

# Characteristics of Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Turkey and their Comparison with Cases in Two other Cultures\*

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## Introduction

SINCE 1953 I have been collecting data on cases of the reincarnation type from a number of different cultures. In addition to studying individual cases with regard to the competing hypotheses which might explain the reported experiences in this type of case, I have initiated studies of the characteristics of all the cases (now numbering nearly a thousand) in different cultures. To date a sufficiently numerous group of cases has been collected for each of the following cultures: Eskimos of Alaska; Tlingits of Alaska; Thais, Ceylonese (Sinhalese and Tamil cases); Indian; Druses of Lebanon, Syria and northern Israel; Turks; and Western Europeans living in Europe and North America.

In 1966 I published a summary of characteristics found in 43 cases of the reincarnation type among the Tlingits of Alaska.<sup>1</sup> In another article I have summarized the main features of 28 Ceylonese cases of the reincarnation type.<sup>2</sup> In the present article I provide similar data on 52 Turkish cases and compare the characteristics of these cases with those occurring among the Tlingits and among the Ceylonese. The analysis of data from other cultures besides the Ceylonese has not yet progressed to the point of permitting valid comparisons with the Turkish and Tlingit cases except in a few features of the cases.

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1 Stevenson, I., Cultural Patterns in Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation Among the Tlingit Indians of Southeastern Alaska. *J. Amer. Soc. Psychical Res.* 60: 229-243, 1966.

2 Stevenson, I., Characteristics of Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon (to be published).



By a case of the reincarnation type I mean one in which the subject claims that he has lived before and justifies this claim by narrating memories of this previous life. The usual subject is a child between the ages of two and five when he first begins to speak of a previous life, but occasionally the subject is older and in Europe and North America often an adult. A number of cases have other associated features additional to the subject's claimed memories. Two other common features are "announcing dreams" (usually dreamed by the subject's mother when pregnant) concerning the identity of the person ostensibly being reborn; and birthmarks or deformities of the subject corresponding in appearance and location to wounds on the body of the related previous personality.<sup>1</sup> In addition, most of the subjects show behavioral traits which the informants report resemble those of the related previous personality to a significant extent.

The actual claims of the subject to remember accurately details of a previous life are often examined by the families concerned. More recently they have been investigated by myself in the course of numerous field trips to places where these cases are found most abundantly. I have reported elsewhere details of 21 cases suggestive of reincarnation from several different cultures<sup>2,3</sup> and further reports are in preparation.<sup>4,5</sup> In these case reports and accompanying discussions I have tried to weigh the merits of the cases with regard to the evidence they provide for the claims made for them, namely, that the subject has had real memories of a previous life. In the present report I am not concerned with asserting the authenticity of any *single* case or its interpretation as evidence for reincarnation. Instead, I am offering a summary of characteristics of the whole group of Turkish cases so far analyzed. That the discovered characteristics may also bear on the authenticity of the individual cases I shall consider later.

Before presenting the actual data of the cases I shall briefly describe the people among whom these cases are found most abundantly in Turkey, and then summarize their main ideas about reincarnation.

### **The Belief in Reincarnation in Turkey**

The vast majority of Turkish people are Muslims, and orthodox Muslims do not believe in reincarnation. There are, however, a number of Islamic

1 I use the term "present personality" for the subject, i.e., the person who has the memories of a previous life or who is otherwise identified as being the reincarnation of a deceased person whom I refer to as the "previous personality." I refer to the interval between the death of the previous personality and the birth of the subject (or present personality) as the "intermission."

2 Stevenson, I., *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. Proceedings Amer. Soc. Psychical Res., Vol. 26, 1966, 1-362.

3 Story, F., and Stevenson, I., A Case of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon. *J. Amer. Soc. Psychical Res.* 61: 130-145, 1967.

4 Stevenson, I. and Story, F., A Case of the Reincarnation Type in Ceylon: The Case of Disna Samarasinghe (to be published).

