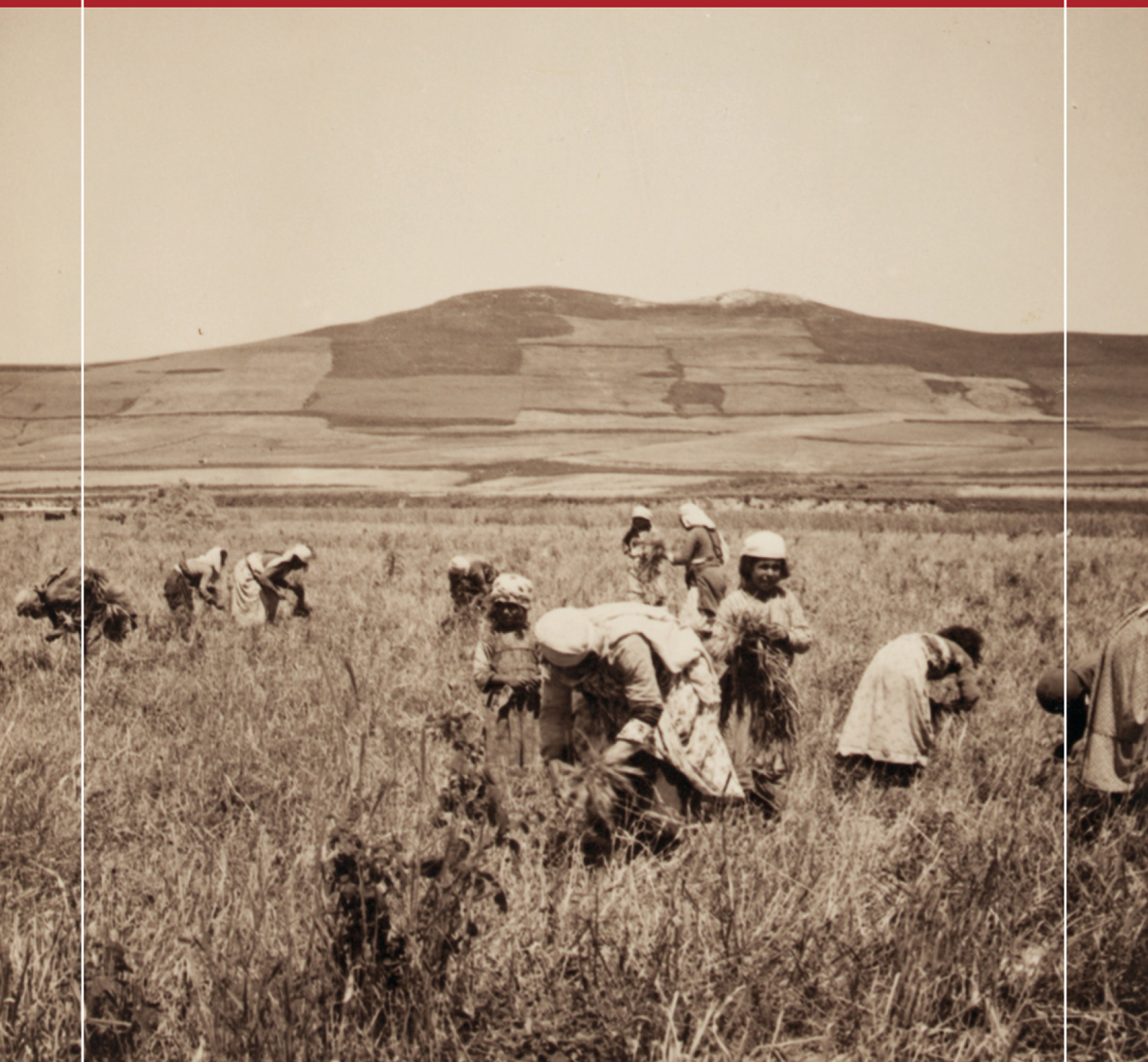


I.B. TAURIS

Non-Sunni Muslims in the Late Ottoman Empire

State and Missionary Perceptions of the Alawis

Necati Alkan



NON-SUNNI MUSLIMS IN THE
LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Gözümün Nurlarına. . .
For Duygu, Idál, Ediz & Noya

‘The difference between Orthodoxy or My-doxy and Heterodoxy or Thy-doxy.’

— Thomas Carlyle (1837)

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Bamberg/Germany, 29 February 2020

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Ottoman Turkish proper names and terms are rendered in modern Turkish. The following letters of the Turkish alphabet have these equivalents in English: c = j; ç = ch; ğ = lengthens the preceding and following vowel; ı = similar to 'u' in *millennium*; j = as in the French *journal*; ö = as in 'her' (without the 'r' sound); ş = 'sh'; and ü = as in 'pure'. Arabic and Persian proper names, unless they appear in quotes from secondary literature, have been rendered without diacritical marks for the sake of simplicity.

