

THE PEOPLE OF 'MEETINGS'



Giorgios Giorgiades- Gurdjieff's father

Bogachevsky or Father Evlissi

"...assistant to the abbot of the chief monastery of the Essene Brotherhood, situated not far from the Black Sea"
Bogachevsky was Gurdjieff's tutor after Dean Borsh when he was a candidate for the priesthood.

Gurdjieff's Father (1835-1918)

"My father came from a Greek family whose ancestors had emigrated from Byzantium ..."
"My father was widely known ... as an *ashokh* ... under the nickname of 'Adash'"

Borsh, Dean - My First Tutor (1819- 1899)

According to his death certificate, Father Damian Ambrosievich Borshch died of pneumonia on 26 March, 1899. On March 28 he was buried in the grounds of Kars Military Cathedral. 'Oriental Suite' by Gert-Jan Blom, p. 252 note 32 from information provided by Tom Daly.



A Priest

Mr X or Captain Pogossian

An Armenian born in Turkey. When he met Gurdjieff he was at the Theological Seminary of Echmiadzin. Went with Gurdjieff to dig in the ruins of Ani. Became an engineer in England and then a wealthy ship owner.

Yelov, Abram

An Aisor bookseller (Aisors are descendants of Assyrians). He was caught in the Bolshevik revolution while in Siberia but through his nephew emigrated to the USA.

Lubovedsky, Prince Yuri

A Russian aristocrat who, through the death of his young wife, turned to studies of the occult. He meets with Gurdjieff in Egypt (and is friends with Skridlov). Introduces Gurdjieff to Vitvitskaia and ends his life withdrawing into a monastery in central Asia.

Vitvitskaia

Russian woman who is saved from sexual slavery by Lubovedsky. She becomes close friends of his sister and obsessed with the laws of music. She died in Samara, attended by Gurdjieff.

Soloviev

A drunkard Gurdjieff cured through hypnotism. Travels with Gurdjieff on the blindfold trip to the Sarmoun monastery where they meet Lubovedsky. Is killed by a wild camel in the Gobi desert expedition.

Bey, Ekim

A Turk who studied in Germany and end up in isolation in Egypt. Known as a 'wizard' because of his powers of illusion-making.

Karpenko, Piotr

A childhood friend of Gurdjieff who risked with him in a deadly competition being killed by artillery shells. He became a mining engineer and later joined the Seekers of Truth. He was wounded during an expedition in the Pamirs and died quite young.

Skridlov, Professor

Russian professor of archaeology. He was a friend of Lubovedsky with whom he met Gurdjieff in Egypt (1893? - see below) . He travelled with Gurdjieff to Kafiristan where he was inspired by Father Giovanni. Gurdjieff says he lost contact with him when he returned to Russia to see one of his daughters.

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SEEKERS

Sari-Ogli

Nijeradze (Prince)*

Baron X

TEACHERS ON THE WAY	Region	Seeker
Bogga-Eddin (my dear friend)	Bukhara	<i>Gurdjieff</i>
Persian Dervish (physical body)	Iran near Tabriz	<i>Ekim Bey</i>
Ez-Ezounavouron (second body)	Pamir region	<i>Karpenko</i>
Father Giovanni (divine body)	Kafiristan	<i>Skridlov</i>

*There have been speculations: (a) that Nijeradze was Stalin, and (b) that Gurdjieff wrote a chapter on this character but then discarded it.



THE GRAVE OF GURDJIEFF'S FATHER, inscribed with the words, as Gurdjieff requested:

I AM THOU

THOU ART I

HE IS OURS

WE BOTH ARE HIS

SO MAY ALL BE

FOR OUR NEIGHBOUR

From *G. I. Gurdjieff, a new life* by Paul Beekman Taylor, pp. 27-8

Olga de Hartmann's history of the origin of the Seekers of Truth in 1893 which she recited at his demand to Gurdjieff and his pupils in Essentuki in 1918:

Twenty-five years ago in Egypt, near the pyramids . . . three tourists met accidentally and from their ensuing conversation it was clear that all three had nearly the same world outlook and understanding of the meaning and aim of life.