5 Stevenson, I., *Thirty Additional Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (in preparation).



sects which do believe in reincarnation. Most of these are derivatives of the Shiites who, with the Sunnis, form the two great branches of Islam. A belief in reincarnation among Shiites can be traced at least to the eighth century.<sup>1</sup> It is particularly prominent among the Ismailis and their offshoots, notably the Druses of Lebanon and Syria. In southern Turkey the belief in reincarnation is found especially, and one might almost say exclusively, among the Alevis, who are, in ultimate derivation, a Shiite sect.<sup>2</sup> Large numbers of Alevis live in south central Turkey in and around Adana, Mersin, Iskenderun and Antakya. The Alevis of this area are mostly Arabic-speaking peoples whose ancestors entered Turkey early in the nineteenth century. In 1832 Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhamid Ali, the powerful Governor (under Turkish suzerainty) of Egypt, invaded Syria and then southern Turkey itself. His invading army included large numbers of Arabic-speaking Alevis (from Syria) and many of these settled in south central Turkey. Alevis may also be found in other parts of Turkey, chiefly Anatolia and southeastern Turkey.

So far as my own investigations have gone, cases of the reincarnation type in Turkey occur only among the Alevis who believe in reincarnation. Although, as mentioned above, most of the Alevis of south central Turkey are Arabic-speaking, I found one case in a village of entirely Turkish-speaking Alevis, and no cases at all in Turkish Muslims who were not Alevis.

Among the Alevis the belief in reincarnation is accepted as axiomatic. Some of my informants expressed astonishment or amusement that money should be spent in the investigation of something so obviously true as reincarnation. Despite their established convictions as to the occurrence of reincarnation, the Turkish Alevis do not have an elaborated doctrine concerning it comparable to those found in Hinduism and Buddhism. My Turkish informants nevertheless told me about some of their common associated beliefs which I will briefly summarize.

Rebirth in animals is accepted among the Turkish Alevis in contrast to its denial by the neighboring Druses. The Turkish Alevis do not, however, accept that a personality can change its sex between incarnations, in this respect according with the Druse belief and that of the Tlingits of Alaska. (Sex change from one life to another is, however, permitted in other cultures such as in Ceylon<sup>3</sup> and India.) They believe that physical infirmities present at birth or downward changes in social circumstances from one life to another express the just results of misconduct in a previous life. But the penalty does not have to be earned in the life immediately preceding the present one of misfortunes. This topic came into discussion especially in the case of a man who was born deaf and has remained mute. This man by gestures and other

1 Dietrich, E. L., *Die Lehre von der Reinkarnation im Islam. Zeitschrift für Religionsgeschichte und Geistesgeschichte*. Vol. 9, 129-149, 1957.

2 Grande Encyclopédie Turque "Inonu." Istanbul: In preparation and publication since 1943. (Passages translated from Turkish to French by M. Reşat Bayer.)

3 *Op. cit.* n. 2 on p. 1.



behavior indicated that he remembered a previous life in which he was drowned. (I shall report this case in detail elsewhere.)<sup>1</sup> The drowned man was, according to my informants, a person of exemplary character. My informants attributed the deafness in this subject to some misconduct far back in the chain of lives, at any rate long antedating the life in which the previous personality was drowned.

On the question of whether every man reincarnates or some only, my informants were of divided opinions. Some contended that only persons who die a violent death are reborn. Others, however, asserted that everyone reincarnates, but only those who die violently remember a previous life. It will be seen later that the Turkish case material seems to support both these views.

Many of my Turkish informants believe that reincarnation occurs instantly after death, another associated belief held by the Druses. I have found, however, that the Druses take immediate reincarnation as a dogma, whereas some Turkish informants said that the interval between death and rebirth might be longer.

Dietrich asserted that the Islamic sects believing in reincarnation derive this belief from the infusion into Islam of the religions of peoples conquered by the early Muslims.<sup>2</sup> In the great Islamic conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., large numbers of Manicheans and neo-Platonic Greeks were overrun by the Arabs and some of their beliefs assimilated. Dietrich thought the belief in reincarnation among Islamic sects to be essentially extra-Islamic. He denied any support for the belief in the Koran. But the Alevis of Turkey cite passages in the Koran which can be interpreted as favoring reincarnation.<sup>3</sup> These passages, like similar ones in the Bible, are ambiguous. Persons who wish to draw on scriptural authority to sustain a belief in reincarnation may find such support in the Koran, but others are not compelled to do so.

### Sources of Case Material

The cases here analyzed were studied during two visits to Turkey which I made in 1964 and 1967. I stayed in the cities of Adana, Iskenderun, and Antakya. The cases were studied in these cities and in the smaller towns, e.g., Tarsus, Mersin, Samandog, and villages of the environs. I have spent less than six weeks altogether in this part of Turkey, but during this period obtained

1 *Op. cit.* n. 5 on p. 2.