INTRODUCTION

Based on extensive use of empirical sources, this book is a discussion of the fate of non-Sunni 'nominal' Muslims in the perception of American Protestant missionaries and the Ottoman state, with a focus on the nineteenth through to the beginning of the twentieth century, and the fate of the Alawis in this period. The *Alawis*, also known as *Nusayris*, belong to an early branch of the so-called 'heterodox' Shi'a, who are centred in North-Western Syria – part of modern Syria and the Turkish province of Hatay – and South Anatolia ('Cilicia') with its centres Adana, Mersin and Tarsus. The main focus of the book lies in the interaction between the Alawis, the late Ottoman state and Protestant missionaries. Throughout the centuries the Alawis, who had been living in Ottoman Syria, are thought to have kept their faith secret by living in seclusion owing to fear of persecution by the Sunni Orthodoxy. The religious beliefs of the Nusayris have been studied since the nineteenth century, based on their writings that are now extant in European libraries. For example, the work by the most famous Alawi convert to Protestantism, Sulayman al-Adhani, *Kitab al-Bakura as-Sulaymaniyya fi Kashf Asrar ad-Diyana an-Nusayriyya*¹ (*The Book of Sulaimân's First Ripe Fruit, Disclosing the Mysteries of the Nusairian Religion*), published in 1863/1864 by American Protestant missionaries, is a detailed exposition of the Alawi belief system and rituals and was for a long time the basis of Western knowledge about the religious tenets of Alawism. As he publicly disclosed the secrets of the Alawi religion in the book, al-Adhani is said to have been killed by Alawi sheikhs.² Most of his book was translated into English and published with a brief introduction in 1866.³ The famous American Presbyterian missionary Henry H. Jessup recounted his meeting with al-Adhani and his life story, describing him as 'as repulsive a man as I have ever met in the East' but he soon learned (also from an Arabic letter of introduction) that 'he was a man of learning and wide reading' and found him to be 'an authorized expounder of that weird system of diabolical mysteries'. Jessup added that he and fellow missionaries encouraged al-Adhani to write a book about the tenets and mysteries of Nusayrism, which was ultimately published in Beirut: 'His book attracted wide attention. The Syrians bought and read it eagerly and copies were sent into Nusairi districts where it made a sensation.'⁴

Another book written by an Alawi is the Arabic *Ta'rikh al-'Alawiyyin*. The author of this 'landmark' book Muhammad Amin Ghalib at-Tawil (d. 1932) was an Ottoman official from Adana who had served at several posts.⁵ He wrote his book

first in Turkish (it seems not to be extant) and later translated it into Arabic and published it in 1924 in Latakia/Syria (with later editions and Turkish translations). Even though it contains many historical flaws and is an apologetic work, his book is historically important and probably the first of its kind to construct an Alawi identity. Since sources such as these about Alawi history and beliefs are rare, I will use Ottoman and missionary sources here to convey perceptions of this religious community.

Historical knowledge and information about the Nusayris in the nineteenth century, based on Ottoman and missionary sources, has been rather meagre. Only in recent years has this kind of research intensified.⁶ These are listed in the previous footnote and discussed in the following paragraphs. There also various studies about the Alawis in Turkish that do not use Ottoman sources.⁷

State of research about the Alawis and other non-Sunni groups based on Ottoman sources

To date, there are a few historical studies of the Alawis in the specified period and of these few have used Ottoman archival materials. Dick Douwes gives a useful overview of the subject in his article 'Knowledge and Oppression: The Nusayriyya in the late Ottoman Period',⁸ but does not use Ottoman sources. Based on Arabic primary sources in Syria, French primary sources in Beirut, and English, French and Arabic secondary literature, he analyses the religious and secular leadership of the Nusayris and their relationship to the community of believers and the state authorities from 1840 to around 1890. He focuses on the change in the status of the Nusayris in the provincial administration, which results from the fact that the Ottoman officials based their decisions in the late nineteenth century less on religious than on political motives and made religion a tool of politics. The Ottoman attitude towards this community changed in this context from a tacit tolerance of 'schismatic faith' to a policy of 'correction of belief(s)'.

In two short articles, '19. Yüzyılda Heterodox Dinî Gruplar ve Osmanlı İdaresi' ('Heterodox Religious Groups and the Ottoman Administration in the 19th Century') and 'Alevilik, Nusayrılık ve Bâbüâlî' ('Alevism, Nusayrism and the Sublime Porte'), İlber Ortaylı examines the relationship between Anatolian Alevi and Nusayris as heterodox religious groups on the one hand and the late Ottoman government on the other. He contrasts the Nusayris with other heterodox groups such as the Druze, crypto-Christians and Sabbatians (or *Dönme*, followers of the Jewish 'messiah' Shabbatai Zvi, seventeenth century). Ortaylı comes to the conclusion that in the late nineteenth century heterodox groups were reintegrated into society by the Ottomans – despite their ambivalent attitudes – in contrast to the reign of Mahmud II (reigned 1808–1839), in which the Alevi and Bektaşî in particular were allies of the Janissaries and were persecuted and had to go underground. In both periods, however, these groups came under state control.