One of them was a Russian prince, another a professor of archaeology and the third a young Greek guide. The Russian was wealthy and from an ancient lineage. In his youth he had lost his wife, whose death so strongly touched him that he pulled himself away from ordinary life and began to occupy himself with spiritualism. He began to travel and met some exceptional people who were interested in esoteric teachings. He went to India many times and lived in the temples. His unhappiness over his wife's death pushed him to travel all the time. His meeting with the professor and the Greek took place on his second

trip to the Egyptian pyramids. It was science and only science that brought the professor to the pyramids.

Before their meeting, all three had spent many long years searching, and that is why they had all arrived at the same conclusion that 'something' absolute existed, but they did not have enough knowledge to come to an understanding of it. . . To know all was too much for just three men. All religions, all histories, all special knowledge about life was too much for three people to arrive at during their short lives. But without this knowledge, they would always encounter obstacles on their way.

So the idea came to them to draw to themselves people of different knowledge. Again, another difficulty arose because if the new people they attracted did not have the same interest in, and aim for, something higher, even their special knowledge would not help. Different specializations would bring them nothing without this. They made a plan to find these necessary people, and to direct and prepare them with their advice in their material as well as spiritual lives. With this aim, the three men parted and went different ways, and the final result was that about fifteen people came together.

She continued with a description of the places they traveled at the start of their search: Persia, then in 1899 to India, Tibet, and Ceylon. Some went to Turkey, Arabia and Palestine before all met at Kabul in Afghanistan. After "many years" twelve remained of the original fifteen, and only four reached Chitral in Hindu Kush (Pakistan). Three years later, they returned to Kabul where they drew "corresponding people" to them. "This was the beginning of our Institute." Five years later they transferred activities to Russia, but because of the political situation there, returned to Kabul (Hartmann 1992, 70-73).

The story is Gurdjieff's which he had spun out to his pupils a few days earlier. When Gurdjieff gave a talk at the Dalcroze school in Paris in 1922 four years later on the origins of the Institute, he told the same story with some added details. He said then that "the earliest beginning of the Institute can be considered to have been in 1895, when three tourists met by chance in Egypt by the pyramids. Finding that all three were Russians they became very close friends." The first was "Prince L." who had set off on his travels in Asia after losing a loved one ten years earlier (if L. is the Lubovedsky" of Meetings, it is appropriate that his name signifies "carrier of love"). The second, an archaeologist and assistant curator of a museum who had made expeditions to Hindu Kush, Armenia and Babylon, foreshadows the Professor Skridlov of Meetings. If his name derives from skrivat, "to hide, conceal," it fits a searcher for hidden things. The third, youngest of all, was Gurdjieff himself, whose interest was magic.

The impulse for the search, then, arose in Egypt, and was "formalized" shortly after in Alexandropol. The historian can attribute the coincidental tourist attraction to Egypt that sparked the search to the recent founding in Russia of a Department of Egyptology at the Institute of Oriental Studies . . .

ETHNIC BACKGROUND (some examples, not necessarily important to Gurdjieff)

MULLA NASRUDDIN



17th century miniature from Turkey

Claims about his origin are made by many ethnic groups. Many sources give the birthplace of Nasreddin as Hortu Village in Sivrihisar, Eskişehir Province, present-day Turkey, in the 13th century, after which he settled in Akşehir, and later in Konya under the Seljuq rule, where he died in 1275/6 or 1285/6 CE. The alleged tomb of Nasreddin is in Akşehir and the "*International Nasreddin Hodja Festival*" is held annually in Akşehir between 5–10 July.

As you look at his mausoleum, all its walls are missing and only the Iron Gate remains whole with a huge padlock hanging on it.

As generations have gone by, new stories have been added to the Nasreddin corpus, others have been modified, and he and his tales have spread to many regions. The themes in the tales have become part of the folklore of a number of nations and express the national imaginations of a variety of cultures. Although most of them depict Nasreddin in an early small-village setting, the tales, like Aesop's fables, deal with concepts that have a certain timelessness. They purvey a pithy folk wisdom that triumphs over all trials and tribulations. The oldest manuscript of Nasreddin dates to 1571.

