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EVLIYA ÇELEBI ON 'ALEVISTÂN:
AN UNIDENTIFIED REGION OF THE SUDAN (1672).

Evliya Çelebi (called further Evliya) in the tenth volume of his "Book of Travels" (*Seyahatname*)¹ mentions the region/territory (*vilāyet*), or country/land (*diyār*), or kingdom of (the) 'Alevī, otherwise called 'Alevistān, meaning the same: 'the region/country of (the) 'Alevī'. After the description of Asvān (Aswan), comes a paragraph, 28 lines long, entitled *Vilāyet-i 'Alevī*, of which only 8 lines are devoted to that country:

„The region (*vilāyet*) on the southern side of Asvān is called the region of (the) 'Alevī. It is a vast country stretching as far as *Habeş* and *Dembistān*.² There, too, because of the mild climate, are desirable girls, with hind-like, and gazelle-like eyes and nicely spoken. Each of them has a bright pretty face like Varaka,³ Gülşah,⁴ Leylā,⁵ Züleyhā,⁶ and 'Azrā.⁷ The notables of Asvān take from the region of (the) 'Alevī these stars[-like] pure maidens for wives. Some of them as virgins are excised

¹ Evliya Çelebi *Seyahatnamesi - Mısır, Sudan, Habeş (1672-1680)*, Onuncu cilt. İstanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1938. Cited further as *Seyahatname*.

² The Turkish editor reads *Dumbistan/Dumbiye* and Prokosch *Dümbistan/Dümbiye*. Erich Prokosch, *Ins Land der geheimnisvollen Func: des türkischen Weltenbummlers Evliya Çelebi Reise durch Oberägypten und den Sudan nebst der Osmanischen Provinz Habeş in den Jahren 1672/73*. Graz; Wien; Köln: Verl. Styria, 1994. (Osmanische Geschichtsschreiber; N.F., Bd.3). This reading is warranted whenever Evliya writes this name with long u (ü). He writes it also with a short vowel, hence reading *Dembistan/Dembiye*, which is more appropriate. Long u (ü) in this toponym is not unique to Evliya as 'Dumbea' is mentioned in one of the letters written (1630-1698) by Antonio da Pescopagano. C. Beccari, *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales Inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*. 1903-17, I, p. 395.

³ The male hero of a Persian romantic poem entitled "Varaka and Gulshah" by 'Ayyukī.

⁴ Sweetheart of Varaka.

⁵ Sweetheart of Majnun.

⁶ Zeliha, wife of Potiphar.

⁷ Vamik's sweetheart in the epic poem of Vamik and Azra by the Persian poet 'Unsurī.

[subjected to clitoridectomy]. They have not experienced menstruation or lochial discharges. However, for the most part, [while] giving birth they die. So tell the inhabitants of *Asvān*.”⁸

Some scholars proposed that in this passage concerning the country / region of (the) ‘*Alevī* Evliya referred to ‘Alwa, the Arabic name of the medieval Christian Kingdom of Alodia. Shatir Busayli claimed that, “After his departure from the town of Assuan he [Evliya] records an account of the Alwa vilayet”. Shatir Busayli, also, explained that, “the seat of Alwa is a town known by this name, and it is situated near Khartoum; and it never extended its rule beyond the second cataract”.⁹ Maria Teresa Petti Suma also equated *vilāyet-i ‘Alevī* with ‘Alwa („regione (vilayet) ... di ALEVI, ritengo ‘Alwa”), stating that Evliya uses this term „per indicare genericamente i paesi a sud di Aswan” (italics added). In a footnote, Petti Suma explained that „In realtà la regione di ‘Alwa (nome di un popolo e di un regno) era posto molto più a sud”.¹⁰ Erich Prokosch simply noticed that ‘*Alevistān* is a “Gegend südlich von ‘İsvān (Assuan)”¹¹, not defining how far to the south. Alosio Bombaci discussing the Abyssinian part of Evliya’s narrative left ‘*Alevistān* unidentified with a question mark.¹²

Shatir Busayli and Petti Suma, at first sight, were justified to connect the name ‘*Alevī* with ‘Alwa, as the Turkish ‘*Alevī* could be read ‘*Alvī* (the Turkish editor once reads ‘*Ulvī*) and could stand for Arabic ‘*Alwī* i.e. Alwan/Alodian (country/region/kingdom). However, Evliya does not mention ‘Alwa at all and using the adjective form he appears to emphasise not the country but its inhabitants i.e. the Alwans/Alodians or other Alevis (excluding the Dervishes of the ‘*Alevī*-order, though, whom he referred to before).¹³

Accepting that the above passage concerns ‘Alwa, Shatir Busayli and Petti Suma do not criticise Evliya for his anachronistic material (the Christian Kingdom is said to have succumbed to the pressure of Arab immigra-

⁸ *Seyahatname*, X, 830-831; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 95.

⁹ C. Bosasley [Shatir Busayli], “Evliya’ Celebi Travels in the Sudan in 1672/73 A. D.” *Cahiers d’Histoire Egyptienne*, tome X, p. 182.

¹⁰ Maria Teresa Petti Suma, “Il viaggio in Sudan di Evliya Celebi (1671-1672)”, *Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, n. s. XIV, II (1964), p. 436 and n. 20.

¹¹ Prokosch, op. cit., p. 318.

¹² Alessio Bombaci, “Il viaggio in Abissinia di Evliya Celebi (1673)”, *Annali del (R.) Istituto Superiore Orientale di Napoli N.S.* 2 (1943), p. 263.

