

CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Fifth session
Nairobi, Kenya
November 2010

NOMINATION FILE NO. 00384 FOR INSCRIPTION ON THE REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN 2010

A. STATE(S) PARTY(IES)
<i>For multi-national nominations, States Parties should be listed in the order on which they have mutually agreed.</i>
Turkey
B. NAME OF THE ELEMENT
B.1. Name of the element in English or French
<i>This is the official name of the element that will appear in published material about the Representative List. It should be concise. Please do not exceed 200 characters, including spaces and punctuation. The name should be transcribed in Latin Unicode characters (Basic Latin, Latin-1 Supplement, Latin Extended-A or Latin Extended Additional).</i>
Semah, Alevi-Bektaşî ritual
B.2. Name of the element in the language and script of the community concerned, if applicable
<i>This is the official name of the element in the vernacular language corresponding to the official name in English or French (point B.1.). It should be concise. Please do not exceed 200 characters in Unicode (Latin or others), including spaces and punctuation.</i>
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B.3. Other name(s) of the element, if any <i>In addition to the official name(s) of the element (B.1.) please mention alternate name(s), if any, by which the element is known, in Unicode characters (Latin or others).</i> —
C. CHARACTERISTIC OF THE ELEMENT
C.1. Identification of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned <i>According to the 2003 Convention, intangible heritage can only be identified with reference to communities, groups or individuals that recognize it as part of their cultural heritage. Thus it is important to identify clearly one or several communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned with the nominated element. The information provided should allow the Committee to identify the communities, groups or individuals concerned with an element, and should be mutually coherent with the information in sections 1 to 5 below.</i> Alevi-Bektaşî Order is shaped around the religious figure of Ali - the fourth caliph following Muhammed the Prophet. The word Alevi could literally be translated as “admirer” or “follower” of Ali. Having nourished by a variety of beliefs, cultural sources and reached its maturity in Anatolia, Alevi Bektaşî Order has distinguished itself from mainstream Alevi belief system, with respect to its roots, formation processes and current cultural background. Alevi-Bektaşî belief system has been enhanced and cultivated by a great variety of beliefs and cultures ranging from Manichaeism to Zoroastrianism, Shamanism to Islam and ancient beliefs and cultures rooted in Anatolia as well. Common features of Alevi-Bektaşî Order with the beliefs or sects such as Shi’ism-Twelve Shi’ism (Caferilik) and Alawites (Nusayriler), which flourished in various locations and cultural surroundings and were included in generally-accepted scope of Alevi-Bektaşî belief, do not go beyond the love of Ah al-Bayt (Ehli Beyt) or interpretation of some specific events in the same way with respect to Islamic history. The Semahs to be mentioned here are neither known nor practiced by Caferis or Nusayris. There are different views on the origins of Semah linking it to Central Asian and Turkish Culture, ancient Anatolian civilizations and Islamic mythology.
C.2. Geographic location and range of the element and location of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned <i>This section should identify the range of distribution of the element, indicating if possible the geographic locations in which it is centred. If related elements are practiced in neighbouring areas, please so indicate.</i> As bearers and practitioners of semah tradition, Alevi-Bektaşî communities are existent all across Turkey, having concentrated in certain regions with different names. Çepni Alevis live in central and eastern part of Blacksea Region and in city of Balıkesir in Aegean Region. Tahtacı Alevis live in the area covering Mersin and Antalya cities in Mediterranean Region to Balıkesir and Çanakkale cities in Aegean Region. Sıraç Alevis live in Amasya, Çorum, Sivas, Tokat and Yozgat cities in Central Anatolia. Babağan Bektaşî community mostly lives in Northwestern Region and in mid-Aegean Region and lastly the Alevi communities affiliated to ocak’s (hearth) live in Central and East Anatolia.

C.3. Domain(s) represented by the element

Identify concisely the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element, which might include one or more of the domains identified in Article 2.2 of the Convention. (This information will be used primarily for visibility, if the element is inscribed.)

Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage.

Performing arts; transmission of rhetoric skills through songs recited by zakirs and prayers uttered by Dede (spiritual leader).

Social practices, rituals and festive events: regular semah performances in cem rituals.

D. BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENT

The brief description of the element will be particularly helpful in allowing the Committee to know at a glance what element is being proposed for inscription, and, in the event of inscription, will be used for purposes of visibility. It should be a summary of the description provided in point 1 below but is not an introduction to that longer description.

Semah is one of the main twelve services of the cem rituals which are considered as religious practices by Alevi-Bektaşî adherents. It can be described as a set of mystical and aesthetic body movements in rhythmic harmony performed by semahçis (semah dancers), accompanied by zakirs playing saz (musical performers in cem rituals).

1. IDENTIFICATION AND DEFINITION OF THE ELEMENT (CF. CRITERION R.1)

This is the key section of the nomination to satisfy criterion R.1: "The element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention". A clear and complete explanation is essential to demonstrate that the nominated element meets the Convention's definition of intangible heritage. This section should address all the significant features of the element as it exists at present, and should include:

- a. an explanation of its social and cultural functions and meanings today, within and for its community,*
- b. the characteristics of the bearers and practitioners of the element,*
- c. any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities towards the element,*
- d. the current modes of transmission of the knowledge and skills related to the element.*

The Committee should receive sufficient information to determine:

- a. that the element is among the "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills — as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith —";*
- b. "that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize [it] as part of their cultural heritage";*
- c. that it is being "transmitted from generation to generation, [and] is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history";*
- d. that it provides communities and groups involved with "a sense of identity and continuity"; and*
- e. that it is not incompatible with "existing international human rights instruments as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development".*

Overly technical descriptions should be avoided and submitting States should keep in mind that this section must explain the element to readers who have no prior knowledge or direct experience of it. Nomination files need not address in detail the history of the element, or its origin or antiquity.

Semah; originated from the Arabic word sema meaning heavens, fortune and hearing.

Semahs are the most effective instruments for the transmission of Alevi-Bektaşî tradition. Semah is one of the main twelve services of the cem rituals which are considered as religious practices by Alevi-Bektaşî adherents.

It is possible to encounter various kinds of semahs across Turkey with different musical characteristics and rhythmic structures. The fact that there are variations in melodic and lyrical structure of semahs with the same name is an evident sign of the richness in semah culture.

Centuries of oral transmission of semahs from generation to generation has enabled a rich diversity among semah culture.

One of the main principles on which semahs are conceptualized is the unity with God which happens through a natural cycle. In this cycle man comes from God and goes back to God which resembles the circulation of the celestial bodies in the universe. However, man is the locus of this circulation. God is omnipresent and semah is the way to reach God.

Hand and body motions in semahs have symbolical meanings. For instance, the motion in which one palm faces the sky while the other faces the earth is meant to say "You are God, we are the people, I come from You and hold your essence in me, I am not separate from You".

The motion in which palms first face the sky and then turned to the earth is meant to represent the same thought.

When semahçıs (semah dancers) face each other just like in Tahtacı Semah it means that God is present in man and people facing each other will witness the divine beauty of God in man's visage.

The motion in which semahçı (semah dancers) turns the palm of his hand to his face represents

man seeing his own beauty in the mirror and therefore he also witnesses the divine beauty of God.

When both palms facing the sky are pulled towards the heart it is meant “God I am Man, so God is in me” or “God is in Man”.

Semahs are categorized into two groups:

- 1- İçeri (private) semahs / Order semahs
- 2- Dışarı (public) semahs / Avare semahs

İçeri Semahs (Order semahs): They are performed in Cems (considered as religious practices by Alevi-Bektaşî adherents) where 12 services are carried out. It is not desirable to perform içeri semahs in front of those without the faith. They are performed in three phases:

- Ağırlama: The prologue with slow movements.
- Yürütme: The phase when the semahs gets faster and livelier.
- Yeldirme: The last phase when the semah is the fastest and hardest to perform.

