The archaeology of the religious lives of Turkish speakers in late medieval and early modern Anatolia is in many ways still in its infancy. Even though significant strides were taken in this area during the late Ottoman and early Republican eras, the field suffered from the unquestioned hegemony of a single paradigm during the course of the entire twentieth century, which—we can now see with the benefit of hindsight—stifled new and innovative research. This paradigm, was, of course, the one put into place by M.F. Köprülü, according to which Anatolian Turkish religiosity had to be understood primarily in the light of the pre-Islamic cultural history of Turks in Central Asia. Köprülü’s approach privileged continuity over against change in the religious thought and practice of Turkish speakers both in the longue durée (from pre-Islamic to Islamic periods) and in geographical and cultural expanse (from Central and Southwest Asia to Anatolia and the Balkans).1 The Köprülü paradigm was, at least initially, a step forward in at least the sense that it brought the Turkish vernacular into full view and focused the scholarly gaze squarely on Turkish speakers, but in the long run it had several unfortunate consequences, which, for those who have labored under its influence, include an inability to conceive the religious lives of vernacular speakers as dynamic, ever-changing webs spun by actual human beings who lived at the threshold of continuity and rupture, of the new and the old. Speakers of Turkish (not to mention other vernaculars spoken in Anatolia) were not, however, mere repositories of culture but actual architects of it, and in the half millennium long history of their Islamization between the tenth and fifteenth centuries and beyond, it is their dynamism and agency, not their presumed preservation of “archaic” lifeways, that need to be explored and explained. It is high

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1 For a critique of the Köprülü paradigm, see the Foreword by Devin DeWeese in Köprülü, Early Mystics viii–xxvii. For an extensive study of Köprülü’s approach to religion, see Markus, Writing Religion. For the sake of simplicity, modern Turkish orthography is followed throughout, with only a few exceptions.
time, therefore, that we turn our gaze directly to vernacular Islam and begin to write its history in a comprehensive fashion.

What is nowadays called the Alevi-Bektashi tradition in Turkey fits squarely into the broader category of vernacular Islam. This is most emphatically not a unitary tradition, and the outlines of its early history, especially before the sixteenth century, are fuzzy at best and obscure at worst. Nevertheless, it is a safe assumption to make that Turkish speakers benefited from multiple sources in fashioning their religious thought and practice, and my aim here is to direct attention to one of those well-springs they drew from, namely dervish piety as represented by a nebulous group that historians of Anatolia refer to as abdalan-i Rum, following the example of the chronicler Aşıkpaşazade (d. 889/1484). Whether or not the abdals of Rum may have been interconnected as a loose social grouping through master-disciple relationships, regional attachments, distinctive practices and the like remains largely a matter of conjecture, but when seen through the lens of the Turkish vernacular, it seems likely that what led contemporary observers such as Aşıkpaşazade to subsume them under a single heading was their linguistic practice: as opposed to other dervish groups like the Qalandars, Haydaris, Jâmis, and Shams-i Tabrizîs, who most probably spoke Persian (at least during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), the abdals of Rum spoke Turkish. The richest historical sources for this Turkish dervish piety are, of course, hagiographical texts that begin to proliferate during the second half of the fifteenth century, and this sizeable hagiographical corpus still needs to be tapped by researchers for what they can reveal to us about Alevi-Bektâsis. Much rarer are the actual, direct voices of the abdals themselves in the form of their own textual compositions, and it is against this backdrop that the towering figure of Kaygusuz Abdal comes into view as a prolific abdal author and poet who left behind a vast textual legacy.

The rich and complex corpus of Kaygusuz Abdal (d. first half of the fifteenth century) remains understudied, no doubt partly because his works—in prose, verse as well as prosimetrum in the form of monologues,

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2 For an excellent summary of the current state of scholarship on Alevis, see Dressler, Alevi.
3 The most detailed documentation of early Alevi history is Karakaya-Stump, Subjects of the Sultan.
4 For a thorough survey of “dervish piety,” see Karamustafa, God’s Unruly Friends; abdalan-i Rum are discussed on 70–78.
5 The key study that set the bar for later works on hagiography is Ocak, Menakıbnameler.