2 *Op. cit.* n. 1 on p. 3.

3 Typical passages in the Koran which are cited in support of the belief in reincarnation are the following: "How disbelieve ye in Allah when ye were dead and He gave life to you. Then He will give you death, then life again, and then unto Him ye will return" (Surah. 2, Verse 28); and "Allah hath caused you to grow from the earth, and afterwards He maketh you return thereto, and He will bring you forth again, a forthbringing" (Surah. 71, Verses 17-18).



some information on about seventy cases of the reincarnation type.<sup>1</sup> For about 15 of the cases I obtained no more information than the name of the subject or main witnesses. Time did not permit direct study of these cases. In 56 cases enough information was obtained from firsthand witnesses to permit judgments about their authenticity. Each of these cases was given a careful study through interviewing all available witnesses. Four cases were seen to be atypical or of insufficient authenticity to justify inclusion in the series to be analyzed. In one of these cases the child had no claimed memories, but had shown evidence of precocity in spelling which was attributed to learning in a previous life. In another case the father refused to permit an adequate investigation of the case. In the other two cases the parents seemed to have made identifications of the previous personality on extremely slender evidence and the details narrated about the case were implausible. After rejection of these four cases the remaining 52 cases were then included in the present analysis.

In nearly all of these cases the child had had memories of a previous life. In several, however, the child had had no memories, but the case was included because of the reported close correspondence of a birthmark with wounds on the body of the presumed previous personality. No case has been included, however, solely on the basis of an "announcing dream" since these are experiences of other people and not of the subject himself. The analyzed cases then are those in which there were reported *prima facie* evidences of some paranormal phenomena in the subject, either memories or birthmarks or both.

No Turkish case has been included unless I myself saw, and in most instances, interviewed the subject. (Naturally interviews were out of the question with a few infants and very small children.) The Tlingit and Ceylonese material does, however, include some cases in which I did not see or interview the subjects. Among the Tlingit cases I have included in the series a small number of cases in which the subject was dead, provided the testimony of a firsthand witness seemed reliable. And among the Ceylon cases I have included some investigated by my colleague, Mr. Francis Story, who is an experienced observer of these cases.

#### *Reported and Real Incidences of Reincarnation Cases in South Central Turkey*

I make no claim to have conducted a systematic census of cases of the reincarnation type in Turkey, or elsewhere. Cases were brought to my attention by persons who knew of my interest (or that of M. Bayer) in studying such cases, and this was necessarily a haphazard way of learning about them. Only a very small portion of the cities and villages inhabited by Alevis in this area were visited. The population of Alevis (mostly Arabic-speaking) of the area is perhaps about 100,000. From the numbers of cases found in any one village, sometimes as many as five or six, we can easily infer that a full census of cases

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1 Some of the cases were first reported to M. Reşat Bayer who accompanied me on my trips to southern Turkey and also made several trips there alone to gather information about the cases.



in this area would show the actual incidence to be very much higher than the small number which have been reported to date.

### Characteristics of the Turkish Reincarnation Cases

#### *Sex of Subjects and Related Previous Personalities*

Table I shows that there was a preponderance of males among the subjects of the Turkish cases. This male preponderance was found also in the Tlingit material, but not in that from Ceylon. I may say that in cases from most other cultures (still not fully analyzed) the numbers of male and female subjects are nearly equal, so the Turkish and Tlingit cases are deviant in the marked preponderance of male subjects they show.

No Turkish subject of a case claimed to recall a previous life as a member of the opposite sex. Tlingit subjects also never claimed to remember a previous life as a member of the opposite sex. In contrast, there are three Ceylon cases of this type. A case report of one of these (Gnanatilleka) has already been published<sup>1</sup> and a detailed report of another is in preparation.<sup>2</sup> Here again, the Ceylonese cases are more typical of the entire collection of cases from all cultures in which about ten per cent of the subjects claim to remember a previous life as a member of the opposite sex.

Table 1  
*Number and Sex of Subjects in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Tlingit Cases<sup>2</sup></i>
Males	44	15	34
Females	8	13	13
Total	52	28	47

1 Includes 26 Sinhalese cases and 2 Tamil cases.

2 Includes 5 Tlingit cases not analyzed in the report of 1966 (Fn. 1) and omits (because of low authenticity) 1 Tlingit case in the previous total of 43.

