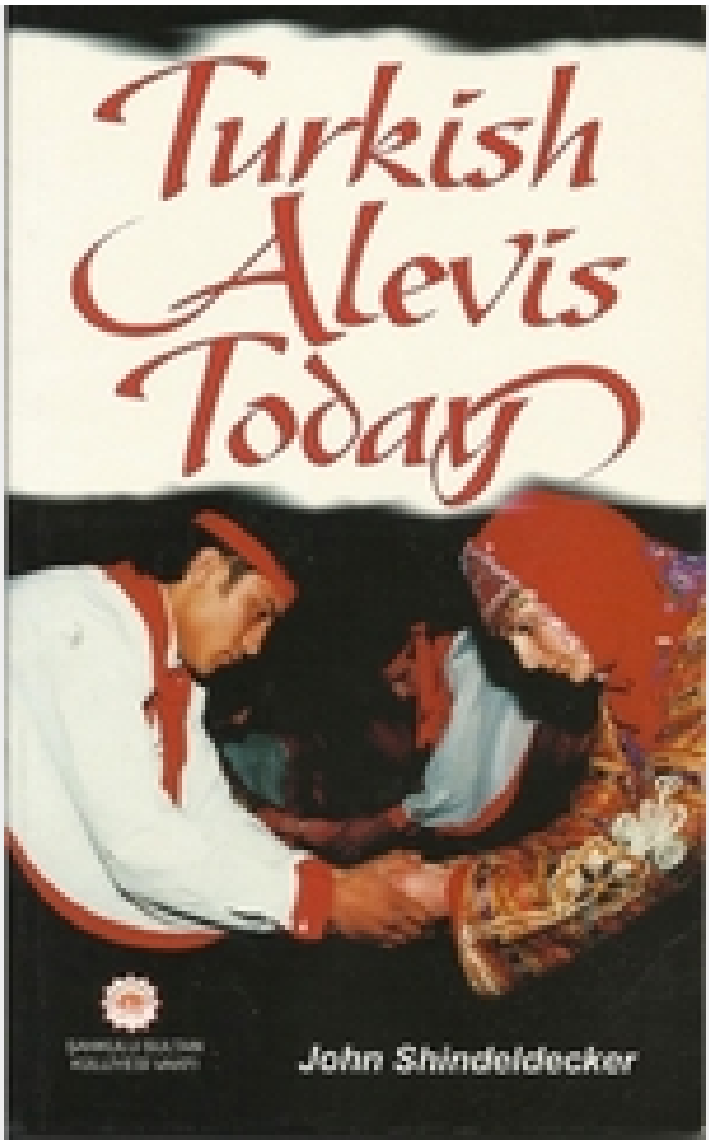
WHO ALEVIS ARE AND WHAT ALEVISM IS

Posted on May 15, 2014 by Keghart



Category: Opinions



John Shindeldecker, captivatingcappadocia.com, Turkey

On Monday, May 26, 2014, the municipal council in Brantford, Ontario, Canada will deliberate on the naming of a plot at that city's Mount Hope Cemetery. The evidence is clear that the burial site predominantly contains the remains of Alevis. The word is council may erroneously designate the plot something other than Alevi. We maintain that any name other than Alevi is a gross falsification of the historic fact.--Editor

> *John Shindeldecker, the author is a long-time resident of Turkey. He has degrees in history (BA, MAT) and language teaching (MA). He has taught seminars on comparative religion at the Alevi Bektashi Sahkulu Sultan Foundation in Istanbul. He has also appeared on Alevi radio programs and has published a series of articles in the Alevi-Bektashi magazines, Nefes and Cem.*
>
> *The below excerpt is only the introduction of Shindeldecker's work. Please visit* ***Turkish Alevis Today*** *to read the entire text. Keghart.com will present an abridged version to its readers shortly.*
> *"For centuries, Alevis have practiced there religious rituals in secret. Sunni-Islamic Sharia imposes a blockade and pressures them not to practice their religious rituals."*

John Shindeldecker's Interview via Skype
(The quality gets better after 2 minutes)

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Almost every single guidebook or encyclopedia I have ever read describes Turkey as 99% Sunni Muslim. But the world is slowly learning of the existence of a large group in Turkey called Anatolian Alevis (Anatolia is a name for the part of Turkey which lies in Asia). The name Alevi sometimes appears in English as Alawi, Alawite, Alouite, or Alevi-Bektashi. Alevi faith and culture is called Alevism (Alevilik).

Finding objective and easily-understood material about Turkish Alevis in a language other than Turkish is very difficult. In fact, Alevi leaders asked me to write this guide because they lack any introductory material in English which they can give to their foreign visitors. My single purpose is to briefly, clearly, and objectively explain the beliefs and practices of Alevis and the issues they face today in a way that a reader with minimal knowledge of Turkey and Islam can understand.

For a variety of reasons, it is impossible to make absolute statements about Alevi beliefs and practices. So, by necessity I use statements like, “almost all,” “many,” “most,” and “some” when describing Alevis and their beliefs. This may be disturbing to the reader who wants a definite answer about what all Alevis believe and practice, but that is the nature of the subject.

The reader should not be surprised that there is a wide variety of beliefs and practices among those who call themselves Alevis. There is a similar broad spectrum of belief and practice among those who call themselves Jews, Christians, Buddhists, or Hindus.

The foreign tourist coming to Turkey for the first time is overwhelmed when he encounters the

richness and variety of Turkish cuisine. No matter how much he wants to, he cannot eat everything at his first meal. So tour guides often make suggestions for him to choose from the delicious appetizers, salads, soups, kebabs, and sweets of the Turkish kitchen. Like a tour guide, I have chosen representative topics and amount of detail I think the foreign reader can easily digest for his first encounter with Alevism. My hope is that the reader will have a tasty, balanced meal and the appetite to come back for more.

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