Stefan Winter's early contribution to the topic of the Alawis in the late Ottoman period can be read in two articles, 'La révolte alaouite de 1834 contre l'occupation

égyptienne: perceptions alaouites et lecture ottomane' and 'The Nusayris before the Tanzimat in the Eyes of Ottoman Provincial Administrators, 1804–1834'. In both articles he deals with the Alawis before the Tanzimat ('reform') period, using only a few Ottoman documents. The first aspect of his research is the Alawi uprising of 1834 and the Ottoman response to the occupation of Syria by Muhammad Ali, the Egyptian governor who endeavoured to reform Egypt and the occupied territories. The Alawis, who lived as farmers in the mountains, rebelled against Muhammad Ali's centralization policy, in particular the military service that was imposed on them, while the Alawis living on the coast of Syria expressed their satisfaction at Muhammad Ali's efforts to level expression of religious differences in society. In his second article Winter deals with the attitude of the Ottoman governors in the province towards the Nusayris. Winter shows that the Ottoman attitude towards the Tanzimat was not only characterized by hostility. On the one hand, the Ottomans allied themselves with the Nusayris against common enemies, e.g. Muhammad Ali; on the other hand, some members of this community managed to rise in the Ottoman hierarchy and hold important offices.

Selim Deringil has researched the heterodox groups in the Ottoman Empire in connection with the politicization of Sunni Islam in the late Ottoman era. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, tension between the Ottomans and Europeans increased due to Christian missionary activities on Ottoman soil. The fear of infiltration of the Muslims on the part of the Europeans and Americans, who increasingly made it their business to free non-Muslims and non-Sunnis from the 'yoke' of the Ottomans, led Sultan Abdülhamid II (reigned 1876–1909) to the spread of the 'official' Hanafi Sunni version of Islam. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Hamidian regime pursued a policy of 'Sunnitization' in eastern Anatolia, Syria and Iraq. This policy aimed at the centralization and unity of the Ottoman state and at introduction of 'heretical' groups to the teachings of the Hanafi school. As part of an education campaign, schools (sg. *medrese*) and mosques were built in the provinces concerned and trained teachers and missionaries were sent out to teach and instruct in religious matters. The aim was to 'civilize' the population in these areas and make them 'good Muslims' in order to immunize them against Christian and, especially, Protestant, missionary propaganda. Through such efforts the government hoped to avert the threat posed by these heterodox groups, which appeared to threaten the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. In his recently published book *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire*,⁹ Deringil analyses the changes that nationalism, national identity and belonging went through in the multi-religious milieu of the late Ottoman Empire and how the social and political function of religious conversion changed.

Yvette Talhamy's Hebrew dissertation 'Mridot ha-Nusayrim bi-Suriya ba-mi'ah ha-tish'ah 'israh' (The Nusairi Revolts in Syria in the Nineteenth Century) has been, until 2016, the only monograph on the history of the Nusayris in the late Ottoman Empire based on Ottoman sources in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, BOA). This work was only accessible to me through an English summary. Accordingly, she analyses the circumstances of the Nusayri revolts following an overview of their history up to the nineteenth century. In a

second study, her essay 'The Nusayri Leader Isma'il Khayr Bey and the Ottomans (1854–58)', Talhamy deals with the rise and fall of Isma'il Khayr Bey, who was influential in the 1850s in the Alawi Mountains in Syria. Talhamy examines why there was no group solidarity, unity and cooperation among the Nusayris when Isma'il Bey rebelled against the Ottomans and how his uprising affected the Nusayris. The essay draws on secondary literature as well as British and French archival material, but only on two documents from the aforementioned Ottoman archives, although there are at least a dozen or more documents on Isma'il Bey and his relationship with the Ottoman authorities. In another article, Talhamy examines American Protestant missionary activity and Ottoman conscription among the Nusayris in Syria and in the nineteenth century. Talhamy examines the aims, methods and results of the Protestant missionary activity among the Nusayris and the impact of their presence and work in these districts upon the Ottoman authorities and their dealings with the Nusayris. She concludes that the investment of the missionaries in the Alawi Mountain did not pay off, and that despite the many schools that were opened there and which functioned for decades, at the turn of the twentieth century the number of the Alawi intellectuals was still minimal and they remained the most illiterate of all the local population of Syria.¹⁰