No Turkish subject investigated at first hand claimed to remember a previous life as a subhuman animal. I did hear secondhand reports of two Turkish subjects who had made such claims, but one of these had died and the other was inaccessible so neither case is included in the present series.

#### *Familial Relationships Between Subjects and Related Previous Personalities*

Table 2 shows the familial relationships between present and related previous personalities in the three series. In only four Turkish cases were the

1 *Op. cit.* n. 2 on p. 2.

2 *Op. cit.* n. 5 on p. 2.



*Table 2*  
*Familial Relationships between Present and Related Previous Personalities in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Personalities related on mother's side	0	1	31
Personalities related on the father's side	3	1	5
Personalities related as brothers or sisters	1	0	4
Clan relationship only			2
No relationship	41	10	1
Relationship not known or not learned (including cases without specific identification of previous personality)	7	16	4
	52	28	47

subject and related previous personality members of the same family. This low incidence of familial relationships is found also in the Ceylonese cases, but the reverse holds for the Tlingit cases. As mentioned in my previous report on the Tlingit cases,<sup>1</sup> Tlingits attach a great deal of importance to being in the right family. Membership in the Tlingit family (and tribal moiety) comes through the mother. In keeping with this emphasis in the culture is the fact that among the 40 Tlingit cases with some known familial relationship between the subject and related previous personality, in 31 instances the relationship was through the mother's family. In four other instances the present and previous personalities were brothers or sisters, thus both born of the same mother.

#### *The Circumstances of Death of Related Previous Personalities*

Table 3 shows the distribution of violent and natural deaths in the related previous personalities of the three series. In most instances, the mode of death of the related previous personality was verified from knowledgeable informants. In a small number of instances, particularly those in which no specific previous personality had been identified, the mode of death claimed in the memories of the subject was accepted for the purposes of this analysis.

In a small number of cases, assignment to the categories of violent or natural death proved difficult, especially when death followed an accident, but not immediately. One death from electrical burns, although not immediate (the person having died in a hospital), was considered violent; but another from an infection following an accidental wound was considered natural. In most instances of violent death the immediate cause was a bullet or knife wound or an automobile accident which provided no difficulty in assignment. Drownings were less numerous, but occurred also in all three series. Automobile accidents accounted for some deaths in the Turkish and Ceylonese cases, but not in Tlingit cases.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* n. 1 on p. 1.



*Table 3*  
*Incidence of Modes of Death in the Three Series*

<i>Mode of Death</i>	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Violent			
Male	33	5	19
Female	6	5	0
Total	39	10	19
Natural			
Male	11	5	8
Female	1	6	7
Total	12	11	15
Unknown			
Male	0	5	7
Female	1	2	6
Total	1	7	13
Totals	52	28	47

Table 3 shows that violent deaths are much commoner in the Turkish cases than in the Ceylon or Tlingit cases. This high incidence of violent deaths in the Turkish cases may be related to the preponderance of males among the subjects of this group. I have accordingly given the figures for the numbers of males and females involved in the different modes of death.

*Incidence of Birthmarks and Deformities in the Three Series*

Table 4 shows the incidence of birthmarks and deformities in the Turkish, Ceylonese, and Tlingit series. I have already published descriptions of some of these birthmarks<sup>1</sup> and will publish further descriptions (with photographs) of additional examples.<sup>2</sup> In most instances I have examined the birthmarks myself and photographed them or had them photographed. In a few instances the birthmark was reported as having faded or the subject declined to allow an examination of the mark. And in another few the subject had died by the time of my investigations.

The birthmarks most frequently relate to fatal bullet or knife wounds on the previous personality, although a few relate to non-fatal wounds, e.g., wounds of surgical operations. (I have published one detailed report of two birthmarks related to surgical wounds in a Tlingit case, that of Corliss Chotkin, Jr.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Op. cit.* n. 1 on p. 1 and n. 2 on p. 2.

2 *Op. cit.* n. 5 on p. 2.

3 *Op. cit.* n. 2 on p. 2.



