

Staging Kurdish Alevi Rituals: *4Kapı 40Makam*

Sinibaldo De Rosa | Independent scholar

Over the last couple of years, a BIAA Study Grant and a Society for Dance Research Ivor Guest Research Award enabled me to expand my exploration of contemporary staged adaptations of Alevi rituals, which I initiated while completing a Research Master's in Turkish Studies at Leiden University (2013) and then a PhD in Drama and Music at the University of Exeter and Cardiff University (2020). This experience opened new directions in my study of contemporary Alevi performing arts and led to further reflection on my application of ethnographic, ethno-choreological and performance methods in Alevi Studies.

The support of the BIAA facilitated my review of the blossoming of contemporary theatre and dance productions at the intersections of Alevi and Kurdish cultures in Turkey. More specifically, the BIAA supported me in producing a movement score of *4Kapı 40Makam* ('4Doors 40Stations') (2011), a contemporary dance piece choreographed by Yeşim Coşkun (b. 1983) which adapts Alevi ritual forms for the stage while emphasising the Kurdish components within Alevism. Performed by a woman and a man surrounded by the audience on all sides, this choreography develops around repetitions and variations over precise movement phrases. The piece is conceived in four sections (*Şeriat*, *Tarikat*, *Marifet*, *Hakikat*), each inspired by the four doors and 40 stages that Alevi devotees are invited to traverse over their journey to attain spiritual perfection.

Thanks to the grant, between October 2021 and March 2022, I travelled to Istanbul to spend time in a dance studio and learn the dance with the choreographer. The experience resulted in the notation of two extracts from the piece (the sections *Şeriat* and *Marifet*) in Kinetography Laban, an internationally recognised system for analysing and recording human movement on paper. Over the first two days of working together, Yeşim clarified my analysis of the first section (*Şeriat*) which I had previously completed by examining several video recordings of the piece during the lockdown. Yeşim then taught me the third and fourth sections of the dance (*Hakikat* and *Marifet*) in the studio. Although I produced a first notation draft of most of the movements with the choreographer in Istanbul, all the sessions in the studio were videorecorded with different camera angles for examination later. This audio-visual material became crucial for my elaboration of the partition of the two sections notated. Finally, in September 2022, I presented this score at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse de Paris (CNSMDP) to obtain an Advanced Diploma in Movement Notation from this prestigious institution.

The dancer Ayhan Karağaç (b. 1989) also joined us in the studio. Ayhan danced the piece in its original duet form, but due to relocation abroad, he had not been part of the cast since 2017. Since he was now back working in Istanbul, Yeşim reviewed and taught him the choreography anew in preparation for a restaging of the piece which happened in December 2021 at Koma Sahnesi in Kadıköy. Ayhan's participation was important to refining my understanding of the movements, as it became for me the opportunity to witness the process of dance transmission from an outsider's perspective. The grant also enabled me to sharpen my analysis of the musical score of the piece thanks to a consultation with musician Can Uğur (b. 1979). Consulting Can has been especially important since Cavit Murtezaoğlu (1962–2020), the composer of the score, sadly passed away due to complications related to Covid-19 while I was working on this project.

Producing a notation score highlighted how the piece constitutes a meeting point between embodied knowledge within Alevi ritual traditions and modern and contemporary dance techniques developed in Europe and the United States, most notably the 'Movement Fundamentals' developed by Irmgard Bartenieff (1900–1981), a dance theorist and pioneer of modern movement therapy. The process of producing the movement score also made evident how the choreography was re-adapted throughout the years; for instance, for frontal view presentation to the audience, as well as to be performed as a solo or as an ensemble piece for a group of four or six dancers. More generally, the project helped me develop my research on political and cultural marginality through the frames of ritual and dance, and their documentation in movement notation.



The author, Sinibaldo De Rosa, learns the dance with choreographer Yeşim Coşkun.