While this three-phase composition of semahs is very prevalent it is possible to see other kinds of performances as well. In some semahs it is very difficult to distinguish these phases from each other.

Dışarı Semahs (Avare semahs, Yoz Semah or Mengis): They are performed independent of 12 services for the purposes of teaching the semah culture to younger generations or simply entertaining. Nevertheless, they are still loyal to semah principles. Dışarı semahs are mostly comprised of two phases; ağırlama and yürütme or ağırlama and yeldirme.

Although semah performances vary according to regions, the main characteristics are common:

- Semahs are performed by both women and men,
- While semahçısı (semah dancers) in içeri semahs are limited in number there is no such restriction for dışarı semahs.
- Semahçısı (semah dancers) start the semahs saluting and inviting each other.
- While performing semah, semahçısı (semah dancers) are in a circular order or facing each other, without touching or holding.
- Bağlama is usually the accompanying instrument to semahs but there are some regions where other rhythm instruments are also played during semahs.
- While there is no specific attire to be worn in semahs it is not uncommon to wear traditional clothes in rural cems (considered as religious practices by Alevi-Bektaşî adherents).
- When concluding semahs, dedes (spiritual leaders) usually say a prayer.
- Transmission of semah occurs through the performance of the tradition.

The basic characteristics and universal values reflecting the understanding of tradition bearers of Semah are as follows:

-According to followers of Alevi-Bektaşî belief, every human being has a divine essence and they see man in unity with God called as the belief of “En-el Hak” which means “I’m God”. Thus, during the worship they prostrate towards one another.

- Seeing man in unity with God, they internalize a humanist philosophy

- According to Alevi-Bektaşî belief, sharing is of great importance in social life. “Musahiplik” (a kind of fellowship as regards to Alevi-Bektaşî belief) in which each individual chooses one another as a spiritual brother or sister committing to care for spiritual, emotional, physical and financial needs of each other, for the purpose of creating a type of communion intimately tied.

- Alevi-Bektaşî believers object gender discrimination, therefore they pray side by side.

- Alevi-Bektaşî followers consider offending human being as equal to offending God; hence, through establishing a kind of judging mechanism called “düşkünlük”, they use a sanction power over the members to prevent them from committing misdeeds. If one commits any of those, s/he is declared as “düşkün” (shunned) and temporarily or permanently excommunicated from the community or society.

- The practices, traditional motifs and teachings are orally transmitted rather than written sources and distinct genres of art and literature particular to the tradition, thereby, have been created.
- They practice their authentic worship and cultural transmission through expressions like lyrics, music and Semahs.

2. CONTRIBUTION TO ENSURING VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS AND TO ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE (CF. CRITERION R.2)

The nomination should demonstrate (Criterion R.2) that "Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity".

Please explain how the element's inscription on the Representative List will contribute to ensuring visibility of the intangible cultural heritage and will raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of its importance. This section need not address how inscription will bring greater visibility to the element, but how its inscription will contribute to the visibility of intangible cultural heritage more broadly.

Explain how inscription will promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity, and will promote mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals.

Semahs are the most crucial elements in terms of transmission of the Alevi-Bektaşî tradition.

The aesthetics of semah performances have inspired various forms of visual arts (painting, sculpture, theatre, etc.) and related artistic products contribute to the visibility of this aesthetic aspect of semah (See: Photo 5).

Semahs play a crucial role fostering and enriching traditional music culture of Turkey as well as being an important instrument for raising awareness.

The authentic aspect of its oral structure and expression not only contributes to the overall visibility of traditional folk literature but also raises awareness as an example local literature.

Musical and dancing characteristics of semahs constitute a common language for humanity as artistic creations in which faith and art are harmoniously integrated to raise awareness in national and international platform. Moreover it enables a better platform for inter-societal dialogue.

