150 years ago, the utopia of the Protestant American missionaries in Turkey consisted in an almost millenarian belief in a new social and symbolic order, promoted not by a miraculous *deus ex machina* but by their own evangelistic, educative and civilizing efforts. Penetrating all the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the carriers of this impressive Puritan model of successful work, self-confident behavior and the socioreligious subversion of the existing order made a major impact on the Christian minorities and on other communities heterodox to the authoritative Islamic orthodoxy—groups which thought there would be much to win and little to lose if fundamental change took place.

The most important heterodox group in Anatolia—beside those grouped in the recognized non-Muslim *millets*—were the Alevis. This is the term for a number of different communities whose common characteristics are the adoration of Ali, the fourth Caliph, as *Paraclete*; their refusal of the Sharia; and an age-old history of marginalization under the Sunni Sultans. The term “Alevi” is almost identical with “Kizilbash”/*kızılbaş*. Still at the end of the

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1 For my vision of Alevism I am indebted to discussions with Hamit Bozarslan, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris. For the stylistic polishing of my text I am very grateful to Paul Jenkins, University of Basel/Basel Mission. I would also like to thank Michael Ursinus, Heidelberg, and Werner Ende, Freiburg, for their helpful comments on this paper.—For a more comprehensive study on missions, ethnicity and the state in the eastern provinces of Turkey see my *Der verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938*, Zürich: Chronos 2000.

2 The Kizilbash opposed their integration into the Ottoman state body during the 15th and 16th centuries. The latter turned out to be, with Selim I, definitely
20th century, “Kizilbash” remains a term of invective in many people’s daily language. The partial replacement of that term by “Alevi” in about 1900 did not effectively change the deep and often mutual prejudices characterising the relations between this important minority and the Sunni majority in Turkey. Alevi then and now constitute about a quarter of Turkey’s Muslim population.

The Alevi revival in Turkey and in the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s has led to many publications about the present-day articulations of Alevism and its socioreligious and ethnic origins. Our information on the Alevi in late Ottoman times is, however, meagre. Because American missionaries continuously documented their contacts with the Kizilbash from the 1850s to the 1920s, their archives prove to be a vital source for the social history of the Alevi in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Interactions between Protestants and Alevis took place during those decades in the regions of Merzifon, Sivas, Elbistan, Dersim, Harput and Malatya.

Important topics to consider here are, firstly, the catalytic and conflictive interactions between the dynamic Protestant movement and heterodox groups in Anatolia; secondly, the impact in this region of age-old neighbourly contact with Christian groups, and especially of the Armenian renaissance and genocide; and thirdly the alleged support the Alevis gave to the “progressive” Unionist-Kemalist power against the Sunni “reactionaries”. The first topic is dominated by Sunnis. The Kizilbash—so called then because of their red headgear—pinned their hopes on the Persian Shah Ismail, and became, in Ottoman eyes, traitors and public enemies. The religious propaganda reviled them as immoral unbelievers without Holy books, kitabsiz, and therefore worse than Christians or Jews. They had to live at the edge of society and in remote regions, notably the Dersim—the Alevis’ heartland between Sivas, Erzurum and Harput, renamed Tunceli in 1936—and Elbistan, south-west of the Dersim. Marginality did not mean a complete exclusion, but an inferior status within the system. Without mosques, the villages inhabited by Alevi were clearly recognizable, until Sultan Abdulhamid II (and his “successors” in power till now) constructed mosques for them. Cf. “Kızıl-Bash” in EI², V, pp. 243-45.

3 Ottoman documents, notably those of the Başbakanlık Arşivi (Prime Ministry Archives) in Istanbul, also constitute important sources, but the author has not had the opportunity to evaluate them systematically for this article.