¹³ Evliya mentions the ‘*Alevī*-order of the Dervishes and their seven cloisters (*tekye*) in Sohaj, in Upper Egypt. *Seyahatname*, X, p. 800; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 51, 299, n. 59.

tion as early as the 14th century,¹⁴ or ceased to exist by the second half of the 15th century¹⁵) but seem to correct him for localising ‘Alwa immediately south of Aswan. However, Evliya can not be blamed for any of these mistakes. Proceeding southwards, after Aswan he describes correctly *vilāyet-i ‘azīm-i Nūbe*.¹⁶ He knows for instance that the Nile, before it reaches *Asvān*, flows through the regions of *Fūncistān*, then *Berberistān* and then *Nūbe*,¹⁷ (approximate equivalent of medieval Alodia, Makuria and Nobatia).

The “account of the Alwa vilayet”, as Shatir Busayli calls it, does not deserve such a definition¹⁸ as it is merely a passing reference to a distant land from where the notables of Aswan used to acquire female slaves, and devoted entirely to the qualities and features of these women. Evliya does not write about medieval ‘Alwa, because he does not refer to the past and does not mention this name. In the 17th century, the name ‘Alwa was an anachronism and does not seem to have been in common usage.¹⁹ The Christian kingdom was remembered by Sōba, the name of its former capital.²⁰ Admittedly, the ‘*Al[e]vī*, if read ‘*Alvī* < Arabic: ‘*Alwī*, (Alwan/

¹⁴ P.M. Holt, “A Sudanese Historical Legend: the Funj Conquest of Sūba”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. XXIII, 1960, p. 11.

¹⁵ Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan. From the Seventh to the Early Sixteenth Century*. Edinburgh University Press. 1967, p. 132.

¹⁶ *Seyahatname*, X, pp. 8, 10, 43, 164, 828, 831; Prokosch, op. cit., pp. 96, 97, 153.

¹⁷ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 832; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁸ The title of the paragraph, *Vilāyet-i ‘Alevī* specially brought about by the editor of the *Seyahatname*, is not highlighted in the manuscript, therefore Prokosch rightly ignores this layout and gives a continuous translation, p. 95. *Vilāyet-i ‘Alevī* is not mentioned in the table of contents *fihris*t of the book ten of the *Seyahatname*.

¹⁹ Ogilby (1670) still mentions “Ghalwa [‘Alwa] seated on the Nile below Dankala [Dongola], 5 days journey”, John Ogilby, *Africa: being an accurate description of the regions of Aegypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid*. London: T. Johnson, 1670, p. 331. The name was erroneously written with *ghain* instead of *ain*, and probably borrowed from al-Idrisi, who made the same mistake. John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Nubia*. 1822. 2nd ed., p. 479, n. 30. Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Storia della Nubia Christiana*. Rome, 1938, p. 154.

²⁰ J.D.P. Chataway, “Notes on the History of the Fung. Note on the Hameg of Roscires. Particularly in Relation to Evidence of Connection with the Christian Kingdom of Soba”, *Sudan Notes and Records*, XIII, Pt. 2, 1930, p.256; O.G.S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar, with a Geographical Account of the Middle Nile Region*. Gloucester, 1951, p. 28, 152. Giovanni Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan*. 1981, p. 214. Allesandro Triulzi, “Myths and Rituals of the Ethiopian Bertha”, p. 182, in: M. Lionel Bender, (ed.) *Peoples and Cultures of the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands*. 1981. d’Abbadie’s informants, Muslim pilgrims, told him about great ancient town, to-day [1842] in ruins, called ‘Suba’. Antoine d’Abbadie, *Géographie de l’Éthiopie: ce que j’ai entendu, faisant suite a ce que j’ai vu*. 1890, p. 49, 59.

Alodian) could be the country/kingdom of the 'Alvī otherwise 'Alvistān, and indicate the existence of the dynasty or people of former 'Alwa if it migrated, as proposed by Jay Spaulding, south and east out of the Funj control after the collapse of the Christian Kingdom.²¹

So what did Evliya really mean by 'Alevistān? Where was it situated? Let us examine some references to that region, overlooked by other authors.

'Alevistān must have been situated at some considerable distance from Asvān if, as Evliya claims, it extended to *Dembistān/Dembiye*, i.e. the kingdom of Ethiopia with its capital at Gondar, north of Lake Tana. It also bordered on *Habeş* by which Evliya means the region of Suakin, Arkiko and Massawa, under the administration of the *nā'ib*, indigenous chieftain, originally appointed by the Ottoman government. The kingdom of the 'Alevī is said to have a common border with the *Sūdān* (otherwise *Fūncistān*), "in the direction of the north wind"²² i.e. along the axis north-south. Moreover, 'Alevistān is mentioned between *Dembistān* and the 'Abāb[i]de people,²³ i.e. 'Abābda, an Arabic speaking tribe of Beja in Upper Egypt with branches in the Sudan, in Berber²⁴ and Shendi Districts.²⁵

Approximately half way between Gondar (Lat. 13°10' N Long. 37°00' E), the capital of *Dembistān/Dembiye*, and Berber (Lat. 18°01' N Long. 34°00' E), the place populated by the 'Ababda, there is Kassala (Lat. 13°32' N Long. 33°41' E), which in 1840 became the capital of the province of Taka (al-Tāka),²⁶ meaning the country in and around the Gash delta,²⁷ or the southern part of the Kassala province.²⁸ This province could be considered to be the region equally situated between the 'Abāb[i]de and *Dembiye*, as well as *Habeş* and *Dembiye*.

Some other references in the *Seyahatname* support such a localisation of this region on the map thanks to names of its immediate neighbours. According to Evliya, a tree called *şecere ül-hat*²⁹ is well known in the

²¹ Jay Spaulding, "The Fate of Alodia", *Meroitic Newsletter*, 15, Oct. 1974, p. 14.

²² *Seyahatname*, X, p. 892; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 181.

²³ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 948; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 261.

²⁴ Burckhardt, *Travels*, p. 195.

²⁵ A. Paul, *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan*. Cambridge, 1954, p. 143. Cited further: Paul, *Beja*.