In her doctoral dissertation 'Anxieties of Conversion: Missionaries, State and Heterodox communities in the Late Ottoman Empire' (University of California/LA, 2009), Zeynep Türkyılmaz deals with the triangular relationship between evangelical missionaries, the Ottoman state and heterodox groups, concentrating on the question of 'anxieties of conversion' among the Crypto-Christians, Nusayris and Kızılbaş (Anatolian Alevi). She sees the conversion missions of the evangelical missionaries and the Sunni missionaries and teachers from Istanbul as an arena for competition for alternative modernization projects. While the Protestant missionaries took advantage of the unexplained politico-religious status of the heterodox groups in the Ottoman state to bring about the rebirth of Christianity in the biblical regions through conversions, the Ottoman central administration saw religious heterodoxy as treason and therefore a danger ideologically as well as for the physical wholeness of religion and state. Türkyılmaz also examines the redefinition of the socio-religious subjectivity of heterodox groups towards the state and global networks that resulted from the above-mentioned clash. In summary, her work is a study of the tension between modernity, religion and state administration in the late Ottoman Empire.

Most recently, in 2016, Stefan Winter published his ground-breaking and revisionist book *A History of the 'Alawis*. In this excellent and well-researched study Stefan Winter aims to prove that this 'metanarrative' or notion of 'historical persecution' is not borne out by the historical evidence. Without discrediting the relevance of Alawi religious identity and the sectarian community as a subject of analysis, he bases his study on secular rather than religious sources in order to show the broad mutual relationship of the Alawis with their neighbours, rulers and supposed oppressors. What makes Winter's book outstanding is his use of sources that have not previously been made use of. By scrutinizing Mamluk administration manuals, Ottoman and Turkish archival documents in Istanbul and Tripoli, and

the Alawi prosopographical literature, he challenges the notion that they had been always an isolated community, different from other rural populations, or were subjected to systematic discrimination. Winter's aim is to provide a less essentializing, more material account of Alawi history by not focusing on the religious character of the community but by employing a secular approach to their history. He does so by highlighting locality and privileging the socioeconomic, political and administrative context of modern Alawism's development over its purely religious traits. And he provides a perspective throughout the centuries in order to form an opinion of the necessarily profound transformation of Alawi communal identity over time.¹¹

In a similar fashion, there have been studies about similar non-Sunni 'non-conformist' religious groups such as the Yezidis and the Alevis. Edip Gölbaşı has written extensively about the Yezidis in his MA thesis and other articles.¹² These deal with the political order and the new power regime of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century and the policy of 'taming' under Sultan Abdülhamid II for groups at the margins and those who were considered 'heretical', 'uncivilized' or 'nomadic'. One of the main problems between the state and the Yezidis was military service/conscription, which the Yezidis allegedly opposed in accordance with their religious beliefs, and the conversion policy of the Hamid period, which was initially introduced with 'persuasion' tactics where applicable, but were later also implemented through pressure and violence. In addition to the aspects of the state's perception of Yezidi identity, these studies also focus on the question of their status, which is closely linked to their position in the political structure.

Most recently Yalçın Çakmak published his revised doctoral thesis about the Kızılbaş-Alevis with the title *Sultanın Kızılbaşları: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi Alevi Algısı ve Siyaseti* ('Sultan's Red Heads: Alevi Perceptions and Politics during the Era of Abdülhamid II', İstanbul 2019). Anxiety over issues of security of the empire, centralization, the politics of Islamic unity of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the relations of the Alevi community with the Armenians and Western missionaries played a significant role during his reign. The Alevi community became a current issue of the empire due to their central role both in domestic issues and regional dynamics. Consequently, these developments led the empire to certain mandatory implementations against the Alevis. The most efficient method Abdülhamid II resorted to was the politics of enforced 'correction of the beliefs' (*tashih-i akaid*) of the community members. The primary aim of his book is to analyse the dynamics which brought the Alevis to the agenda during the reign of Abdülhamid II. In relation to this aim, Çakmak discusses Abdülhamid II's Alevi politics in the history of the Ottoman Empire within the context of continuity and disengagements. Another aim is to deal with the place of the empire's approach towards Alevism throughout the period within the context of the non-Sunni politics from a comparative perspective. Furthermore, he illustrated the representations of Kızılbaş-Alevi communities by Western missionaries, travellers, researchers and officers.

Mention must be also made of a very recent revisionist study about the Kızılbaş-Alevis before the nineteenth century. The history of the Kızılbaş-Alevis in the

Ottoman Empire has so far mostly been remembered and described in the context of persecution and oppression. Benjamin Weineck's study *Zwischen Verfolgung und Eingliederung Kızılbaş-Aleviten im osmanischen Staat (16.–18. Jahrhundert)* ('Between Persecution and Inclusion: Kızılbaş-Alevi in the Ottoman State (16th–18th centuries)', Baden-Baden 2020) provides such dominant and essentialist narratives with a perspective that analyses the complexity of the relationship between the state and the Kızılbaş-Alevi. The author explores the question of how this relationship developed from the 16th to the 18th century: After the persecution of the Kızılbaş, who were regarded as dissidents and 'heretics', a relationship was established that aimed primarily at the appropriate integration of these groups into the Ottoman rule. On the basis of Ottoman sources previously unused for research about Alevism, Weineck shows that the Kızılbaş-Alevi regularly interacted with agents of the state in different contexts. Thus, this work contributes to a re-evaluation of the history of the Kızılbaş-Alevi in Ottoman times.