Table 4  
*Incidence of Birthmarks and Deformities of Subjects in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Absent	24	24	23
Present and related to			
Gunshot wounds	11	1	7
Knife or spear wounds	8	0	4
Accidental wounds	1	1	0
Wounds of bites	1	1	1
Wounds of surgical operations	0	0	2
Wounds of disease	0	0	3
Burns	0	0	1
Tattoo marks	0	0	1
Naevi (possibly inherited)	0	0	4
Miscellaneous, chiefly wounds of accidental and inflicted head injuries	7	1	1
Total	28	4	24
Total Cases	52	28	47

*Incidence of Announcing Dreams in the Three Series*

Table 5 shows the incidence of announcing dreams in the three series. I am sure the real incidence of these dreams, at least in Turkey and Alaska, is considerably higher than my figures indicate. On my first trips to Alaska I did not realize how frequently these dreams occur and did not begin to make systematic inquiries about them until 1964. In Alaska the announcing dreams seem well known to both men and women, but in Turkey I found that the women often kept them to themselves. Sometimes males present at interviews were astonished when a woman in response to a question would narrate an announcing dream.

Table 5  
*Incidence of Announcing Dreams in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Present	23	1	22
Absent	29	27	25
Total	52	28	47

As already mentioned, the dreamer is usually the pregnant mother of the "incoming personality," but sometimes a female relative or neighbor, and occasionally the father or other male relative or friend, will have an announcing



dream. Occasionally also, two or more members of the family will have such a dream. Nearly all the dreams occur towards the end of the pregnancy and most often just before delivery, but a few have occurred after delivery and I have included three instances in which an identifying dream occurred more than a year after the birth of the present personality; but in two of these cases there was also a prenatal dream by another person.

As I have described elsewhere, the typical Tlingit announcing dream includes images of arrival scenes. The "incoming personality" is visualized in the dream as coming with his suitcase into the house, looking around for a bedroom, getting off a ship at a dock, etc.<sup>1</sup> In the Turkish announcing dreams this type of symbolism is less common. More often the "incoming personality" simply shows himself, often with the fatal wounds which will be found in the birthmarks, and communicates his wish or intention to be reborn in the family of the dreamer. In Tlingit cases the dreamer can nearly always recognize the "incoming personality," it being expected that a Tlingit will be reborn on his mother's side of the same family. In Turkish cases, however, the "incoming personality" is usually a stranger and the dreamer may have no idea whatever of his identity. This often leads to delays in identification of the previous related personality which will be discussed next.

Announcing dreams with specific identification are extremely rare in Ceylon and the only instance known to me occurred in a Tamil case in which a young man was thought to have been reborn as his own niece. In this case several members of the family had dreams of the deceased young man during the mother's pregnancy. Ceylonese mothers do often narrate symbolic dreams, e.g., of a snake, an elephant or other animal during the pregnancy. They interpret these variously as indicating the arrival of a baby of a particular sex, but seem to show no consistency in the interpretation of the dream symbols. And they rarely expect to identify an "incoming personality" in advance of birth.

#### *Identification of Related Previous Personalities*

Table 6 summarizes the number of cases in each series in which the related previous personality has been identified. As already mentioned, the parents of the subjects of these cases usually make efforts to identify the previous personality the child claims to have been. If the mother or a neighbor has had a dream in which a recognizable person indicates that he is being reborn in a particular family, a judgment is often made at that time about who the related previous personality is. The identification is likely to be confirmed by observation of birthmarks on the child. Such early identification of the related previous personality may sometimes lead to suggestions about a previous identity offered by the parents to the child and this may weaken the evidence of paranormal<sup>2</sup> knowledge about the previous personality which the subject

1 *Op. cit.* n. 1 on p. 1.

2 By "paranormal," I mean knowledge gained without the means of the usual sensory channels.



Table 6  
*Specific Identification of Related Previous Personality in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Previous Personality Identified	45	12	45
Previous Personality Not Identified	7	16	2
Total	52	28	47

may later show. This, however, is a separate issue and I am not here defending the evidence of paranormal features in any one case, but simply describing the patterns found in the case material as a whole.

In the Tlingit cases, the combination of announcing dreams, birthmarks and membership of the two personalities in the same family usually leads to a very early identification of the related previous personality. I have only two Tlingit cases in which the previous personality has not been identified. In the Ceylon cases, announcing dreams, birthmarks and membership in the same family are rare. The two personalities often live in villages quite far removed from each other. Identification of the previous personality is difficult for the families concerned and hardly less so for investigators. In some instances the child simply does not give enough detailed information to permit the tracing of a related previous personality fitting his statements. This is especially the case if the child does not give accurately the name of a village or town or a family name. One may be dealing in some instances with fantasies on the part of the child, there being no actual previous personality at all; but this seems improbable except in a very small number of cases since the characteristics of cases in which a previous personality has been identified closely resemble those in which one has not been found. One would expect invented cases to deviate from the characteristic pattern of genuine cases, although imitation of known cases may also occur and give an inauthentic case the appearance of being typical.