²⁶ Richard Hill, *On the Frontiers of Islam. Two Manuscripts Concerning the Sudan under Turco-Egyptian Rule 1822 – 1845*. 1970, p. 100.

²⁷ D.C. Cumming, "The History of Kassala and the Province of Taka". *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. XX, Part I, 1937, p. 3.

²⁸ Hill, op. cit., p. 193, n. 1.

²⁹ Prokosch translates: Schriftbaum.

following regions or countries of: *İsne*, *Asvān*, *Sūdān*, *Fūncistān*, *Nūbe*, *Dembiye*, 'Alevī and *Habeş*.³⁰ The Equator is to be found in the First Clime and it passes through *Berberistān*, 'Alevistān, *Dembistān*.³¹ People of *Habeş*, rulers and inhabitants of *Fūncistān*, *Dembistān* and 'Alevistān as well as the 'Abābide ['Ababda] obey commands of *Qara* [black] *Nā'ib*.³² The Pasha of *Musova* (Massawa) sends gifts to kings of *Fūncistān*, *Dembistān*, *Zenc*, 'Alevī, and *Zeyla'istān*.³³

The sequence of toponyms is, more or less, consistent. Only in the last sentence 'Alevī is placed exceptionally between Somaliland (*Zenc*) and



³⁰ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 832; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 97.

³¹ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 898; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 190.

³² *Seyahatname*, X, p. 948; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 261.

³³ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 943; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 254.

Adal/Aussa (*Zeyla'istān*). Otherwise, from all these references a general picture emerges: 'Alevistān, in the west, borders partly on *Berberistān* (Nubia) and *Fūncistān* (Funj Kingdom/Sultanate of Sennar), differently *Sūdān*; in the south on *Dembiye*, *Dembistān* (Ethiopia); in the north and the east on *Habeş* (modern north-eastern Sudan and Eritrea).

Of the possible areas between *Dembiye* and *Habeş* the Taka/Kassala province of the Sudan seems the most likely, and therein probably 'Alevistān is to be looked for. This choice is supported, though indirectly, by one more detail given by Evliya. While describing³⁴ the gorge of the cataracts (*Şellālāt boğazi*) near Aswan, he speaks of two legendary canals - branches of the Nile dug in ancient times.³⁵ South of Aswan, according to Evliya, in a place called *Shellāl*, "in olden days, as the rocks stemmed the flow of the river, the Nile divided itself into two branches. One ran towards the *iqīm* of *Habeş*, whereas the other flowed from the country of the 'Alevī towards *Sevākin* [Suakin] where it fell into *Bahr-i Kulzūm* [the Red Sea]."³⁶

A similar notion is found on European older maps³⁷ covering the whole of Africa on which at or above Aswan the Nile divides into two branches coming from the south-west and south-east respectively.³⁸ It would appear that Evliya failed to realise that if in Aswan the Nile flows northwards, therefore waters of its tributaries (canals), even if stemmed by rocks, could not have run south-east as he implies "towards the *iqīm* of *Habeş*". In order to flow towards *Habeş* the river must have originated much further to the south in comparison with the location of Aswan. Still, there is a core of truth in these details on condition that one disregards the two branches as pertaining to the Nile. Once they are "detached" from the Nile and Aswan, then they become two separate rivers, both flowing northwards.

The identity of the right (eastern) one is obvious. The watercourse nearest to Suakin that almost flows into the Red Sea is the Baraka/Barka river. Evliya's vague information echoes the more precise one given by Ibn Hawqal (middle of the 10th c.): "The Barka flows from the land of the Habasha, passing through [the regions] of Bāzīn people and going in the

³⁴ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 835; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁵ A canal is known to have been dug at Aswan by Egyptian King Senusret III. Leslie Greener, *High Dam over Nubia*. 1962, pp. 89, 117.

³⁶ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 835; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 102.

³⁷ These begin with Carignano (c. 1320), Dalorto (1325), Dulcert (1339) and their imitators, and Pizzigani (1367). O.G.S. Crawford, "Some Medieval Theories about the Nile," *Geographical Journal*, CXIV (1949), p. 7. Cited further as Crawford, *Nile*.

³⁸ According to Crawford, the two rivers uniting at Aswan represent the Atbara and the Nile and Blue Nile. Crawford, *Fung*, p. 219.

direction of the Beja; it falls into the salty sea between Sawākin and Bādi'." ³⁹ The Barka rises in the Eritrean Highlands near Himberti and, following its confluence with the Anseba, reaches the Red Sea not far from Tokar⁴⁰ (Lat. 18°13' N Long. 35°02' E). Although it now loses itself in a delta at Tokar, the Baraka, once, as Ibn Hawqal and Evliya claim,⁴¹ must have reached the Red Sea.⁴²

The left (western) branch, named by Evliya, that "ran towards the *iqīm* of *Habeş* could be Gash - Mareb, once the tributary of Atbara⁴³ but now ending in its own delta,⁴⁴ running more or less parallel with the Baraka. If this assumption is correct then "two branches of the Nile", as mentioned by him, are in fact two separate rivers, which did not join the Nile⁴⁵ (unless the Gash - Mareb is replaced with the Atbara).

On the basis of these vague geographical details, and a good deal of guesswork, regions situated along rivers Baraka and Gash - Mareb emerge so far as the plausible territory for localising of 'Alevistān i.e. extending from the Taka/Kassala province of the Sudan to south-western regions of Eritrea. Evliya placed the country of the 'Alevī somewhere along the (eastern) "branch of the Nile", i.e. the Baraka that "flows to the Red Sea". If 'Alevistān were to be situated along the Baraka it would have been found already within *Habeş* because most of the Baraka flowed through the territory of what the Ottomans considered *Habeş* in the 17th century.⁴⁶ In or-

³⁹ Belyaev, V. I. & D.A. Olderogge (eds.), *Arabskie istochniki X-XII vekov*. (Drevnie i srednevekovye istochniki po etnografii i istorii narodov Afriki yuzhnogo Sahary). Moskva Leningrad 1965, II, p. 61, (cited further as *Arabskie istochniki*); Crawford, *Fung*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ K. M. Barbour, *The Republic of the Sudan: a Regional Geography*. University of London Press, 1961, pp. 36-37, 226-228; Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians, An Introduction to Country and People*, 1973, 3rd ed., p. 24.