The last addition here to this literature about non-Sunni groups is Cem Kara's recent book *Grenzen überschreitende Derwische: Kulturbeziehungen des Bektaschi-Ordens 1826–1925* ('Dervishes Crossing Borders: Cultural Relationships of the Bektashi Order 1826–1925', Göttingen 2019) which is about the cultural relations of the Bektāşī in and outside the Ottoman Empire. With the investigation of horizontal cultural contacts in the Ottoman state, Kara worked on a desideratum, since previous research only focused on vertical relationships between the government and the religious communities. To this end, he poses the research question: in which way was the religious culture of the Bektāşī transformed by cultural contact. This question encompasses types of contact and their limits, mutual perceptions of those involved and (im)material cultural assets exchanged in contact with each other. At its core, Kara's case study offers a bird's eye view of the Bektashi order from the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. The balanced presentation of the examined cultural relationships testifies to the relevance of the research on interweaving of religious subgroups. Nevertheless, the work leaves room for further studies on the cultural relations of the Bektāşī. This also includes the relationship with the Kızılbaş-Alevi, as the discipline of Alevi studies is still relatively early.

Finally, it is necessary to briefly dwell on the work *A History of Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East* (2017) by Heather J. Sharkey.¹³ She deals with the diverse relationships between Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. In the context of changes and reforms in the nineteenth century, she emphasizes that on the one hand the Ottoman state began to regard its subjects as individuals at times – theoretical freedom of conscience, responsibility for taxation or military conscription; on the other hand, they continued to be classified and treated as members of older collectives and above all as members of religious communities of Muslims, Christians and Jews. Sharkey notes that this tension between the older strategy of seeing people as members of a collective and the newer, albeit uneven, strategy of recognizing people as individuals was an integral part of the modern age. The Alevi, the Druze, the Yezidi and the Nusayris/Alawis fell into this ambiguous category. Over the course of the nineteenth century, this ambivalence found expression in a number of strategies that were irregular. This

was particularly obvious with the Yezidis, who were periodically taxed by the Ottomans with the Islamic 'poll tax' (*jizya*) but this was demanded neither from the Druze, nor the Alawis. At times, the Ottomans did not draft the Yezidis into the military, but they were then forced back to military service and conversion to Sunni Islam at other times.

Knowledge of the Nusayris and similar groups such as above in modern times began with Western travellers, orientalist and missionaries, from the early nineteenth century. These groups with secret and nonconformist religious beliefs were studied for learning purposes, sometimes to bring them into the fold of Christianity but also to find ways of exploiting them against the Ottomans politically. In the Ottoman Empire real interest in the Nusayris started during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II. The fear of infiltration of heterodox Muslims by foreigners, especially by American and English Protestant missionaries, pressed the Sultan to attract them by educative means to the official Hanafi-Sunni school. In the process, the status of the Nusayris changed during the late nineteenth century as a result of the missionary attempt to convert them and the Ottoman fear that they would become another 'European problem' for them to deal with. A fight for the Nusayri soul began that left them changed.

In spite of the large amount of Ottoman official documents and other sources, the history of the Nusayris in the late Ottoman Empire is still very little researched. The aim of this study and attempt to fill this gap is based on the hypothesis that the change in the self-designation of the Nusayris was part of a broader socio-political process dissociating them from the Ottoman Empire and preceding the final collapse of this state for some decades. While taking internal differences within the Nusayri community into account, the book will elucidate this process and put it into historical context, by comparing it with similar transformation processes within other heterodox communities of the Ottoman Empire, especially Alevis, Yezidis, and Druze.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of what is regarded as 'heretical' and 'heretics' based on the Qur'an and hadith (oral Islamic traditions) and ties this to the Sunnis' perception of groups such as the Alawis. An overview of the history and the beliefs of the Nusayris/Alawis from its inception in ninth/tenth century Iraq until today introduces to the reader this much talked-about 'secretive' religious community in the Islamic world. This is done in the light of secondary literature based on various sources in Arabic, Ottoman/Turkish and European languages. Next, I discuss the importance of geography, social structure and authority among the Alawis. While the geography of the so-called 'Alawi/Nusayri Mountains', their heartland in the hinterland of Latakia, has been described and discussed since the nineteenth century as being their 'mountain refuge' where they supposedly hid since the Crusades due to their 'heretical' beliefs, there is not much written about their social structure and, to a lesser extent, about Alawi religious and secular authority in European languages. This chapter attempts to give an appraisal of these, followed by an outline of the Alawis' status in the Ottoman political system.