With regard to the identification of the previous personality, Turkish cases are somewhat intermediate between the Ceylonese cases and the Tlingit ones. When a child is born among the Turkish Alevis, the announcing dream (if it occurs) may not present the image of a person known to the dreamer. Sometimes a combination of the dream and birthmarks lead the family to make a tentative identification with a particular person, say someone who was known to have been murdered in the next village. The parents may then forget about this conjecture until later, when the child begins to talk about a previous life. His remarks and his recognitions of members of the family of the person he claims to have been may then lead to a firmer conviction about the identification of the previous personality. In general, then, a related previous personality is identified eventually in most Turkish cases, but rarely at or soon after birth.



*Median Age at Death of Related Previous Personalities*

Table 7 shows the median age at death of the related previous personalities for the three series. These figures should be interpreted cautiously. In the first place, for many cases I have no information at all about the age at death of the previous personality. This is especially true for the Tlingit cases since I collected much of the Tlingit data before I contemplated analyses like the present one. Secondly, in many instances the informants could only give the ages within a certain range of years, e.g., "he was between 45 and 55 years old," or the previous personality would be said to be "a schoolgirl." In a small number of instances without identification of the previous personality I have inferred the age at death from statements of the subjects who rarely state an exact age at death, but who may give an approximation or other relevant information. On the other hand, it has been possible to ascertain exact ages for some of the subjects through the study of medical or other documents, so the figures do not always depend only on the memories of informants.

Table 7  
*Median Age at Death of Related Previous Personalities in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Age in Years	30 (50) <sup>1</sup>	14 (25)	25 (9)
Expectation of Life at Birth in Country <sup>2</sup>	48 (1950-51) <sup>3</sup>	61.7 (1962)	69.4 <sup>4</sup> (1957)

1 The figures in parentheses in this row give the number of cases in each group for which reasonably adequate data are available.

2 Data from *Demographic Yearbook*. New York: United Nations, 1966.

3 Figures in parentheses in this row give year from which the data were derived.

4 The figure given is for the United States of America as a whole. Data for expectation of life among Tlingits were not available. The actual expectation of life among Tlingits would be considerably lower due to the generally lower quality of medical care available to them as compared to the average for the nation.

Taking the data of Table 7 with these reservations, we can say that the average previous personality in Turkish and Tlingit cases is a young adult. But the average previous personality in Ceylon is a considerably younger person, a schoolchild or adolescent. In all three groups, however, there was a wide range at death of the previous personalities. In all three cultures the age at death of the related previous personalities was far below the expected age for these cultures.

*Median Interval Between Death of Related Previous Personality and Birth of Present Personality*

Table 8 shows in months the median interval or "intermission" between the death of the previous personality and the birth of the subject for cases in the three series. The reservations expressed in the preceding section concerning



*Table 8*  
*Median Interval between Death of Related Previous Personality and Birth of Present Personality in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Interval in Months	9 (34) <sup>1</sup>	21 (12)	48 (23)

1 The figures in parentheses give the number of cases in each group for which reasonably adequate data are available.

the accuracy of the figures given apply with equal or greater force to the data of Table 8. The villagers of southern Turkey have little interest in the passage of time other than as seasonal changes affect their agricultural pursuits. (The villagers of Ceylon and the Tlingits of Alaska are little different in this respect.) Everyone in Turkey is supposed to have an official identity card on which is inscribed at his birth the date and place of birth and other identifying information. In fact, however, many parents delay having the identity card filled out until several years after the birth of the child or even until he goes to school and the authorities ask to see the card. By this time the actual date of birth may be forgotten. Also, various motives, e.g., the desire to have a son appear older than he is so he may serve his military duty early and return to the family, often lead to falsification of the identity cards. In view of this unreliability, we must interpret the differences between the three series cautiously. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the median "intermission" for Tlingit cases seems to be definitely longer than it is for the Turkish cases and the "intermission" for Ceylonese cases falls in between the other two series.