⁴¹ A similar statement is found in a History of the Sudan, 1822-1841, by an unidentified European author who writes that, "a great torrent which comes down from the mountains on the Abyssinian border (...) flows into the Red Sea near Sawakin". Hill, op. cit., p. 96 and n. 1. d'Abbadie's informant, "L'homme de Dongola affirme qu'il connaît le 'Ansaba parfaitement bien, qu'il attaint Tokar au sud de Sawakin et qu'il mêle ses eaux aux eaux salées (mer Rouge)." d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴² Crawford, *Nile*, p. 12.

⁴³ Thus shown as "Gozc R." on the map of John Senex, (1709). d'Abbadie's informant, 'natif de Dongola' believed that "Le Gax [Gash] se joint au Atbara en amont de Goz Rajab". d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ On the map of John Senex (1709), the Mareb ("Maroba R.") runs separately from the Gash and flows in the Atbara. Paul, *Beja*, p. 94.

⁴⁶ See the southern border of the vilayet/eyalet of *Habeş* in: Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun güney siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti*. İstanbul, 1974, folding map.

der to agree with other details given by Evliya, namely that 'Alevistān is found between *Habeş* and *Dembiye* a region rather along the Gash – Mareb should be considered as the territory of the country of (the) 'Alevī.

Although Evliya claims to know of some European Mappa Mundi, called by him "Papamonta",⁴⁷ he most likely relied to a great extent on information supplied by traders, pilgrims, slaves. Travellers, who used informants extensively, like for instance Antoine d'Abbadie, almost two hundred years after Evliya, as regards rivers, on the whole obtained wrong information. One of the mistakes made by informants was confusing the [Gash-]Mareb with the Anseba,⁴⁸ the tributary of the Baraka, or the Baraka itself.⁴⁹ One finds even more uninformed views, like: "gros torrent de Barka inférieur, se jette dans le Marab qui va à Dongola"⁵⁰ Even those informants who knew the true layout of rivers did not avoid mistakes like "Marab qui vient du pays de Gax [Gash] et leur eaux réunies [true] vont vers Sawakin [false] et finissent je ne sais où".⁵¹ Erroneous views, concerning the relationship between the Gash and the Baraka, were held also by European authors as late as 1856.⁵² It is not surprising that Evliya, from scraps of obscure information, failed to make sense of it, if local informants and later European explorers could not either.

By analogy to other identifiable countries and regions named in the *Seyahatname* and cited so far, it is evident that 'Alevistān, appearing six times in different contexts, is not a fictitious country invented by Evliya. So why is the kingdom/country of (the) 'Alevī not mentioned in other, earlier or contemporary sources? Or is it referred to by another name?

Evliya's contemporary, Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704) in his *History of Ethiopia* (1682), stated that the king of Sennar "possesst a part of the ancient Nubia, near to which adjoined the kingdom of Balou, whose inhabitants are by the Portuguese called Balaous. Their king was formerly Lord of Suaqem..."⁵³ However, on Ludolf's map of Abyssinia, (1683), west of "Balou R.[egnum] Pars" is "Dequin R. Pars" and further west "Nubiae R. Pars". Whereas in the *History of Ethiopia*, Nubia (in this case Evliya's *Berberistān/Fūncistān*), is adjacent to the Kingdom of Balou, on the map, it is contiguous to the Kingdom of Dequin.

⁴⁷ *Seyahatname*, p. 842; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 113.

⁴⁸ d'Abbadie, p. 38: "le Marab prend le nom de 'Anseba"; pp. 38, 46: "Marab ('Anseba)";

⁴⁹ "le Marab va près de Sawakin", d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵⁰ d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵¹ d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵² Hill, op. cit. p. 96, n. 1.

⁵³ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 116.

Could the name 'Alevī be identical with Balou and the territory of 'Alevistān with Dequin? And furthermore could it be the Taka/Kassala region of the Sudan? Let us consider all possibilities, one by one.

For Ludolf, Balou is a toponym. At the same time, as we shall see, it is an ethnonym, linked with the Arab immigrants from Hadramawt. This Arab immigration provides a clue for the identification of the name of (the) 'Alevī. Turkish word 'Alevī is identical with Arabic 'Alawī, the name of a large and influential clan of South Arabian Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet) and Sufis living in Hadramawt.⁵⁴ According to Sayyids writers, the great emigration to Africa took place in the 14th and 15th centuries.⁵⁵ Sherif Mohamed el Alawi, is said to have come to Suakin from Mecca in 1451.⁵⁶ He had a daughter Hadat, also called Sherifa Alawia, who became ancestress of the Hadendowa/Hadendoa.⁵⁷ Apart from the Beja, al-'Alawi clan is connected in traditions with the Funj, also through intermarriage.⁵⁸

The Sayyids of Hadramawt, in South Arabia, used genealogical term Bā to form individual and collective proper names, e.g. Bā 'Alawī⁵⁹, Bā Saffār⁶⁰, etc. Thus 'Alawī is identical with Bā 'Alawī > Ba'alawī. The Beja, speakers of the Bedawi language (tu-Bedawiye), utilise the word Belawī (<Ba'alawī) to describe an Arab. In their language, 'Belāwī' is used as the synonym of "Arab, 'Arabi' or, Arabīna", but Arabic language is called 'tū-Belāūye', and Arabia: 'Belāūyēt būr'.⁶¹ The Bilawia or Balawiyin or Balwa are mentioned in the traditional histories of the Beja.⁶² The etymology of the word 'Belāwī' is inadvertently explained by Shaykh Muhammad Ibrahim, of the Amarar (Amar'ar) tribe, the author of the *History of the Beja*, when he says that "Bilawia was the first tribe to enter the

⁵⁴ R.B. Scrjcant, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*. An Inaugural Lecture delivered on 5 June 1956. S.O.A.S., 1957, passim.; O. Löfgren, "Bā 'Alawī", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, 1960, p. 828.

