sup>31</sup> so they do not take any critical look approach at to the texts or their performance. As for the concern to resurrect former sources or to give a more scholarly aspect to these textual references, only Hüseyin Dede seems to care about this. He never brings a notebook with him and most often usually sings by heart (*ezberli*). However, during the *cem* ceremony, which features in the CD released by Ocora Radio-France, he sings a poem by Pir Sultan Abdal in the *avşar* mode, that which he reads from a scholarly edition of the latter's works (track 5).

<sup>29</sup> It was the Ottomans who plundered the convent of its treasures (Maden, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Both words can be translated as ‘master’, but one notable difference remains: the *hoca* possesses the knowledge and masters literacy in a religious (imam) or secular (teacher) context, while the *usta* masters skills (for example mechanical as well as musical).

<sup>31</sup> During the ritual they do not closely follow the written version of the hymns.

Since the 1960s, a considerable number of publications have seen the light of the day, offering poetic anthologies or ‘complete works’ composed by leading poets of the community, such as Şah Hatayi, Pir Sultan Abdal and many others. Although most of these issues are presented as scholarly publications, they do not necessarily include a critical edition and consequently they often reveal an ordinary chain of transmission. But we do not find books in the homes of Tekke Köyü and the Abdal Musa association (*dernek*), which is officially called *Abdal Musa Kültürünü Araştırma Yaşatma Derneği*, the ‘Association for Research and Preservation (literally “vivification”) of Abdal Musa’s Culture,’ has not yet taken the opportunity to create a library, which would have been welcome in the ‘house of culture’ built after 2003. We can therefore verify that the *güvende*’s notebooks do not really rely on the content of the books or current editions of great poets of the past. A very small part of the *nefes* they contain comes from popular aşiks whose songs are distributed by mass media and widespread within the Alevi world,, such as Mahsuni Şerif, for example, a very popular figure in Tekke. Thus some *nefes* have come to the village through such famous musicians of national influence, who have interpreted great poets’ works of the tradition and made them popular.

These notebooks therefore reflect an internal village tradition. Four poetic categories can be found in the *cem* repertoire:

- Poetry by the local former saints and poets, first and foremost Abdal Musa himself. However, the most knowledgeable of the *güvende*, such as Nuri K., confess that the texts are probably not his own and that he was not a poet, but rather a man of action. Kaygusuz Abdal was an illustrious fourteenth century poet whose settlement in Tekke is more legendary than real, since he went on to found a convent in Cairo, where he died. Moreover, the Kaygusuz sung during *cem* remains weaker compared to his abundant work,<sup>32</sup> because the original version was undoubtedly too difficult to be sung during Bektashi rituals in the Taurus region.
- Poetry composed by the ‘classics’, the authors of the sixteenth century, such as Şah Hatayi, Pir Sultan or Kul Himmet. This era is the golden age of Alevi poetry.
- Poetry by authors closer to us who are not strangers to the Tekke community, such as Hüsnü *baba* who composed the text of the *baba*’s *semah* at the beginning of the twentieth century, or Derviş Kemal, born in 1930 in Dimotika, Didymotic in Thrace, and died in 2015, whose *nefes* are often sung during the *sofra*;
- Finally, some contemporary poets from Tekke or the surrounding area, such as Hasan Kara.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. the admirable work of Zeynep Oktay (2013) on Kaygusuz.



#### 4. Appropriations, Attributions and Variants: A Living Tradition

The main question remains of when and how these notebooks were organized. I can try to give some answers from two examples.

One *nefes* seems particularly important to me to give a better appreciation of the Tekke tradition: it is the *babalar semahı*. This text is indeed a ‘local’ composition, because it begins by describing the *türbe* and its environment in the form of a thanksgiving, referring to the miracles performed by the saint:

*Türbe bağlarında (Ali'm Ali'm !) zeyn'olur güller  
Çevirmiş etrafını da hemen şakır bülbüller (medet Şah!)  
Mubbabete canı (Ali'm Ali'm !) katacak yerler  
Mubbabete giren cana aşk olsun (medet Şah !)*

*Türbe bağlarının (Ali'm Ali'm !) dört yanı bağlar  
Sular revan olmuş da olmuş her yana çağlar (medet Şah !)  
Üstümüze yürüdü (Ali'm Ali'm !) ol yedi dağlar  
Yürüten canlara da bemen dedem aşk olsun (medet Şah !)<sup>33</sup>*

–

Among the vines of the mausoleum (my Ali my Ali my Ali!) shine the roses,  
All around them gloat the nightingales (help us, Shah!)  
These places invite (my Ali my Ali my Ali!) souls to the agape;  
To the soul that enters this agape, may Love be! (Help us, Shah!)

The vines of the mausoleum (my Ali my Ali my Ali!), on all four sides are vines,  
Water flows in from all sides (Help us, Shah!)!  
Before our eyes these seven mountains (my Ali my Ali my Ali!) began to walk  
To the souls who set them in motion, from now on, may love be (help us, King!)

