More than one and a half decades have passed since the beginnings of the “Alevi revival,” when Alevi went public with their claim for recognition of their cultural and religious difference. Both in Turkey as well as in European countries with strong Turkish communities such as Germany, Alevism has become an undeniable social and political reality expressed in cultural, social, and religious Alevi networks. The unexpected coming-out of a so far largely assimilated and hardly visible community sparked academic interest. At first, researchers were mostly busy with describing and explaining the very phenomenon of Alevi revivalism and, not the least, trying to explain what Alevism was all about. The volume under review reflects a certain maturing of the field. It brings together heterogeneous scholarship on the subject situating Alevi politics within the broader context of Turkish identity politics. In the 20th century, this politics has been strongly shaped by the exclusivist Republican dogma of “unity and togetherness” (birlik ve beraberlik). The main achievement of the discussed volume is to illustrate how this dogma, which had originated in the Turkish War of Independence, operated as the very leitmotif of Turkish Nationalism. Too often interpreted in a coercive rather than inclusive way, it has a long record of rendering non-Turkish and non-Sunni identity conceptions sectarian if not separatist.

Turkey’s Alevi Enigma contributes to the critical literature on the country’s history of suppressing identity claims deviating from the Sunni-Turkish paradigm. In their unfortunately extremely brief introduction, the editors claim to “comprehensively address the ‘Alevi issue,’” which constituted “together with the ‘Kurdish issue’… one of the most explosive issues in contemporary Turkey.” (XI) Aspiring to “cover the ‘Alevi question’ from all its aspects” (ibid.) appears, however, too ambitious an endeavour. Already a brief look into the list of contents makes the—certainly meaningful—selectiveness apparent. The closer reading reveals a clear focus on issues of ethnic, cultural, and political identities. The religious dimension of the Alevi revival, which is one of the main and most enigmatic aspects of the Alevi revival and a matter of fervent discussions, is only marginally addressed—mainly in Karin Vorhoff’s brief overview on revivalist Alevi identity discourse, and to a lesser extent by Elise Massicard, who argues that it is the very vagueness of Alevi symbols that makes possible the success of the label “Alevi”.

The editors perceive a scarcity of academic works in English, but unfortunately miss the opportunity to discuss previous works on the “Alevi issue” and thus to situate this volume within the field. Regarding the aim to “contribute significantly towards constructing a coherent picture” (XI) it has to be stated that there is not as much new material presented in the volume as suggested. Four of the thirteen chapters of the book are slightly edited (and/or translated) reprints of previously published work (one of which, the article by Hamit Bozarslan, without acknowledging so).

The volume under review offers stimulating perspectives on neglected dimensions
of the Alevi debate. To the reviewer's knowledge this is the first time that heterogeneous in-depth scholarship on 20th century Alevi internal ethno-lingual faultlines (between Kurdish Alevi and Turkish Alevi, between Kurmanci and Zazaki speakers) has been brought together. While focusing on different time periods and different incidents, especially the chapters by Hans-Lukas Kieser, Emma Sinclair-Webb, Joost Jongerden, Michiel Leezenberg, and Leyla Neyzi reveal how strongly Kurdish and/or Alevi claims are reactive to the hegemonic Turkish-Sunni discourse, which already began to shape nationalist thought during the Young Turk period, and ever since had a strong impact on Turkish identity politics. Maintaining the (implicitly Sunni) Turkish identity of the state, this discourse requires acceptance of a centralist and authoritarian state. Those who challenge this discourse risk either direct coercion by the state (examples are the Kurdish-Alevi rebellions of Kocgiri in 1920-1 and Dersim in 1937-8, as well as in the 1990s, the army's actions against civilians during its war with the PKK) or the state's hesitance to interfere against “anti-sectarian” violence targeting Kurdish and/or Alevi subjects (e.g. the massacre of Maraş in 1978, the unfolding and immediate public discussion of which are chillingly described by Sinclair-Webb; further the Sivas arson attack of 1993 and the shootings of Gazi/Istanbul in 1995 put into context by Jongerden (85-7)).

The chapters of this volume cumulatively bring to the forefront the interaction between the state's Kurdish politics and its Alevi politics. They address crucial issues of identity, authority, and power as they illuminate some of the darker spots in Turkey's history. Kieser's chapter on “Alevis, Armenians and Kurds in Unionist—Kemalist Turkey,” e.g., provides a competent overview of the late Ottoman Empire’s and the early Republic's identity politics and explains how attempts of Kurdish Alevi resistance against centralist Ottoman and Republican politics where motivated partially by fear (of a fate similar to that of the Armenians, which Alevi had observed closely) and in part by growing nationalist self-awareness (177-96).

Struggling to clarify some of the most strongly contested parts of modern Turkish history, the collection provides unintended insights into the political intricacies of writing Alevi history. As Bozarslan points out in his initial chapter, the writing of Alevi history has, in its attempt to correct official history, begun to create a number of historic myths and biases itself (3-16). The boundaries between history and myth are, however, often difficult to disentangle. An example of this is provided by Paul J. White's discussion of Alevi ‘Kurdish’ identities. White puts emphasis on a clear differentiation between Zaza and Kurdish languages and identities. While this is widely acknowledged as far as the relationship between the Zazaki and Kurmanci (Kurdish) languages is concerned, White goes one step further making a case for the ethnic difference of the Zaza people, thus supporting Zaza nationalist claims as opposed to Kurdish nationalism. On this issue, inconsistencies and contradictions between different chapters of the volume become apparent, reflecting the extreme politicization of the topic. An example illustrating this point is the Dersim uprising of 1937 and the following “ethnocide” (Kieser, 191) on Alevi Kurds. For Kieser, the uprising was Kurdish nationalistic, and he does not make any references to a possible Zaza nationalist component (191-5). White, on the other side, criticises the