The understanding of God-human unity and that everything will return to God has found its way in semah through circular movements which is derived from the movements of celestial bodies. Provided that this element is included in the Representative List, the authentic understanding of nature and universe, the symbolism and the conceptual depth of semah will better contribute to the universal awareness on ICH.

The human-centered perception of the world and the universe and humanist philosophy of semah are values which can contribute to the intercultural dialogue.

3. SAFEGUARDING MEASURES (CF. CRITERION R.3)

Items 3.a. to 3.c. request the elaboration of a coherent set of safeguarding measures as called for in Criterion R.3: "Safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element". Such measures should reflect the broadest possible participation of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned, both in their formulation and in their implementation.

3.a. Current and recent efforts to safeguard the element

Please describe the current and recent efforts of the concerned communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals to ensure the viability of the element. Describe efforts of the concerned State(s) Party(ies) to safeguard the element, taking note of external or internal constraints, such as limited resources.

1- "Nevşehir Hacıbektaş Semah Topluluğu (Nevşehir Hacıbektaş Semah Ensemble)" was established in 1997, in the province of Nevşehir (Hacıbektaş) as an affiliation of Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MoCT). The number of members of the ensemble which was 30 in the beginning has decreased to 16. The ensemble maintains its activities under the supervision of Directorate General of Fine Arts of MoCT and participates in various national and international organizations. (See: Appendix- DVD - Nevşehir Hacıbektaş Semah Topluluğu Performance)

2- Directorate General of Research and Training of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism carries out field studies which are registered in Information and Documentation Center of Folk Culture. (See: Supplementary Documents/References)

3- In Alevism-related activities carried out by MoCT, semah groups are encouraged to take parts and made publicly known. (See: Appendix – DVD – Hacı Bektaş Veli Commemoration Activities, Ankara 2009, Turhal Semah Ensemble)

More extensive and comprehensive safeguarding measures are taken with semah ensembles formed by Alevism-related NGOs.

3.b. Safeguarding measures proposed

For the Representative List, the safeguarding measures are those that may help to solidify the element's current viability and to ensure that its viability is not jeopardized in the future, especially as an unintended result of inscription and the resulting visibility and public attention.

Identify and describe the various safeguarding measures that are elaborated that may, if implemented, protect and promote the element, and provide brief information concerning, for example, their priority, scope, approaches, timetables, responsible persons or bodies, and costs.

The written opinions of semah and Alevi-Bektaşî NGOs, academicians and concerning public and private institutions as well as the outcomes of the meeting held on August 4, 2009 in Ankara between related parties were all taken into consideration to determine abovementioned safeguarding measures. (See: Appendix – Consulted Institutions List)

- For the purpose of making inventories in localities where authentic forms of semahs are preserved, variety of performances, communities and localities will be studied by MoCT in cooperation with universities and NGOs.

- Educational materials (film, book, catalog and multilingual web site) in cooperation with related institutions.

- Training issues related to Semah will be carried out by the community concerned and MoCT will provide technical assistance as regards to financing and legislation.

- In the framework of a training program semah courses will be initiated for the purpose of transmission of the tradition. In these courses those who are trained previously and have the basics of semah improve their knowledge nearby the master semahçıs (semah dancers).

- In cooperation with the media, concerning departments of the universities, NGOs, MoCT

will prepare and publish documentary films and books to create public awareness.

- To enhance the visibility/awareness on the element, exhibitions of photograph & art and contests of photograph, painting, poetry and short story will be held in 2010 in cooperation with MoCT and NGOs.

- In 2010, an international semah symposium will be held in cooperation with MoCT, universities and NGOs.

- At national and international levels, Semah Days activities, in which the bearers and the communities take part annually, will be organized in cooperation with NGOs and MoCT.

- Necessary initiatives will be taken in order to establish a Semah Museum by 2012. The collections to be exhibited in the museum will be provided by the cooperation of MoCT and NGOs.