The proselytizing efforts of Protestant missionaries, mostly American, in Ottoman Syria among heterodox non-Sunni groups and in particular their

conversion efforts among the Nusayris, are the subjects of Chapter 2. Inspired by millenarian beliefs, since the eighteenth century Protestant missionaries in North America – and also in Europe – anticipated and worked for a new social order. This religious zeal targeted the Jews in the Holy Land, the native Christians (Greek and Arab) and eventually, since missions among the Jews and native Christians proved difficult and proselytizing Sunni Muslims was forbidden, communities such as the Nusayris ('Alawis), who were heretics in the eyes of the Sunnis and regarded as pagans by the missionaries themselves. Two hitherto, rather unexplored cases of conversion from Nusayrism to Protestantism serve as examples for discussing the role of the late Ottoman state regarding centralization, state and missionary education and religious conversion and how the relationship between the Ottomans and the USA/Europe worsened during these times.

Chapter 3 analyses the policy of 'correction of belief(s)', the ideological and political background of the Hanafi-Sunni 'civilizing mission' and accordingly the conversion strategies of the administration of Sultan Abdülhamid II. I argue that Mahmud II's administration used this concept in the context of the persecution of Bektaşis during the first half of the nineteenth century, and I compare the application of this policy with the similar strategy of Abdülhamid II, who applied it to non-Sunni Islamic sects such as the Turkish or Kurdish Alevi, the Nusayris in Syria, the Shi'is in Iraq, and the Yezidis in eastern Anatolia. The motivation of the Hamidian regime was to 'civilize' these non-conformist groups and bring them into the Sunni fold by fine-tuning their beliefs. I demonstrate how this concept evolved, beginning in the eighteenth century when it was invoked in the context of taming groups such as the Abkhaz and Circassians, and, later, Caucasian tribes. During the tumultuous reign of Mahmud II, Ottoman administrators and scholars made use of this term as an official policy to correct the beliefs of the Bektaşis both before and after the prohibition of their order.

Lastly, Chapter 4 investigates whether and what changes occurred during the Young Turk rule (1908–1918), particularly with regard to the Nusayris. After providing an outline of the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and its repercussions among ethnic and religious groups, I consciously follow and leave room for the narratives of Protestant missionaries about their activities among the Nusayris in Ottoman Syria in the wake of the Revolution. I attempt to illustrate the missionaries' response to the promise of freedom in the Empire, analyse whether the circumstances for proselytizing improved and how the Nusayris in turn responded to the missionary efforts. A key issue that has not been dealt with sufficiently in my opinion is how Muslims, especially intellectuals of the Young Turk era, have viewed missionary work, especially that of American Protestants. This subchapter reveals the role of Islam during the supposedly 'secular' Young Turk rule and how the Nusayris were perceived. I complete this chapter with a very late Ottoman official text about various ethnic and religious groups in Syria and Palestine, a publication that was commissioned as a 'scientific and civilizational guide' in search for solutions of the ailing Empire and which sought to create modern identities among those peoples and instil hope for a 'bright' future.

Sources and research questions

Among the primary sources used in this study are first the documents belonging to various funds in the *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (BOA, Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive) in Istanbul.¹⁴ These documents are among the primary objectives of the book since the bureaucracy had its own internal correspondence and these constitute sources of reference for understanding the state policy towards the Nusayris/Alawis and similar groups. They are from the Ottoman capital Istanbul to provincial and local governors especially in Syria, and vice versa, and also central in understanding the attitude and politics of the Ottoman state, the officials and, as reflected there, of the common people towards the Nusayris in the first place and also vis-à-vis the missionaries, especially the American Protestants, who are one of the main focuses of the book. BOA documents from the pre-Tanzimat period, roughly from 1826 to 1839 during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, deal mainly with the aftermath of the abolition of the Janissaries, namely the prohibition and persecution of the Bektāşis. While the Janissaries and their allies the Bektāşis were regarded as the arch-enemies of the state, which aimed at centralization and modernization, and are depicted negatively and described as degenerate, the original Bektāşi creed and its founder, Hacı Bektaş, deserved praise.

The Tanzimat period (1839–1876), comprising the reigns of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861) and Abdülaziz (1861–1876), describes Nusayri uprisings, struggles between Nusayris and Sunnis, and Nusayri tribes among themselves. This period also includes records of the conscription of Nusayris to military service. In general, the policies towards groups of nominal Muslims were broader in application and not necessarily negative in nature. The main question for Ottoman officials and intellectuals was rather how they could accommodate them as potential allies into the mainstream 'orthodox' position.