Today, Nasreddin stories are told in a wide variety of regions, especially across the Muslim world and have been translated into many languages. Some regions independently developed a character similar to Nasreddin, and the stories have become part of a larger whole. In many regions, Nasreddin is a major part of the culture, and is quoted or alluded to frequently in daily life. Since there are thousands of different Nasreddin stories, one can be found to fit almost any occasion. Nasreddin often appears as a whimsical character of a large Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Judeo-Spanish, Kurdish, Pashto, Persian, Romanian, Serbian, Russian, Turkish and Urdu folk tradition of vignettes, not entirely different from zen koans.

1996–1997 was declared International Nasreddin Year by UNESCO.

Some people say that, whilst uttering what seemed madness, he was, in reality, divinely inspired, and that it was not madness but wisdom that he uttered — *The Turkish Jester or The Pleasantries of Cogia Nasr Eddin Effendi*

Idries Shah made several collections of Nasruddin stories such as *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin* and *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*. The Nasruddin stories have many affinities with tales of *Bektashis*.

THE BEKTASHI

Haci Bektash Veli lived 1209-1271 in Anatolia. His tekke is still to be found in the village of Haji Bektash, in the centre of modern day Turkey. Stories of Bektashi dervishes are similar to those ascribed to Mullah Nasruddin. They are close to the *Malamati* sufism sometimes translated as 'way of blame' because they would drink wine, break fast during Ramadan and generally mock outer tokens of piety.



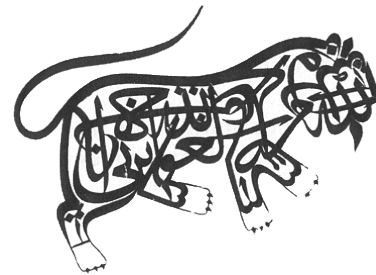
A Bektashi Baba who was worried by the increasing poverty of his monastery one day sent out a young monk to ask for alms. With many a solemn injunction to be careful he entrusted him with the monastery donkey. Unfortunately on the way the animal died, and after burying it the Bektashi monk sat by its tomb and wept because he did not know what was to become of him. At that moment the governor of the province passed by, having been summoned by the Sultan to account for his exactions and maladministration. He saw the Bektashi and without listening for any explanation told him to pray to the saint whose tomb it was to intercede for him with the Sultan. A short while later the governor came back from Constantinople far more satisfied with the outcome of his trip than he had ever expected, and promised to repay the saint who had thus helped him in his hour of need. He therefore built a rich monastery round the

tomb, miracles began to take place, and crowds flocked to the holy place, while the old monastery fell further and further into decay. Its Baba decided to pay a visit to the monastery of the younger and luckier monk; they greeted each other effusively, wept on each other's necks, and the old Baba was shown the wonder-working tomb. Here the young Bektashi was a little embarrassed, not wanting to deceive his former superior, and started in a roundabout way to explain what had happened. "Oh, I shouldn't worry about that," said the old Baba; "your saint is the grandson of the holy protector of our monastery."

If the Mevlevi can be considered aristocratic, the Bektashis were democratic, two of whose social aims were women's rights and enfranchisement of the population. The *Alevis*, associated with the Bektashis, were rural (see below). It is said that their congregations and dances were open to



both sexes. Their pictorial art got round the injunction against showing faces by using calligraphy. Their chief tekke in Turkey is now a museum in Hacibektaş.



Bulgaria. When the dervish orders were banned in Turkey in 1925, it made its headquarters in Tirana, Albania; but all religion was banned there in 1967.



Cappadocia in central Turkey

TURKISH ALEVIS

Turkish Alevi Today John Shindeldecker
(http://www.alevi.dk/ENGELSK/Turkish_Alevi_Today.pdf)



What are Alevi? What is Alevism?

I have personally heard or read all of the following statements about Alevi and Alevism:

“An Alevi is any Muslim who loves the family of the Prophet Muhammed.”

“An Alevi is simply any democratic, tolerant, human rights-promoting, modern-thinking person, whatever his religious background.”

“An Alevi is a filthy, immoral person who is so far from religion that he must first become a Christian before he can become a Muslim.”

“Alevism is the original, true essence of Islam.” “Alevism is a heterodox sect within Islam.”

“Alevism is the most authentic expression of Turkish Anatolian Islam.”

“Alevism is a philosophy, a ‘way of life.’”

“Alevism is pure sufism.”

“Alevism is pure Shiism.”

“Alevism is simply Sunni Islam with an extra emphasis on Ali.”