- Through the network to be established by MoCT, information-sharing will be enabled among the communities and institutions concerned.

During the implementation phase of the action plan, a coordination committee will be assembled in coordination with MoCT, and NGOs.

3.c. Commitment of communities, groups or individuals concerned

The feasibility of safeguarding depends in large part on the aspirations and commitment of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned. This section should provide evidence that the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned have the will and commitment to safeguard the element if conditions are favourable. The best evidence will often be an explanation of their involvement in past and ongoing safeguarding measures and of their participation in the formulation and implementation of future safeguarding measures, rather than simple pledges or affirmations of their support or commitment.

Responsibilities of the concerning communities (Alevi-Bektaşî Organizations);

- Academic studies will be carried out,

- Publications regarding semah will be issued,

- Semah courses will be opened,

- Cems (considered as religious practices by Alevi-Bektaşî adherents), as important occasions for semah, will be encouraged.

3.d. Commitment of State(s) Party(ies)

The feasibility of safeguarding also depends on the support and cooperation of the concerned State(s) Party(ies). This section should provide evidence that the State Party concerned has the commitment to support the safeguarding effort by creating favourable conditions for its implementation and should describe how the State Party has previously and will in the future demonstrate such commitment. Declarations or pledges of support are less informative than explanations and demonstrations.

Responsibilities of the public institutions:

- Necessary measures will be taken to open new premises for Alevi-Bektaşî cem rituals.
- Several studies will be initiated to establish public institutions and institutes in universities regarding Alevi-Bektaşî faith and culture.
- Necessary funds will be transferred from MoCT and Prime Ministry Promotion Fund to concerning institutions for the preparation of academic publications (periodicals, books, etc.) and a documentary.
- MoCT will provide financial and technical assistance to Alevi-Bektaşî associations and foundations working on semahs.

4. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT IN THE NOMINATION PROCESS (CF. CRITERION R.4)

This section asks the submitting State Party to establish that the nomination satisfies Criterion R.4: 'The element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent'.

4.a. Participation of communities, groups and individuals in the nomination process

Describe how and in what ways the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned have participated actively in the nomination process at all stages, as required by Criterion R.4. States Parties are further encouraged to prepare nominations with the participation of a wide variety of other concerned parties, including where appropriate local and regional governments, neighbouring communities, NGOs, research institutes, centres of expertise and other interested parties. The participation of communities in the practice and transmission of the element should be addressed in point 1 above, and their participation in safeguarding should be addressed in point 3; here the submitting State should describe the widest possible participation of communities in the nomination process.

Requests for the inclusion of the element of semah in the national inventory, its safeguarding and registration in the Representative List was sent to MoCT Directorate General of Research and Training through local ICH boards which are comprised of representatives of concerning institutions, academicians, NGOs and bearers of ICH.

Directorate General of Research and Training has evaluated aforementioned requests in the Commission of Experts and concluded in the inclusion of the element in national inventory and that the nomination file should be prepared for the element to be registered in the 2009 Representative List.

After Directorate General of Research and Training has initiated nomination file preparations, it has asked for the written opinions of semah and Alevi-Bektaşî NGOs, academicians and concerning public and private institutions, and finally held a meeting on August 4, 2009 in Ankara in which 13 institutions were represented (See: Appendix – Participant List).

4.b. Free, prior and informed consent to the nomination

The free, prior and informed consent to the nomination of the element from the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned may be demonstrated through written or recorded concurrence, or through other means, according to the legal regimens of the State Party and the infinite variety of communities and groups concerned. The Committee will welcome a broad range of demonstrations or attestations of community consent in preference to standard or uniform declarations..

Please attach supporting evidence demonstrating such consent and indicate below what evidence you are providing and what form it takes.

Written statement of consent is attached.