#### *Selection of Parents for Next Incarnation*

Sometimes informants report that the previous personality selected parents for his next incarnation before he died. Table 9 shows the differing incidences in the three series of reports of such selection of parents for the next incarnation. I found only two instances of this in Turkey, and I found only one instance among the Ceylonese cases; but it was reported in ten of the Tlingit cases.

*Table 9*  
*Reported Selection of Parents for Next Birth Prior to Death of Previous Personality in the Three Series*

	<i>Turkish Cases</i>	<i>Ceylon Cases</i>	<i>Tlingit Cases</i>
Number of Instances Reported	2	1	10



## Discussion

In discussing the data presented from the three series of cases, I shall first consider some of the principal differences between them and then some of the resemblances.

The marked preponderance of male subjects in the Turkish and to a lesser extent in the Tlingit cases, as compared to the Ceylonese ones (and those of most other cultures), is almost certainly *not* due to a spurious pushing forward of male subjects by the informants. Most of the subjects were still children at the time of my investigations and I detected little reserve on the part of parents in presenting children of either sex for study. It is true that men are still dominant in Turkish society, but they are hardly less so in Ceylon. And among the Tlingits, women and membership in their families have very great importance.

It seems to me more likely that the preponderance of male subjects in Turkish cases related to the high frequency of violent deaths in the previous personalities. There is a very high incidence of claimed memories of the mode of death, whether natural or violent, among the statements of all the subjects. Emotionally intense experiences are more memorable than experiences with lesser emotional accompaniment. Supposing reincarnation to be the best explanation for these cases, then one would expect that a violent death would be more easily remembered by the surviving and reborn person than would a natural one. (As mentioned earlier, many of the Alevis believe either that only persons violently killed reincarnate or that only persons remember their previous lives.) Since, however, men engage in more dangerous vocational activities and are more inclined than women to use violence in settling disputes, one would expect that male subjects would preponderate in the cases of cultures showing a high incidence of violent deaths in the previous personalities. This explanation fits the data of the Turkish cases better than it does those of Tlingit cases. For violent deaths of the previous personalities occurred only a little more often proportionately among Tlingit cases than among Ceylonese ones (See Table 3). Since, however, no female Tlingit subjects were identified with previous personalities who died violent deaths, the preponderance of male Tlingit subjects may also be due to the high incidence of males with violent deaths, or contributed to by it. Memories enhanced by violent deaths cannot alone account for the preponderance of males in the Turkish cases since as Table 3 shows, the males preponderate by far also in cases with non-violent deaths of the previous personalities.

When I asked my Turkish informants why a particular person was born in a particular family, they would nearly always sigh and say "Allah alone knows" or "Allah willed it." The ideas of the Turkish Alevis on reincarnation are evidently much imbued with the Islamic concept of an ineluctable destiny. The Turkish Alevi believes that his conduct will influence his future incarnations but his wishes or willpower cannot do so. It rarely occurs to him to try to plan his next life.



For a different reason the Ceylonese also do not often plan another life. This reason is that good Buddhists (and Hindus) are trying to get away entirely from any terrestrial rebirth whatever and the planning of another incarnation for them defeats the purpose of trying to get altogether off "the wheel of rebirth."

With both these views the Tlingit outlook contrasts rather sharply. Many Tlingits have an optimistic view of their ability to shape their next life. They sometimes state before dying that they wish to be reborn without some defect, e.g., a stutter which has bothered them in the present life. And they may also choose, from the available mothers of the family, one favorite woman as the mother for the next rebirth. The data of Table 9, although derived from a very small number of cases, does seem to indicate that this pre-mortem selection of parents occurs more commonly among the Tlingits than among the Turks or Ceylonese.

The Turkish and Ceylonese cases again differ from the Tlingit ones in the low incidence among the former two of familial relationships between the two personalities. As I have suggested elsewhere, Tlingits believe that they should be reborn in the same tribe, preferably in the mother's immediate family.<sup>1</sup> The high incidence of familial relationships between the two personalities in Tlingit cases is harmonious with the influence of cultural forces on the shaping of the cases through expectations. It is also harmonious, however, with the interpretation of the cases as instances of reincarnation since, on this hypothesis, we can conceive that cultural expectations would persist after death and influence selection of the next parents. The "selection process" may be entirely unconscious although, as we have seen, the Tlingits rather often attempt conscious selection of the next parents before death.

Turning now to important resemblances between the Turkish and other cases, we find that the Turkish and Tlingit series resemble each other markedly in the high incidences they each show of announcing dreams and birthmarks.