4Kapı 40Makam (2011)

Chorégraphie : Yeşim Coşkun

Partitions des Extraits :
Şeriat et Marifet

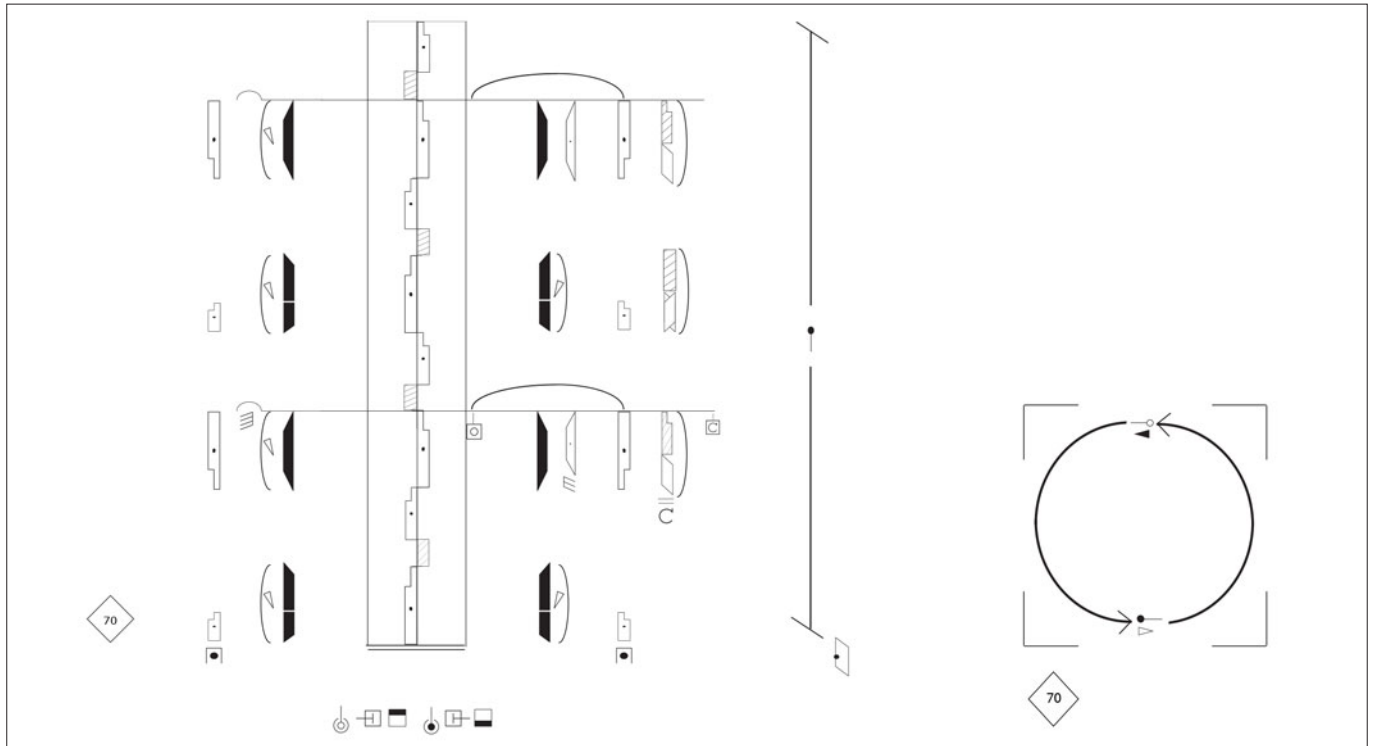
Notateur : Sinibaldo De Rosa

Professeur : Noëlle Simonet

The cover of the movement score produced by the author for the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse de Paris (CNSMDP).

The partition of *4Kapı 40Makam* will be the first Kinetography Laban score of a choreography produced in Turkey or by a Turkish choreographer. It will constitute an important resource for scholars interested in processes of hybridisation of Western modern and contemporary

dance techniques. More than contributing to scholarly engagements with Alevi and Kurdish cultural production, it will hopefully also open new paths for studies and practices of movement notation, in Turkey as well as internationally.



An extract from the score produced by the author, illustrating one of the movements in notation form,