4.c. Respect for customary practices governing access

Access to certain specific aspects of intangible cultural heritage is sometimes restricted by customary practices governing, for example, its transmission or performance or maintaining the secrecy of certain knowledge. Please indicate if such practices exist and, if they do, demonstrate that inscription of the element and implementation of the safeguarding measures would fully respect such customary practices governing access to specific aspects of such heritage (cf. Article 13 of the Convention). Describe any specific measures that might need to be taken to ensure such respect.

- İçeri Semah is a part of the traditional cem rituals which are performed in almost all regions of Turkey on certain days of the week.
- It's possible to see Dışarı Semahs in various occasions such as celebrations, festive events and commemoration days. Hacı Bektaş Veli and Abdal Musa Commemoration Ceremonies are two of such events which attract tens of thousands of people across Turkey and host semah performances as well as other activities.
- Nevşehir Hacıbektaş Semah Ensemble performs regularly in Hacıbektaş Museum on certain days of the week which can be seen by visitors.

5. INCLUSION OF THE ELEMENT IN AN INVENTORY (CF. CRITERION R.5)

This section is where the State Party establishes that the nomination satisfies Criterion R.5: "The element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies) as defined in Articles 11 and 12".

Identify the inventory in which the element has been included and the office, agency, organization or body responsible for maintaining that inventory. Demonstrate that the inventory has been drawn up in conformity with Articles 11 and 12, in particular Article 11(b) that stipulates that intangible cultural heritage shall be identified and defined "with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations" and Article 12 requiring that inventories be regularly updated.

The nominated element's inclusion in an inventory should not in any way imply or require that the inventory(ies) should have been completed prior to nomination. Rather, a submitting State Party may be in the process of completing or updating one or more inventories, but has already duly included the nominated element on an inventory-in-progress.

Turkey has two national inventories named as National Inventory of ICH and National Inventory of Living Human Treasures.

As the executive body, MoCT, in cooperation with its provincial directorates in 81 cities and a wide array of participation, formed "ICH Boards". These boards annually send the data they acquire from the research studies. Until recently, elements from the cities Adıyaman, Antalya, Aydın, Denizli, Erzincan, Kırıkkale, Muğla, Nevşehir, Sivas, Tokat and Tunceli are requested to be included in the inventory.

Directorate General of Research and Training along with Commission of Experts has evaluated the nomination proposal at the meeting held on 6 July 2009, and decided to include those elements in Intangible Cultural Heritage National Inventory of Turkey.

A “zakir” was proposed to be included in National Inventory of Living Human Treasures. This nomination proposal is still being evaluated by the Commission of Experts.

Aforementioned inventories involve safeguarding projects and measures at both local and national level, which enables the implementation of the Convention Principles.

DOCUMENTATION

a. Required and supplementary documentation

	Primary materials	Supplementary materials
Photos	CD – Photograph (10 items)	a- Bibliography b- DVD – Nevşehir Hacıbektaş Semah Ensemble Performance c- Documents list on <i>Semah</i> registered in the Documentation and Information Center by MoCT Directorate General of Research and Training. d- DVD – Commemoration activities of Hacı Bektaş Veli in 2009 e- DVD – <i>Semah</i> Performance (47 minutes)
Video	CD – 10 minutes	
Audio	—	
Maps	—	
Books	Book (1 item) ONATÇI, AYŞIT, Neşe, 2007, <i>Alevi-Bektaşî Kültüründe Kırklar Semahı: Müzikal Alan Çalışması</i> , Bağlam Yayıncılık, İstanbul.	

b. Cession of rights including registry of items

Required cession of rights provided.

c. List of additional resources

a) Bibliography:

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ESSAYS:

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ER, Piri, 1997, "Anadolu Aleviliğinde Semah ve Oyun Kavramları Üzerine" Türk Halk Kültürü Araştırmaları, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları Ankara s.102 – 108.

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c. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)

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Hacı Bektaş Veli Kültür ve Tanıtma Dernekleri Genel Merkezi
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Pir Sultan Abdal 2 Temmuz Kültür ve Eğitim Vakfı
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Date: 11 January 2010

Signature: <signed>