“Alevism is so syncretistic that it can't be counted as Islam at all.”

“Alevism is an alternative to orthodox Islam.”

“Alevism is an example of the classic Marxist struggle by an oppressed minority.”

“Alevism is a mixture of the best elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Shamanism, and 20th century humanism.”

Four Blind Men and the Elephant

All of these opinions are debated today by Turkish and foreign scholars, researchers, and writers. To be sure, not all of these scholars, researchers and writers are objective. In the fascinating social and political climate of today's Turkey, many writers are using Alevi and Alevism as tools to put forth their own ideological agenda.

Actually, the various approaches to Alevism today remind me of the story of the four blind men who encountered an elephant for the first time. Each tried to describe his impression of the elephant to his friends by holding onto one part of the elephant. The first blind man, holding onto the elephant's trunk said, “It's a large, flexible hose.” The second, running his hands over the elephant's ears, declared, “No, I beg to differ, it is much more like a floppy, thick blanket.” The third, wrapping his arms around a leg, cried out, “I'm sorry, gentlemen, but you are mistaken. This thing called an elephant is a very large, ancient tree. I can't even reach all the way around it.” The fourth, running his hands along the elephant's body, yelled

out, "You men don't know what you're talking about! This elephant is so broad and tall, it's more like a house than anything you've described!"

Learning about the nature of today's Alevism is much like the elephant and the blind men. You may receive as many opinions as the number of persons you ask. It all depends on the perspective of the person with whom you are speaking.

. . . most Alevis place more importance on how a person interacts with other people, that is, whether he acts like a "human being" (insan), than whether he has correct theology. Most say,
"The important thing is not religion, but being a human being." Önemli olan din degil, önemli olan insan olmak.

Almost no Alevi practices ritual prayer five times a day or goes to a mosque (cami) for the prayer service at noon on Fridays. These are simply not Alevi religious customs. In fact, several sayings succinctly summarize the Alevi attitude toward ritual prayers:

"We don't do ritual prayers, we do supplication." Bizde namaz yok, niyaz var.

This means that when Alevis pray in their worship meetings, they are entering into a deeper spiritual relationship with the leader of the meeting and with God than if they were simply doing a form of prayer.

To Alevis, relationships with people are more important than observing formal religious ritual. Two common Alevi sayings illustrate this:

"If you hurt another person, the ritual prayers you have done are counted worthless."

Bir insani incitsen, kildigin namaz geçerli degil.

"My Kaaba is a human being." Benim Kâbem insandır.

Today, Alevis love to quote sayings attributed to Haji Bektash. Here is a sample:

"Seek and find." Ara bul.

"Don't forget that your enemy is also a human being." Düşmaninizin dahi insan oldugunu unutmayiniz.

"Teach the women." Kadinlari okutun.

"Don't do to anyone what you don't want done to you." Nefsine agir geleni kimseye tatbik etme.

"Do not criticize any man or people." Hiç bir milleti ve insani ayiplamayiniz.

"Even if you are offended, do not offend in return." Incinsen de incitme.

"Take responsibility for your words, actions, and morals." Eline diline beline sahip ol.

"Take responsibility for your own spouse, job, and nourishment." Esine, isine, asina sahip ol.



Alevi-Bektashi Ceremony today



Alevi dancing from southern Anatolia 1976

ZOROASTRIANISM



Zoroastrian Shrine

Zoroastrianism is a religion and philosophy based on the teachings of prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra, in Avestan) and was formerly among the world's largest religions. It was probably founded some time before the 6th century BCE in Persia (Iran). The term Zoroastrianism is, in general usage, essentially synonymous with Mazdaism (the worship of Ahura Mazda, exalted by Zoroaster as the supreme divine authority).



In Zoroastrianism, the Creator Ahura Mazda is all good, and no evil originates from Him. Thus, in Zoroastrianism good and evil have distinct sources, with evil (druj) trying to destroy the creation of Mazda (asha), and good trying to sustain it. Mazda is not immanent in the world, and His creation is represented by the Amesha Spentas and the host of other Yazatas, through whom the works of God are evident to humanity, and through whom worship of Mazda is ultimately directed. The most important texts of the religion are those of the Avesta, of which a significant portion has been lost, and mostly only the liturgies of which have survived. The lost portions are known of only through references and brief quotations in the later works, primarily from the 9th to 11th centuries.