The majority of the Ottoman documents date from the later reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II and deal with the conversion policy that was carried out in Syria and South-eastern Anatolia. What is striking here is the network of Hanafi-Sunni missionaries and teachers who were active everywhere in these areas, sent by the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Nezareti*) in order to convert the population through education in medreses and mosques and to make them 'good' Muslims. Ottoman documents on the Alevis, Yezidis and the Druze from the same archive are analysed for a comparative approach. The Ottomans' attitude to these non-Sunnis is similar to that of the Nusayris. The more rigid policy of Abdülhamid II towards sectarian groups, as reflected in official communications, must be seen as a result of catastrophic military defeats, especially in the Balkans; instead of winning them over they needed to be suppressed as potential enemies. Those who were willing to comply with the state's policies were worthy of cooperation. It must be stated that there is a scarcity of Ottoman archival sources from the Young Turk period about the official view towards the Nusayris, which leaves us with a gap. I have integrated some documents from that period and, though very few in number, we can observe in them that the Young Turk rulers were concerned about

missionary activities as much as officials in the Hamidian period were. This is also expressed in publications by Islamist thinkers of that period, which I used in order to fill the gap.

My research was facilitated by a compilation of Ottoman archival documents about the Nusayris: Ali Sinan Bilgili et al. (eds.), *Osmanlı Arşiv Belgelerinde Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik (1745–1920)* (Ankara, 2010; henceforth referred to as OABNN); it includes many of the documents in my possession and has the images of the documents and their transliterations in Latin letters. Ranging from the eighteenth century (for which there only one document) until the War of Independence by Mustafa Kemal Paşa (later Atatürk), this volume includes topics about diverse aspects of the Nusayri community vis-à-vis the Ottoman state. Written by the Prime Ministry, the ministries of Foreign and Internal Affairs, of Education, of Justice or of War to governor generals, local governors, directors of education etc., the documents also include communication with representatives of foreign states, such as the American Embassy in Istanbul and regional consulates. The topics range from Protestant missionary activities, the relations of the Nusayris with other groups, foremost Sunnis, within the regions they inhabited, the efforts to include the Nusayris into the Sunni majority and the Nusayris' wish to become Sunnis, the construction of mosques and schools in Nusayri villages and towns, the education of children, the revolts and banditry by Nusayris, the injustices committed by Ottoman regional/local officials towards the Nusayris, the rewarding of Nusayris who served well the Ottoman state, and the Nusayris' behaviour during the French occupation of South Turkey and Syria.

In all periods, it is possible to follow the attitudes and policies of the central state policy, towards the Nusayris and similar groups, which includes statements, reports and journals presented by a number of major and minor officials. These documents also reflect their rather negative picture of those communities, and reflect the biased nature of the documents as they reflect the subjective view of the officials. Another type of Ottoman archival document are reports that the central government in Istanbul asked to be sent from the provinces; these provide hints as to the policies Istanbul applied or would apply regarding the Nusayris. Ottoman archival documents are also important because they contribute significantly to the clarification of specific events through which the community came to the fore. Among these are, firstly, the cases of the two Nusayri converts to Protestantism, Suleiman Hassan Makhloof ('Daoud') and Telgie Ibrahim.

Other contemporary Ottoman sources such as newspapers and works by Ottoman historians are also to be consulted. The latter includes, for example, *Tarih-i Cevdet* by Ahmed Cevdet Paşa (2nd ed., 1892), the then official historian who dealt with the Nusayris and the Druze in a derogatory fashion; we must also mention another, rather unknown, short handwritten treatise by him regarding socialists in which he traces the origin of the Nusayris back to ancient 'proto-socialist' and 'rebellious' movements in ancient Persia, such as Mazdakism out of which, according to the Paşa, emerged the 'secret, heretical' (*batini*) religious groups such as the Isma'ilis, Kızılbaş-Alevis, Freemasons etc.¹⁵

Another, very late Ottoman, contemporary but hitherto ignored source about the various religious and ethnic communities that is used here is the yearbook

Beyrut Vilayeti on the province of Beirut from 1917–1918. In two volumes, the two authors deal with different religions and sects in what is now Syria, Lebanon and Israel, including the Nusayris. In addition to the general history and geography of the region, the work also deals with the history, beliefs, number and conditions of the different religious communities and the places where they live. Though biased and written from what seems to be an ‘Ottoman orientalist’ viewpoint, this source provides interesting details about the tour of the two authors who I would call ‘missionaries of modernity’.