⁵⁵ Scrjcant, *Saiyids*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ According to another tradition he came under the reign of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwan, T.R.H. Owen, "The Hadendowa". *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. XX, Pt. II, 1937, p. 184. The fifth Umayyad caliph reigned 685-705.

⁵⁷ Owen, Hadendowa, p. 208; Crawford, *Fung*, p. 122.

⁵⁸ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 175, 176.

⁵⁹ O. Löfgren, "Bā", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, 1960, p. 828. The name of Bā 'Alawī, which is shortened form of Bāni 'Alawī i.e. descendants of 'Alawī was adopted by the descendants of 'Alawī bin 'Ubaidullah bin Ahmad bin 'Isa.

⁶⁰ Bā Saffār, claimed by the Artayqa to be their ancestor, moved during the 15th century from Hadramawt to Sawakin, where he took a Bejawi or a Balu wife. Hasan, *Arabs*, p. 142. Andrew Paul believes that this happened about 800. Paul, *Beja*, p. 73.

⁶¹ Leo Reinisch, *Wörterbuch der Bedaue Sprache*. 1895, p. 253.

⁶² Crawford, *Fung*, p. 110, and n. 14.

Beja country; Bilawiyin were Arabs living between Mecca and Medina, and they came from Arabia to the Sudan before it was conquered by the Muslims",⁶³ and dwelt in the Beja and mingled with them.⁶⁴

The Balaw ruling-caste, dominated the Beja of the Suakin-Massawa hinterland.⁶⁵ At the turn of the 16th century the Bellou were pushed south.⁶⁶

Francisco Alvarez (1540) observed, "At the end of the kingdom of Bagamidri [Begemder, i.e. Evliya's *Dembiye*] has [on its frontier] Moors who are called Bellōo, and are vassals of Prester John, paying as tribute a large quantity of horses. And to the north these Belloo border on a people called Nobii: and these say that they were Christians [formerly] and ruled by Rome."⁶⁷ In another place the Bellōo were regarded as being between Abyssinia [Evliya's *Dembiye*] and the Nobii⁶⁸ [in this case the inhabitants of *Fūncistān* and *Berberistān*].

The Spanish missionary, Pedro Paez (died 1622), after describing Tigre, says that next beyond it begins the great kingdom called Deguin, inhabited by very black Moors called Balōus who are not subject to Abyssinia and supply the Emperor with many fine horses. In Deguin is a river which goes below ground and whose waters are divided into many parts by the Moors, for which reason it is called Tacâ 'scattered water' or the place of the dividing water. "A river which goes below ground" called 'Tacâ' suggests that for Paez, Dequin, the kingdom of the Balōus, was the region of Taka (Kassala) and the Gash delta.⁶⁹

Spanish rendering of the name Dequin, in Portuguese sources becomes Dequim. Emmanuel d'Almeida (1628-43) describing the course of the 'Tacazee' (Takazze) says that it passes from the province of Holcâit (now Wolkayt) to the hot lowlands of the Cafres [pagan Barea] and the kingdom of Deqhim, inhabited by Moors [Muslims] called Ballous. In the middle of

⁶³ Hasan, *Arabs*, p. 15 and 218, n.86.

⁶⁴ Crawford, *Fung*, pp. 110-111; Paul, *Beja*, p. 65. As it was reckoned a disgrace for women to emigrate, Sayyids married into the countries of their adoption. Serjeant, *Saiyids*, p. 27.

⁶⁵ Holt, "Bedja", p. 1158.

⁶⁶ Paul, *Beja*, p. 140.

⁶⁷ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 113. Vantini claims that Alvarez called "Nobiis" (Nubians) the inhabitants of the region of Taka "who were at five or six days' distance from the limits of the territory of the Barnagais" i.e. the Bahr Negash, the Viceroy of the sea province – now Eritrea. Vantini, *Christianity*, 1981, p. 201.

⁶⁸ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 114.

⁶⁹ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 114; Crawford, *Nile*, p. 20.

this kingdom it joins the Nile⁷⁰ (more precisely first becoming the Setit and then the Atbara).

Dequin, locality and people/region (?) still appears prominently on the map by J. B. Bourguignon d'Anville in his "Dissertation sur les Sources du Nil", published in 1759⁷¹ dividing half way 'Tacazé' from 'Astaboras' (Atbara). The name is old and appears in Arab medieval sources as D.k.n./D.g.n, the name of a river, of a region, and of a people. Ibn Hawqal (middle of the 10th c.) talks about a river called Dujn or Dukn. It ends in the fields of [the region of] Dujn, which consists of villages set closely together. As this name is written once with *jim* and once with *kaf*, it may have been pronounced Dugn. It could be another variant of Dequin and is identified with the region of Kassala and the Gash delta.⁷²

Ibn Selim al-Aswani (Ibn Sulaym al-Uswani, 2nd half of the 10th c.) describes a **people**: "On this river dwells a race of mixed origin, of Aloa ['Alwa] and of Bedja, called Deyhyoun [<Dijiun⁷³ = Digiun], and another race called Nara".⁷⁴ O.G.S. Crawford equated Deyhyun with Dequin⁷⁵ and placed Deyhyoun/Digiun somewhere in the region of the Atbara, between the Beja on the one side, and the Kingdom of 'Alwa on the other.⁷⁶ However, the mention of 'Nara' (Nera), another name for the "Barea", "Barya", "Baria", who nowadays live in western Eritrea, brings the 'Deyhyun' [<Dijiun/Digiun], closer to the region of the Gash, especially that "En général dans le pays de Gax [Gash] tous les nègres sont appelés Barya".⁷⁷

All these sources provide evidence for the perpetuation of the name of Dequin in various forms. Crawford placed Dukun⁷⁸ or Duqein⁷⁹ in the delta, between the western and the eastern Gash. A possible survival of the old name is in "a small settlement called Duqein"⁸⁰ or the present village

⁷⁰ Beccari, *Rerum*, V, p. 25. See also pp. 42, 329; Crawford *Fung*, p. 115.