In some form, it served as the national or state religion of a significant portion of the Iranian people for many centuries. The religion first dwindled when the Achaemenid Empire was invaded by Alexander III of Macedon, after which it collapsed and disintegrated and it was further gradually marginalized by Islam from the 7th century onwards with the decline of the Sassanid Empire. The political power of the pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties lent Zoroastrianism immense prestige in ancient times, and some of its leading doctrines were adopted by other religious systems. It has no major theological divisions (the only significant schism is based on calendar differences), but it is not uniform.

YEZIDIS

The Yazidi (also Yezidi, Kurdish: *یەزیدی* or *Êzidi*) are members of a Kurdish religion with ancient Indo-Iranian roots. They are primarily a Kurdish-speaking people living in the Mosul region of northern Iraq, with additional communities in Transcaucasia, Armenia, Turkey, and Syria in decline since the 1990s – their members emigrating to Europe, especially to Germany. Their religion, Yazidism, is a branch of Yazdânism, and is seen as a highly syncretic complex of local Kurdish beliefs and Islamic Sufi doctrine introduced to the area by Sheikh Adi ibn Musafir in the 12th century. The Yazidi believe in God as creator of the world, which he placed under the care of seven holy beings or angels, the chief of whom is Melek Taus, the Peacock Angel.



Yezidi Shrine



Peacock Symbol of Yezidis

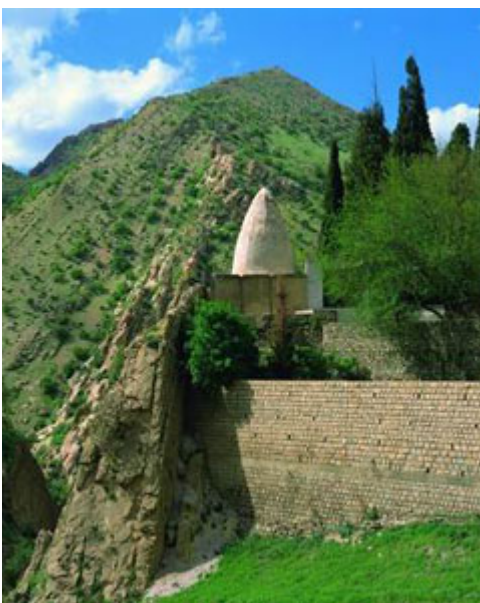
MANDEAISM



Mandaean ceremony

According to most scholars, Mandaeans migrated from Palestine to Mesopotamia in the first centuries AD and are certainly of Pre Arab and Pre Islamic origin. They are Semites and speak a dialect of Eastern Aramaic known as Mandaic. They may well be related to the Assyrians who are also Semitic, Aramaic speaking indigenous Pre Arab and Pre Islamic inhabitants of Iraq. Mandaeans appear to have settled in northern Mesopotamia, but the religion has been practised primarily around the lower Karun, Euphrates and Tigris and the rivers that surround the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, part of southern Iraq and Khuzestan Province in Iran.

AHL-E HAQQ (People of Truth)



The *Ahl-e Haqq* or *Yârsân* (Kurdish: ناسه‌رای *Yâresân*, Persian: اهل حق له *Ahl-e Haqq* "People of Truth"), are members of a religion founded by Sultan Sahak in the late 14th century in western Iran. The total number of members is estimated at around 1,000,000, primarily found in western Iran and Iraq, mostly ethnic Kurds and Laks, though there are also smaller groups of Luri, Azeri, Persian and Arab adherents. Some *Yârsânî* in Iraq are called *Kaka'i*. The *Yârsân* have a distinct religious literature primarily written in Gorani and partly in Persian, although few modern *Yâresânî* can speak or read Gorani, as their mother tongues are Gorani and Soranî.

ASHOKH (ASHIK)



Azerbaijani Ashiq musicians performing in Old Baku

An Ashik (Azerbaijani: *Aşıq*, Turkish: *Aşık*), Persian: عشیق, Armenian: Աշուղ, *ashugh*, Georgian: აშუღი, *ash ugh*) is a mystic troubadour or travelling bard, in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Iran who sings and plays the saz, a form of lute. Ashiks' songs are semi-improvised around common bases.