Letters and reports from missionaries who worked in Syria form another source for the book. Of great importance is the five-volume work *The Missionary Herald: Reports from Ottoman Syria* edited by Kamal Salibi and Yusuf K. Khoury,¹⁶ in which letters and personal diaries of missionaries working in Syria are reproduced, which were published by the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) in its periodical *The Missionary Herald* from 1819 to 1870. The ABCFM was the institution that sent the missionaries to the Ottoman Empire from 1819 and also financed them. The representations in the *Missionary Herald* reflect the experiences that the missionaries had with ‘heterodox’ religious groups such as the Nusayris, Yezidis and Druze and with the Ottoman administration in Syria. They give us fascinating details about the work and daily life of the missionaries and provide information about the missionaries’ view of these communities. While these offer interesting details about the daily life of the missionaries and the people, they are limited in that they do not always offer correct historical information. This stems from the fact that knowledge on Nusayris was sometimes acquired from biased sources. Nevertheless, in the later decades of the nineteenth century missionaries and other Europeans or Westerners were able to travel and live among Nusayris and so wrote about their experiences in letters or books. Such sources are among the primary sources here. And in 1870 the ABCFM mission in Syria was handed over to the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* that was administered by the *Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church*.¹⁷ Its reports and results are available in various journals (e.g. *Herald of Mission News*, and *Olive Trees*) at the Reformed Presbyterian History Archives at <http://rparchives.org> and constitute an important source for Protestant missionary activities. Together with the Ottoman archival sources they provide a clearer picture of specific events in the Nusayri community, such as the above mentioned two converts.

As far as possible, texts from Catholic missionaries who worked among the Nusayris and from the Nusayris themselves are also utilized for my research. On the part of the Catholic missionaries, this includes in particular the writings of the Jesuit and orientalist Henri Lammens, who had personal contacts with Nusayris around 1900 and published his impressions of it in at least five treatises.¹⁸ Alawi texts, such as Ghalib at-Tawil’s *Tarikh al-Alawiyyin* (‘History of the Alawis’) revolve around initiatives for rapprochement by Ottoman statesmen such as Midhat Paşa, who was governor of Syria from 1878 to 1880.

A gap in this study is that there is a lack of Alawi sources in general, except for at-Tawil’s and al-Adhani’s book, but these also do not provide Alawi perspectives on the result of Ottoman and missionary propaganda among their community.

It is crucial to state that both the Ottoman and missionary sources are biased and have their pitfalls in that they present their own specific view of the Nusayris and the other similar groups discussed in this book. Both sides approach the Nusayris (and similar groups) as being outside 'civilization' and deprived of religion, that is to say, 'true' faith: for the Ottomans they were Muslims off-limits and the Protestant missionaries thought that the Nusayris were 'pagans', nor did they think they were Christians even though some of their beliefs resembled Christian ones. Due to these very particular perspectives Ottoman and Protestant missionary sources need to be reflected on openly and critically.

Based on the sources mentioned above, the following questions will be answered in the book: What was the result of Christian and Ottoman propaganda among non-Sunnis and, in particular, the Nusayris? How did the Christian missionaries integrate them into their new social order inspired by millenarian beliefs? What role did these 'heterodox' and marginalized groups play in the 'civilizing mission' of the regime of Sultan Abdülhamid II? What was the reaction of these groups to the Ottoman educational and civilizing efforts? What was the attitude of the Young Turks and of Muslim intellectuals towards the missionaries and Nusayris after their revolution in 1908? The main goal of the book is to describe the change in the relationship between missionaries, Ottoman state actors and the Nusayris in the late Ottoman Empire. In particular, aspects such as conversion, resistance, assimilation, integration and military conscription will be examined. Furthermore, to what extent did the tribal and religious fragmentation of the Nusayris affect their relationship with the Ottoman Administration?

From the analysis of the sources the impression emerges that the Alawis underwent a collective transformation process between 1840 and 1918. In the book this process is compared to processes taking place at the same time in other 'heterodox' groups of the Ottoman Empire. Markus Dressler showed in a study how Turkish and Kurdish Shi'i-heterodox groups, which were previously contemptuously referred to as 'Kızılbaş', were renamed and re-signified as 'Alevîs' (Alevîler) in the late nineteenth century in response to their being researched by Western orientalist and the discourses of Turkish nationalists.¹⁹ This book is based on the hypothesis that the Nusayris' transition to the self-designation '*Alawîyyun*' ('Alawîs', 'Alawîtes') was part of an analogous socio-political identity formation and demarcation process that needs to be examined. The situation is similar with the Yezidis, where identity politics was closely linked to discourses on origin. A search for the Yezidi's ethnic and religious origins began with the development of modern concepts of nationalism and racial identity from the nineteenth century. On the religious level, there has been a predominantly Iranian-Zoroastrian and an Arab-Muslim approach. Theories based on ethnicity ranged from purely Kurdish origins to descent from the Assyrians or Sabians.²⁰ In my study, such identity formation processes in other 'heterodox' communities will be used for comparison.

I am aware that the word 'Nusayri' has a negative connotation, I nevertheless use it as it appears in Ottoman documents and other sources before 1920 for ease of reference. It is widely accepted that it was only from that date onwards that the