We know that poets always sign the last quatrain by including their name in the text (*taç beyt*, or *Şah beyt*): this poem is signed Hüsnü. However, he appears in a *nefes* anthology by Ali Rıza Öge, a Bektashi poet who signed his texts with the nickname Kadimî. Those texts were published in the master’s dissertation of a student from Sivas, Murat Demir.<sup>34</sup> Ali Rıza Öge was born in 1881 and died in 1957. His anthology is a manuscript of 927 pages in which we find, among other things, poems of Hüsnü Baba, with whom he may have been well acquainted since he was born in Greece in 1874, studied in Izmir, was living in Denizli in 1915, and ended his life in Izmir after the *tekke* were closed down.<sup>35</sup> Ali Rıza Öge probably had access to the original version of the *baba’s semah* poem adopted in Tekke, since these authors were contemporaries of him – the version commonly sung in Tekke differs very little from the original text (see p. 315 of

<sup>33</sup> *Babalar semahı*, cf. Jérôme Cler: *Turquie: cérémonie de djem bektachi, la tradition d’Abdal Musa*, Ocora Radio-France, C 560248, 2012, track 3. And video : Vimeo › Jerome Cler › ‘Tekke Köyü, le 01/01/2008’ <https://vimeo.com/346619635>

<sup>34</sup> Demir, 2016. I thank Nikos Sigalas for having found this major source of information.

<sup>35</sup> According to Bedri Noyan, quoted by Murat Demir (2016: 34) of his master dissertation.

the anthology). It is certain that Hüsnü baba visited the village of Abdal Musa, as evidenced by his lyrical description of the *türbe*. Without knowing more about his connection with Tekke Köyü, we can surmise that he was involved in the reconstruction of the village's Bektashi institutions during the troubled times at the end of the empire or during the even more difficult times for Tekke Köyü, when the *tekkes* were closed down by Mustafa Kemal. The second 'fast' part, which evokes Abdal Musa's achievements during his lifetime is by Kul Şükri, who lived between the end of the eighteenth and the middle of the nineteenth century. We know almost nothing about his life, except that he was in the service of Abdal Musa's *dergâh* for a time (Özmen 1998: 307).

These two texts are the only genuine 'local' material among the fixed parts: texts from the 'fast' parts of two additional *semah* can be added (those added at the end of the *cem*, before the *gözcü semah*, cf. transcription booklet, ([www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/transcription_booklet.pdf)) p. 23 '*Adem oldum*' and p. 25, '*içmişem bir demden*'). But in these specific cases, the signature corresponds more to an attribution or appropriation than authentic paternity. Indeed, both are signed by Kaygusuz Abdal. The chorus of the second text evokes the hunting of a deer: '*kaçma geyik kaçma, bir avcı değilim,*' 'don't run away, deer, don't run away, I am not a hunter.' Legend holds that Kaygusuz was hunting a deer and wounded it in the flank. This deer took refuge in the convent of dervishes. Still hunting the wounded deer into the convent, the young Kaygusuz then stood in front of Abdal Musa, who showed him the arrow on his side. Kaygusuz, whose worldly name was Gaybi, understood the holiness of the master. Convinced by this miracle, he became his disciple. Many commentaries are provided on this legend. According to some of them, it echoes the shamanic past of Turkic peoples.<sup>36</sup>

However, this poem is referred to as a *nefes* by Şah Hatayi in Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı's anthology, without being explicitly linked to Abdal Musa's legend. It is therefore likely that the peasants of Tekke spontaneously replaced the *tac beyt* with Kaygusuz because they were influenced by the strong hagiographical narration. Regarding other poems, common confusions occur such as between Pir Sultan Abdal and Kul Hüseyin, the latter being a disciple of the former. It is therefore not relevant to search for an indisputable 'original author' of many poems in this tradition, because oral transmission from community to community gives rise to various appropriations or attributions, as also occurs in Western literature of the Middle Ages.

Another example confirms the extent to which this liturgical poetry can be the subject of multiple appropriations, substitutions and attributions. This is the

<sup>36</sup> The thematics of deers and comparable legends about religious conversions have been mentioned by Hanslück in his book, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, Oxford UP, 1929, pp. 460 sq. Those characteristics also appear in Christianity. They are not necessarily related to the often mystified shamanism of the *Turkic* peoples of the Great Steppe.