The Ashik tradition in Turkic cultures of Anatolia, Azerbaijan and Iran has its origin in the Shamanistic beliefs of ancient Turkic peoples. The ancient ashiks were called by various names such as *bakhshi* (Бахши), *dede* (dədə), and *uzan* or *ozan*. Among their various roles, they played a major part in perpetuation of oral tradition, promotion of communal value system and traditional culture of their people. The word Ashik derives from the Arabic word *Asheq* (عشاق), and means the "one who is in love."

The Poet Minstrels of Azerbaijan

by Anna Oldfield

http://azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai124_folder/124_articles/124_ashug_minstrels.html

It's like a conversation with God, Professor Maharram Gasimli explained, as a young "ashug" student began to play "Ruhani" (which means "spiritual" in Azeri) on his "saz", and sure enough, as the musical theme developed, I could hear the metallic notes of the traditional string instrument seeming to search for a connection, revel in the glory of what had been found, and then return to the original theme refreshed and renewed, like a mystic returning home from a mountaintop experience of enlightenment.

. . . Never would I have dreamed that two years later I would be awarded Fulbright Fellowship for 10 months to do research in Baku, studying traditional poet - minstrels called "ashugs" who are the inheritors of an oral tradition, which dates back to pre-historical Turkic Shamanism.

I first became interested in ashug art from reading the great heroic and romantic epics such as Koroghlu (Son of a Blind Man) and Ashug Garib (the story of a poor minstrel who falls in love with a rich man's daughter). These works are the heritage of peoples throughout the Turkic-speaking world. I was impressed by the sophistication and narrative complexity of these works and amazed that these lengthy epics had been passed via oral tradition for hundreds of years and were still being performed today.

Studying the Turkish Ashug tradition (a close cousin of the Azerbaijani tradition) with Professor Sarah Atis at Wisconsin, I learned that the singers of these traditional epics also compose original songs on contemporary topics. I realized that Turkic oral narrative, which both preserves the past while being responsive to the present, has a depth and richness that is as complex and fascinating as any written literature.

APPENDIX - ALEVI DANCING





The ceremony, *âyîn-i cem* or simply *cem*, features music and dance (*semah*) which symbolize the main planets around the Sun (by man and woman turning in circles) and the putting off of one's self and uniting with God. In Alevism, men and women are regarded as equals, and pray side by side.

Alevi religious services, referred to collectively as *cem* or *âyîn*, include spiritual exercises that incorporate elements of *zîkr* ("remembrance" or recitation of God's names, in this case without controlled breathing, but with some elements of body posturing) and *sema* (ritual dance). The latter is accompanied by sung mystical poetry in the vernacular, and by the sacred ritual instrument known as *baglama* or *saz* (a plucked folk lute with frets).

Such music is performed by specialists known as *zâkir*, *aşîk*, *sazende* or *güvende*, depending on regional usage. They are recruited from Alevi communities and descended from *dede* lineages. Many are also known to be poet/minstrels (*aik*, *ozan*) who perpetuate the tradition of dervish-lodge (*tekke*) poets such as Yunus Emre (13th century), Nesîmî (14th century), *Pir Sultan Abdal*, Hata'î and Genç Abdal (16th century) and Kul Himmet and Kul Hüseyin (17th century). The poetry was composed in the Turkish vernacular and follows the principles of folk prosody known as *hece vezne* in which the focus is the number of syllables.

The specialized sacred musical repertoire of Alevi musicians includes

- *Deyiş* (songs of mystical love)
- *Nefes* (hymns concerning the mystical experience)
- *Düvaz* or *dıwes imâm* (hymns in honor of the 12 Alid imams)
- *Mersiye* (laments concerning the martyrdom of Imam Huseyn at Karbala)
- *Miraclama* (songs about the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven)
- *Sema* (ritual dance accompanied by folk lutes and sung poetry)

The dances are performed with dignity by couples, and choreographies employ circle and line formations as well as arrangements where couples face one another, thus synchronizing their movements more closely. As the tempo of the music increases, the figures become more complex and intense. There are many regional variants of *sema*, but the most widespread and important are the Dance of the Forty (*Kırklar Semah*) and the Dance of the Cranes (*Turnalar Semah*).



http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IDYhq8vhu6c