⁷¹ Reproduced in: John O. Udall, *The Nile in Darkness. Conquest and Exploration 1504-1862*, 1998, p. 5.

⁷² Crawford, *Fung*, p. 108; *Arabskie istochniki*, II, p. 60; Paul, *Beja*, p. 71.

⁷³ Corrected so by Harold A. MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan, and Some Account of the People who Preceded Them and of the Tribes Inhabiting Darfur*. Cambridge, 1922, I, p. 171.

⁷⁴ Burckhardt, *Travels*, p. 453; Crawford, *Fung*, p. 114-115.

⁷⁵ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 106.

⁷⁶ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 114-115.

⁷⁷ d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷⁸ Crawford, *Fung*, map, p. 103.

⁷⁹ Crawford, *Fung*, map, p. 97.

⁸⁰ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 114.

of Degein,⁸¹ otherwise spelt Digein/Dagein/Degain.⁸² Such an identification of Dequin would justify placing the Balaw in the Gash/Kassala region.

According to Andrew Paul, in the 16th century the kingdom of the 'Bellou' stretched from Suakin to the Gash,⁸³ or they were "still the dominant authority in the area between Suakin and the district of Mazaga, at the confluence of the Atbara and the Setit",⁸⁴ as shown on the map of John Senex (1709), where the 'Kingdom of Balous' stretches between 'Suaquem' (Suakin) and 'Massoua' (Massawa), and in the south-west includes Mazaga. On Almeida's map (1662), north of 'Magaza' [Mazaga] and north of the 'Tacasê' and the Mareb confluence (which, as Takazze and Mareb do not join, in reality would have to be Takazze - Setit and Atbara confluence) 'Reino deQhim' still appears in 1662, about ten years before Evliya's travel, as well as the name 'Ballous', written on the map further north.⁸⁵ Mazaga/Mezaga is said to have been the home of one division of the 'Bellou'.⁸⁶ Some authors place Mezaga in the low country north of Walkeit, or between the Setit, the Atbara, and the Mareb, or further south at Gallabat.⁸⁷ Placing the Balaw in the territory outlined by the Setit, Atbara, and Mareb brings them close to the Taka/Kassala province, and roughly agrees with modern "zona Mezzegà a sud-est della piana di Badumà".⁸⁸

Out of numerous references to the Balaw, here only a selection is presented of those that facilitate the connection from Evliya's starting point i.e. the Baraka › the Gash › Dequin/Balaw › Taka/Kassala and provide geographical background to support this identification of the region in question. To sum up, *vilāyet-i 'Alevī' 'Alevistān* could tentatively be identified with Dequin, the kingdom of the Balous, or Reino deQhim/Deqhim, otherwise known as the kingdom of Balaw/Balau/Balou/Baloo. In the 17th century, if we are to believe what can be deduced from Evliya's vague and scarce information, it may have been situated in the modern province of Kassala and the Gash delta.

⁸¹ Paul, *Beja*, p. 71.

⁸² National Records Office Archives, Kassala 4.2/019/078; 4.2/020/081.

⁸³ A. Paul, "Notes on the Beni Amer". *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. XXXI, Part 2, 1950, p. 224.

⁸⁴ Paul, *Beja*, 81.

⁸⁵ Descrição do Imperio de Aethiopia, Pello P. Manoel Dalmeida da Comp de Iesus. Ann M DC. LXII. Map reproduced in Beccari, *Rerum*, V.

⁸⁶ C. G. and Brenda Z. Seligman, "Notes on the History and Present Condition of the Beni-Amer (Southern Beja)", *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. 13, Pt 1, 1930, p. 92.

⁸⁷ Seligman, *Beni Amer*, p. 92, n. 1.

⁸⁸ Guido Corni, *Tra Gasc e Setit: note di viaggio: Missione Corni-Calciati-Bracciani*. Roma. [1930], p. 97.

The likelihood of the 'Alevī inhabiting land near the river is strengthened by the last clue supplied by Evliya, namely the word for 'crocodile', which in the country of the 'Alevī is called *shunshar* or *shushar*.⁸⁹ Accordingly, one would expect the inhabitants of 'Alevistān to live near a river frequented by crocodiles. A modern visitor to the region of Kassala (near Tessenei, on the Eritrean side of the border) noticed that, on the banks of the Eloschiek, a waterless tributary of the Gash, near the village of Alabu, all the rivers in this region were dry, and "at depths of four to six feet below the river beds which were cracked with the drought, crocodiles were embedded in thick mud, sleeping their summer sleep until the rains of the monsoon brought water and liberty".⁹⁰ Crocodiles are also found in the neighbouring Setit⁹¹ and other rivers.⁹²

The question is which language does the word belong to? The first choice is to look for it in languages spoken nowadays in the eastern Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Dictionaries, chosen at random of about twenty languages spoken in these countries, give different words for 'crocodile'.⁹³

One might assume that the word *shunshar* / *shushar* for 'crocodile' is in fact the only firm clue that might conclusively enable the identification of the 'Alevī people and their language. Yet this may prove to be a forlorn hope as Evliya can be unreliable. For example, his glossary of the *Habešī* (i.e. Abyssinian) language turned out to be Kanuri,⁹⁴ language spoken mainly in Nigeria and neighbouring countries.⁹⁵ Likewise, in this case,

⁸⁹ *Seyahatname*, X, pp. 346, 349 respectively.

