



ARIT LECTURE

Alevi-Bektashi Digital Archive: A Project of Cultural Preservation

by Ayfer Karakaya-Stump

Monday, March 11, 2024, 6:00 pm (Istanbul time) on ZOOM

Please register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/tZwkcmvqDooGdXdb0NFHuAkkjVuGtEHVDXE>

You will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

The Alevi and closely related Bektashi communities represent a marginalized ethno-religious minority, accounting for approximately fifteen percent of Turkey's population, with extensions in the Balkans and a significant Alevi diaspora in Europe. Their presence in historical rural settlements, along with their artistic, cultural, and religious traditions, has experienced a rapid decline since the mid-20th century due to the pressures of modernization, assimilationist policies, and the migration of Alevis to major cities and Western countries for economic or political reasons. This has put Alevi villages and sacred sites at risk of disappearing or being subject to cultural appropriation. Furthermore, Alevi written sources, preserved in the private archives of Alevi *dede* (spiritual leaders) families, and items of Alevi material culture, including sacred objects, are also at risk of deterioration, destruction, or loss due to various factors, including natural disasters like fires or earthquakes.



The primary objective of the Alevi-Bektashi Digital Archive project is to establish a comprehensive web-based archive dedicated to documenting and safeguarding the endangered historical and cultural heritage of Alevi-Bektashi communities in Anatolia and the Balkans, making it accessible to a broader audience through a user-friendly digital platform.



Ayfer Karakaya-Stump is an associate professor of history at William and Mary. She earned her Ph.D. in History-Middle Eastern Studies from Harvard University in 2008. Karakaya-Stump is the author of "The Kizilbash/Alevis in Ottoman Anatolia: Sufism, Politics, and Community" (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019/2020), which received the 2020 SERMEISS book award. She has a prolific record of scholarly articles and chapters on Alevi-Bektashi history, with some of her work featured in the book "Vefailik, Bektaşilik, Kızılbaşlık: Alevi Kaynaklarını, Tarihini ve Tarihyazımını Yeniden Düşünmek" (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2015; 4th edition 2022). Currently, Professor Karakaya-Stump, along with Professor Cemal Kafadar from Harvard University, is leading a digital humanities project called the "Alevi-Bektashi Digital Archive," dedicated to recording and preserving documents and manuscripts found in the family archives of Alevi saintly lineages. This project earned her an ARIT-NEH grant in the Fall of 2023.

Professor Karakaya-Stump's scholarly interests encompass the late medieval and early modern Middle East, the social and cultural history of the Ottoman Anatolia, Ottoman-Safavid borderlands, Sufism, nonconformist religious movements, Kizilbash/Alevi-Bektashi communities, and women and gender within Islamic(ate) societies. In addition to her academic work, Karakaya-Stump has also contributed commentaries to periodicals and newspapers, and has given interviews on current Turkish politics.