It is quite certain that the similar high incidences of birthmarks and announcing dreams in the Turkish and Tlingit cases does not derive from any influential contacts between the two groups. There certainly has been no effective contact between them since the ancestors of both came out of central Asia thousands of years ago. There has been some contact for more than a thousand years between Arab traders and the Ceylonese, but Muslim influence on the Sinhalese culture has been slight. Sinhalese ideas on reincarnation derive from Buddhist traditions and Tamil ideas on it derive from Hindu traditions. Muslims of Ceylon are mostly orthodox and do not believe in reincarnation. Another point of importance is that in neither the Tlingit nor the Turkish culture is there any written or other widely authoritative tradition which dictates what pattern reincarnation cases should show. In contrast, there is an extensive literature of Theravada Buddhism which has much to say for the Ceylonese about rebirth and which may influence expectations about cases

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* n. 1 on p. 1.



occurring in that culture. In all these cultures, however, there exists an oral tradition concerning reincarnation which may have shaped development of the cases to some extent. It seems significant, however, that patterns of the cases have developed very similarly in two cultures so completely isolated from each other as are the Turkish Alevi and Tlingit. These similarities suggest some common influence on the cases in both cultures.

The similarities in the cases might occur if they consisted of nothing but fantasies either wholly invented by the children or elaborated by the parents from small nuclei furnished by the children. It is known that humans have devised very similar myths in widely different cultures. But it is also known that myths have a basis in human experience and derive at least partly from man's effort to interpret his real experiences. We are, however, in the present material not dealing with myths, but with reports of actual experiences. We are much closer to verifiable evidence of what actually happened than we are when trying to understand most myths. To be sure, the reports may be altered by the informants from the original primary experiences in ways that we do not recognize. But the similarity of case after case within the same culture and of whole groups of cases of different cultures strongly suggests that the reports communicate authentic experiences and that they are reasonably close to the actual events described. If the cases are due to fraud or to fantasy, it is difficult to see how such similar accounts could have been independently invented by so many people. Incidentally, very few of the informants about one case had heard of other cases, although some of them had learned of one or two well-known cases which had reached newspapers. But these isolated and often illiterate villagers in Turkey, Ceylon and Alaska have few opportunities for modeling one case on a previous one. It is unreasonable to suppose that the consistent patterns in these groups of cases could derive only from the imitations of one or several model cases.

To declare the cases authentic, however, is to set aside only the simplest interpretations of fraud and fantasy. A decision for authenticity does not by itself dispose of various other interpretations which may still apply to authentic cases. It merely prepares the way for us to consider these other explanations.

Some of these cases, for example, may be explained as instances of secondary personality, including in necessary instances some extrasensory perception with which the subject gathers information about the related previous personality who, according to this theory, he wishes he was. The announcing dreams and birthmarks also may give leads to the child and parents for elaboration of a plausible account of a previous personality. This explanation, however, does not account for the presence of the birthmarks themselves, nor for some other features of the cases. I have reviewed these alternative hypotheses in detail elsewhere<sup>1</sup> and I believe they are best considered in weighing the merits of each individual case.

To return to cultural influences, the evidence from cross-cultural compari-

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1 *Op. cit.* n. 2 on p. 2.



sons of these cases, so far as they have gone, suggests that cultural forces influence the cases at several different levels. At one level cultural factors evidently influence the mere occurrence of the cases, for their incidence seems much greater in some cultures than in others. These cases occur abundantly in northern India, Burma, Tibet, Ceylon, Thailand, southern Turkey, Lebanon, and Alaska. They occur much less frequently in other parts of the world.

At another level, cultural influences may account for similarities in the characteristics of the cases in different cultures widely separated, such as I have found in the similar high incidences of birthmarks and announcing dreams in the Turkish and Tlingit cultures. In both these cultures the importance attached to identity and also to bravery in the face of danger may lead to increased attention to birthmarks and "announcing dreams" and to the more frequent occurrence of both.

And finally, cultural influences may account for differences in the characteristics of groups of cases even where they are otherwise rather similar. The very great importance attached by the Tlingits to the matrilineal line and to being identified on rebirth must surely have something to do with the high frequency of familial relationships between the present and previous personalities in the Tlingit cases as compared to the low frequency of such familial relationships in Turkish and Ceylonese cases.