⁹⁰ Hartlmaier, P. *Golden Lion: A Journey through Ethiopia*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956, pp. 41-42.

⁹¹ Corni, op. cit., p. 206.

⁹² Tellez and Alvarez mention crocodiles and hippopotami in the Takazze and Sir Samuel W. Baker in the Atbara and in the Dinder. S.W. Baker, *The Nile Tributaries of Abyssinia and the sword hunters of the Hamran Arabs*. London, 1894, p. 64, 163, 359.

⁹³ Afar (Parker-Hayward); Baiso (Haberland); Badditu (Cerulli), Bedaue (Reinisch), Beja (Hudson); Chamir (Reinisch); Ciala Guraghe (Viterbi), Galla (Foot); Gofa (Cerulli), Kunama (Englund), Oromo (Viterbo), Qemant (Conti Rossini); Saho (Reinisch); Saho - dialect (Conti Rossini), Sidamo (Moreno); Somali (Ghika), Somali (Leslau), Tigre (Beaton/Paul); Wolamo (Cerulli), Zala (Cerulli). So far the nearest to *shushar* is the word *shosha* meaning 'snake' in Wollamo. M.L. Bender, "Analysis of a Barya Word List", *Anthropological Linguistics*, 1968, 10.9: 1-24. Wolamo (Walamo) is a Cushitic language spoken on the left bank of the Omo between it and River Billate. A. Tucker and M. Bryan, *The Non-Bantu Languages of north-eastern Africa*. 1956, p. 127.

⁹⁴ T. Habraszewski, "Kanuri - Language and People - in the «Travel-Book» (Siyahatname) of Evliya Çelebi", *Africana Bulletin*, 6 (1967), pp. 59-66.

⁹⁵ Barbara F. Grimes, (ed.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics. 1996. 13th edn.

languages spoken in countries situated west of the Sudan should also be examined. In Aiki / Runga, the language spoken in the Republic of Chad and the Central African Republic, a young (baby) crocodile is called 'sha(o)sha(o)'⁹⁶ and slightly resembles Evliya's *shusha(r)*. The Runga are listed among tribes from whom slaves were taken,⁹⁷ pointing out a possible informant. Finding the word *shunshar* / *shushar* in a language spoken in countries situated west of the Sudan does not necessarily exclude 'Alevistān from our search because in the region of the Gash – Mareb there may have been already in 1672 settlements of the Takruri (of West African origin).⁹⁸ In fact, Evliya's *Habeşī* (Abyssinian) that turned out to be Kanuri seems to confirm this.

Regrettably, the ethnographic details concerning the inhabitants of the 'Alevistān are of little help. Apart from the beauty of girls, and the custom of subjecting them to clitoridectomy and their consequential dying, Evliya says precious little.

Beauty is too general a criterion for identification of the women concerned, as many ethnic groups would qualify. Beautiful women are plentiful in various regions of the Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Burckhardt observed in Berber women who were Abyssinians by birth and found them "in general handsome, and many of them might even pass for beauties in any country".⁹⁹ Among the Agaw group, the womenfolk of Bilen, also known as Bogos, in the Keren area of Eritrea, are widely renowned for their graceful bearing and beauty.¹⁰⁰ But then one would have to consider numerous other judgements like, 'Le donne dei Gallas godono fama di essere tre le più belle di tutta l'Africa'.¹⁰¹ For this reason Abyssinian slaves consisted "principally of females of the Gala [Galla] nations".¹⁰² "La beauté physique est commune chez les Sinico qui sont plus ou moins chrétiens et parlent une langue très-voisine de Kaffa",¹⁰³ and so on, and so forth.

⁹⁶ John T. Edgar, *Maba – Group Lexicon*. 1991, p. 283, 383.

⁹⁷ R.S. O'Fahey, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Dār Fūr". *Journal of African History*, XIV, 1 (1973), p. 34, n. 28

⁹⁸ For the distribution of the various western settlers see: G. Ellero, "I Tacruri in Eritrea". *Rassegna di studi etiopici*, Vol. VI, fasc. II, 1947, 198-199; Crawford, *Fung*, p. 242-243.

⁹⁹ Burckhardt, *Travels*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁰ Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p. 37.

¹⁰¹ Pellegrino Matteucci, *Sudan e Gallas. Spedizione Gessi-Mateucci*. Milano 1879. p. 269.

¹⁰² Burckhardt, *Travels*, p. 277.

¹⁰³ d'Abbadie, op. cit., p. 151.

Equally widespread is the custom of clitoridectomy (and infibulation).¹⁰⁴ The Beja subject girls to excision of the labia minora, and infibulation.¹⁰⁵ Under Arab, Beja or Galla influence the custom of clitoridectomy is practiced among the Barea and the Kunama.¹⁰⁶ Among Cushitic peoples of Eritrea, the infibulation is practiced by the Danakil.¹⁰⁷ In Ethiopia, the Falashas carry out on girls excision (a kind of clitoridectomy).¹⁰⁸ These examples do not pretend to be exhaustive. One can see from them that the custom is so widespread that it does not make it possible to identify the people in question. It is worth noting, however, that Evliya supplies the unique early evidence of the problem of complications during childbirth caused by genital mutilation.¹⁰⁹

The arguments presented so far concerning the connection between the 'Alevī and the Balaw, are weakened by one puzzle: why did Evliya use the name 'Alevi-stān and not for instance 'Balevi-stān? In other words, why did he call the inhabitants of that country by their Arabic *nisba*:¹¹⁰ 'Alawī and not by the name Balaw used by the Beja, which, if our assumption is correct, developed from Bā + 'Alawī? As we have seen, in the traditions of the Beja, referred to above, members of the Bā 'Alawī clan were known by their *nisba* "el Alawī". Was Evliya's informant a member of the Bā 'Alawī family who used the name 'Alawī for the country governed by another, southern section of this aristocratic clan?¹¹¹ The Balaw are said to have been divided; one section had their headquarters at Suakin, the other at Mazaga.¹¹² The northern section of the Balaw passed under the supremacy of the Nabtab, the ruling caste, about the end of the 17th century.¹¹³

¹⁰⁴ Described in: Hill, op. cit, p. 25-26.