*nefes/semah* quoted on p. 21 of the transcription booklet [see Ex. 11, [www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example\\_11\\_semah\\_yalanci\\_dunya.mp3](http://www.nomos-elibrary.de/extern/nomos/live/978-3-95650-640-6/example_11_semah_yalanci_dunya.mp3)): ‘*karşıdan göründü dostun bağları,*’ ‘opposite appeared the vines of the Friend,’ a poem that mentions Abdal Musa and Kaygusuz Abdal, as well as the *türbe*. As in the poem of the *babalar semahı*, Abdal Musa is associated with the vines and the paradisiacal garden of the *türbe*:

*yedi de kapı içeriye Şabimin türbesi  
üstüne nur doğdu / Abdal Musanın*

inside the seven gates lies my King’s mausoleum  
a light was born above, that of Abdal Musa

The version cited in Ismael Özmen’s great anthology, which features similar elements but in a different order, tells us:

*Yedi baktan içeridir türbesi  
Nur doğdu üstüne Abdal Musa’nın*

The meaning is exactly the same, but the turns of phrase are different and the vocabulary (*bab* instead of *kapı*) is more archaic. However, we can probe further by relying on Ali Rıza Öge’s anthology. The poem that precedes it in this anthology, the one of the *baba’s semah* strangely resembles the poem of ‘The Friend’s Vines’ discussed above, especially the last distich magnifying Abdal Musa’s exploits. This poem begins with the following verses:

*Horasan elinde duyuldu sesi  
Mümin olan canlara düştü bevesi  
Yedi baktan içeri şabım ziyası  
Türbesin bekleyen cana aşk olsun  
Kudretten başında elifi tacı  
Eşiğin bekleyen Gürub-ı Naci  
Mağripten meşrike oynar kılıcı  
Kılıcın sallayan cana aşk olsun*

From the land of Horasan, his voice was heard  
desire has taken hold of the souls of believers  
Inside the seven doors shines the King’s light,  
to the soul awaiting at the mausoleum, may love be!  
On his head be the elifi tadj conferred by the (divine) power,  
waiting on the threshold, Gürub-ı Naci,  
From the West to the East plays with his sword  
to the soul that waves his sword, may love be!

The following version is very similar to the text mentioned above, attributed to Pır Sultan or Kul Hüseyin. According to the Tekke’s version:

*Başına da grymiş elifi tacı  
eşiğin bekleyen istemez hacı  
maruptan meşruba oynar kılıcı (...)  
Kürdistan elinden duyuldu sesi  
Mühîb olanların düşmüş bevesi*

There is a shift in the order of the verses and sometimes also in the vocabulary: Horasan, which was Hindistan in the version attributed to Kul Hüseyin, is replaced by Kürdistan. In the same poem by Hüsnü Baba, we also find the verse *'türbe bahçesinde cennet bağları'*, *'in the mausoleum garden, the vines of paradise,'* which recalls *'cennet bahçesidir türben' evleri,'* *'the mausoleum houses are the garden of paradise,'* in the Tekke's version.

This unique example epitomizes several characteristics of poetic transmission such as language simplification, borrowing of verses or distichs, changes in authorship. But it seems that the existence of Hüsnü Baba and his presence at the opening of the *cem* in the initial *semah*, are significant clues that enable us to locate in time the creation of this poetic corpus between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1920s.

### *Conclusion*

This article was an endeavour to dive into a 'tradition' in the literal sense of the word, which means 'knowledge transfer and interpretation' (Picard, 2001). It is a real joy for ethnologists to work in a village where tradition is fully alive and escapes the patterns of recomposition of the Alevi urban world, which often exerts a strong influence on the village communities and tends to erase local particularities. One day in December 2007, I was invited to attend a *cem* in Finike (Yuvalı Köy) in an Abdal Alevi community. A *cem* house (*cem evi*) had just been built and the *cem* ceremony was like a dress rehearsal for the inaugural *cem* that was scheduled to take place the following March. I was greatly surprised to see that this *cem* was a mere copy of those performed in Istanbul, including the musical repertoire. However, the *dede's* preaching insisted on the pride, for the Abdal community, of having gained recognition as a minority. When all was over, some members of the community showed us some genuine 'local' Abdal *semahs*<sup>37</sup> After the *cem*, while talking with the *dede*, I quickly understood that his intention was to conform to the model imposed from the outside by the federation of Alevi associations, rather than to emphasize the specific traditions inherited by the community. In Tekke, nothing like that happens; quite the contrary. The village remains impervious to external influences, even though Alevis from all over Turkey come annually to Tekke for the Abdal Musa festival in June. If there was ever any 'influence' from a musical viewpoint, it probably came from the Tahtacı neighbours. But the singularity of the ritual and the conscious Bektaşhi identity, as well as the scholarly and refined musical features described in the previous pages confirm the power of a ritual and musical tradition. For fur-

<sup>37</sup> One of these *semah* is available on my YouTube channel: watch Youtube › Jeriabi-Jérôme Cler › Semah abdal Finike 31/12/2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nllOQ31MVPc>

ther research, it would now be advisable to start from the centre embodied by Tekke, to reach out to the other Bektashi villages in the nearby region, from Isparta to Denizli. This will enable a better assessment of the transmissions, shared repertoires and the continuity of ritualistic organization. More than ever, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists must persevere in the ancient practice of long-running field research, led in small rural communities, to highlight the cultural wealth that the waves of globalization have not yet swept away.

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*Example 2a:*

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*Example 2b:*

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*Example 3:*

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*Example 8:*

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*Example 10:*

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*Example 13:*

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*Example 14:*

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