¹⁰⁵ G. P. Murdock, *Africa, its Peoples and their Culture History*. 1959, p. 316; Hjort af Ornäs, Gudrun Dahl. *Responsible Man. The Atmaan Beja of North-eastern Sudan*. 1991, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶ Murdock, op. cit., pp. 173, 316; M. Lionel Bender, *The Ethiopian Nilo-Saharan*. 1975, p. 14.

¹⁰⁷ P. Hartlmaier, *Golden Lion. A Journey through Ethiopia*. London 1956, p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ Ullendorff, *Ethiopians*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁹ A. El-Darccr. *Woman, Why do you weep? Circumcision and its consequences*. Zed Press. 1982; Nahid Toubia, "Female Circumcision as a Public Health Issue." *New England Journal of Medicine*, Sept. 15, 1994.

¹¹⁰ An adjective, forming part of a name, which indicates the bearer's descent or origin.

¹¹¹ It is worth recalling that Evliya once placed 'Alevistān between *Zencistān* and *Zeyla 'istān*, i.e. Adal/Aussa (Awsa). Interestingly, the "imamate" of Awsa passed by the middle of the seventeenth century into the hands of immigrant Sharifs of the Ba Alawi family of Hadramawt.

¹¹² Seligman, *Beni Amer*, p. 92.

¹¹³ Seligman, *Beni Amer*, p. 85, 90.

Alosio Bombaci believed that Evliya may have acquired all information regarding Abyssinia from the *kāhyā* (steward¹¹⁴) of *Qara Nā'ib* of Arkiko.¹¹⁵ The *na'ibs* were descended from the 'Belew' aristocracy of Arkiko, whose leading family obtained appointment as local "deputy" of the Ottoman Turkish governor of Massawa sometime in the late sixteenth century.¹¹⁶ The leading Balaw families intermarried with the Turkish garrison in Massawa.¹¹⁷ Evliya claims to have been a guest of the *nā'ib* of Arkiko,¹¹⁸ whom he describes in some detail, and who spoke perfect Turkish.¹¹⁹

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the Turkish traveller's vague and, some may say, suspect information. It is left to the scholars of the Sudan to interpret Evliya's data, and comment whether localisation of 'Alevistān' is plausible, in the light of historical events. Evliya Çelebi's "Book of Travels", being a rare early source, despite all its shortcomings, contains information not found in accounts left by the European visitors to the Sudan at the end of the 17th century and later. One would like to believe that Richard Hill was not mistaken when he referred to Evliya Çelebi's "tantalizing references which, if we could only interpret them, would greatly illuminate one of the darkest periods of Sudanese history".¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Bruce met "the Kaya of the Janizaries" i.e. lieutenant. James Bruce, *Travels To Discover the Source of The Nile*. Selected and edited by C.F. Beckingham. Edinburgh, 1964, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ Bombaci, op. cit., pp. 260, 264.

¹¹⁶ Tom Killion, *Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, 1998, p. 320.

¹¹⁷ Crawford, *Fung*, p. 131; Killion, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 948; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 259.

¹¹⁹ *Seyahatname*, X, p. 948; Prokosch, op. cit., p. 261.

¹²⁰ Richard Hill, *Pseudo Travellers. A catalogue of fraudulent and unauthenticated travel*. Cornmarket Press. N.d., p. 8.

MAGDALENA JODŁOWSKA

A NOTE ON THE TURKIC BACKGROUND OF A MATOR WORD FOR 'EASTERN'

Among Mator words of unknown or uncertain etymology there is one spelled *ирганъ* (? *irgən*) and attested in the phrase *ирганъ мерга* 'восточный вереп' (Helimski 255). There is no problem with Mator *мерга* 'wind' (*ibid.* 303) but no certain Uralic etymology of *ирганъ* could be found. Helimski's conjecture that it might be a Locative formation < Proto-Samoyed **ir-* 'das Vordere, Vorderraum' (Helimski 255) is not quite certain. The usual Locative suffix in Mator is *-gənä*. It is because of the suffix-final vowel which is lacking from four words only that Helimski 139 toys with the idea of a special adverbial function of what he calls "konsonantischer Lokativ", i.e. *-gən*. From among the words without the final vowel (*amgan* 'wozu, warum'; *hegen* 'außen, draußen'; *irgən* 'östlich'; *kagan* ~ *kägän* 'wann'; *ibid.* 140) two are provided with a question mark (*hegen* and *irgən*) and, besides, *irgən* is the only word in which the suffix vowel is not assimilated to the word-stem vowel (against the general rule in Helimski 139). Thus, there are two weak points (the phonetic value of *-ə-* and the lack of the final vowel of the suffix) in the interpretation of *ирганъ* as a Uralic Locative. No wonder then that Helimski 255 added the word "möglicherweise" to his explanation.

These facts make it legitimate to seek a foreign source for the given word. In view of the great amount of Turkic loan words in Mator, some of them being attested in a not really precise transcription, it seems quite natural to suppose a Turkic etymon of *ирганъ*. The word sounds, in fact, like a Turkic one; however, no concrete etymon could be found so far.

We owe the attestation of *ирганъ* to Grigorij Ivanovič Spasski (1806). It is noteworthy, however, that his cyrillic transcription of Mator words was anything but precise. His <a> can also stay for ä, and his <н> may also be read ŋ (Helimski 128, 129) so that the notation <ирганъ> can be read *irgan*,