

DEPICTING THE OTHER: QIZILBASH IMAGE IN THE 16th CENTURY
OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

A Master's Thesis

by

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Ankara

July 2013

To My Parents

DEPICTING THE OTHER: QIZILBASH IMAGE IN THE 16TH CENTURY
OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
Of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the early roots of the Ottoman perception of Qizilbash, both the Safavids, rising as a new power in Iran at the turn of the 16th century, and their Turcoman collaborators in Anatolia. The previous literature showing the image of the Qizilbash in the eyes of Ottoman dynasty employed mostly archival sources, such as *fatwa* collections and *mühimme* registers. In contrast, by focusing on the historiographical narrations of the years of 1509–1514, the present study looks at the literary works of 16th century chroniclers, particularly Selimnâme literature, and their role in building the Ottoman religio-political discourse on the Qizilbash with an attempt at showing their propagandist (or Selimist) nature. The present study argues that this discourse helped the dynasty to justify the act of war against them. After giving a brief background of the early Ottoman history with an emphasis on the shifting position of nomadic-tribal Turcomans, the study probes how a chosen sample of Ottoman histories from the 16th century depicted the Qizilbash image and

how they identified the “self” through depiction of the “other.” This thesis argues that religio-political discourses created in the 16th century led the Ottoman state to espouse a more Sunni-minded imperial ideology, and to identify the social and religious status of the Qizilbash.

Keywords: Qizilbash, Safavid, Turcoman, Ottoman historiography, Chronicle, Selimnâme, Self, Other, Image, Identity Construction.

ÖZET

ÖTEKİNİ TASVİR ETMEK: 16. YÜZYIL OSMANLI TARİHYAZIMINDA KIZILBAŞ İMAJI

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Bu çalışma Osmanlı'nın 16. yüzyılın başında İran'da yeni bir güç olarak ortaya çıkan Safeviler ve onların Anadolu'daki Türkmen destekçileri hakkındaki algısının kökenlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada hem Safevileri, hem de Anadolu Türkmenleri Kızılbaş olarak adlandırmak tercih edilmiştir. Osmanlı hanedanının gözündeki Kızılbaş imajı hakkında daha önceden yapılmış çalışmalar, genellikle fetvalar ve mühimme defterleri gibi arşiv kaynaklarını kullanmaktaydı. Aksine bu çalışma, 16. yüzyıl Osmanlı tarihçilerinin eserlerine, özellikle Selimnâme literatürüne bakmakta ve onların Kızılbaşlar hakkında oluşturulan dini ve siyasi söylemdeki rollerini incelemektedir. Bunu yaparken 1509–1514 yılları arasındaki olayların tarihçiler tarafından anlatımları esas alınmakta ve bu anlatımlar onların propagandacı doğaları göz önünde tutularak tartışılmaktadır. İleri sürülen noktalardan birisi, bu söylemlerin Kızılbaşlara karşı yapılmış ve yapılacak olan savaşların meşrulaştırılmasına yardım ettiğidir. Bu çalışma, öncelikle Türkmen göçebe aşiretlerin erken Osmanlı tarihi boyunca değişen pozisyonlarını incelemekte,

daha sonraysa 16. yüzyıl Osmanlı tarihyazımından seçilen bir örnekleme kullanarak Osmanlı yazarlarının Kızılbaşları nasıl öteki olarak resmettiklerini ve bu ötekiliği nasıl kendi öz kimliklerini tanımlamada kullandıklarını göstermektedir. Yine bu çalışma, 16. yüzyılda yaratılan bu dini-politik söylemlerin Kızılbaşların dini ve sosyal statülerinin tanımlanmasına ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun daha Sünni-odaklı bir ideolojiyi benimsemesine sebep olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kızılbaş, Safevi, Türkmen, Osmanlı Tarihyazımı, Kronik, Selimnâme, Benlik, Öteki, İmaj, Kimlik İnşası.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Subject

From the mid-15th century to the end of 16th century, bureaucratization or institutionalization of the Ottoman state occurred at the expense of its founding Turkish elements. As the Ottoman state evolved from a loose organization into a centralist empire, existing institutions were replaced with ones that were more complex. This process significantly worsened the position of the Turcomans, the nomadic, tribal Turkish population of Anatolia, who were descendants of the initial settlers. These warrior-settlers had played a prominent role during the foundation of the Ottoman principality, by providing military and moral support to the Ottoman rulers along the frontiers. In the course of time, however, the nomadic Turcomans were alienated from the social hierarchy and became discontented with the Ottoman centralist polity; accordingly, they were considered an obstacle to Ottoman centralization and bureaucratic development. The centralist policies aimed to make the nomads tax-payers tied to a village, town or city. Turcoman alienation may be attributed to two factors: their insistence on continuing their nomadic lifestyle despite

the pressure of Ottoman settlement policies, and the gradual incorporation of Sunni Islam into the Ottoman bureaucratic apparatus as a so-called state religion. A majority of the Turcoman population had remained followers of non-orthodox beliefs during this religious consolidation. In general, the Ottoman central authority remained tolerant, or even indifferent, to the *heterodox* religious beliefs and practices of Turcoman population. As long as these variant belief systems were not practiced or promulgated publicly, they were not considered a direct challenge to the political and religious authority of the Ottoman dynasty.¹ Thus, the problem between the state and the nomadic heterodox Turcomans in the 15th and 16th century was less about heretical religious beliefs in the Ottoman Empire where Sunni Islam constituted the orthodoxy, than it was about socio-economic discontent, at least in the beginning.

The Sunni character of the Ottomans had existed since the foundation of the state. However, it became more apparent in the 16th century, when Ottoman authority began to be challenged both by Turcoman rebels in Anatolia and by the increasingly powerful, Shi'a Islam-practicing, Safavid dynasty of Iran (1501–1736). Similar interests of the Ottoman and Safavid states fostered the regional, political, as well as economic competition. The declaration by the founder of the Safavid dynasty, Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524), that Shi'a Islam would be the state religion changed the magnitude of the Safavid-Ottoman rivalry, turning it toward conflict. Support for Ismail among the heterodox Turcomans of Anatolia intensified the religious dimension of the competition.² This support, which was mainly but not exclusively faith-based, is not surprising: Shah Ismail was not only a political leader, as a

¹ Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* (Freiburg: Schwarz 1970), p. 151.

² I need to make it clear that there were also Sunni nomadic Turcomans in the Ottoman Empire. However, it is still possible to say that those who collaborated with the Safavids were followers of Anatolian heterodox Islam, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters in detail.

religious leader, he had great influence on the Turcoman subjects of the Ottoman Empire. His popularity had an ancestral origin, as his father and grandfather were also influential spiritual figures among the Turkish population.

Before examining the ideological side of the rivalry, I shall explain the meaning of the term *Qizilbash* appearing in the title of this study, and my interpretation of it. *Qizilbash*, literally means “red head” in Turkish—a reference to the red headdress worn in battle by heterodox Turcomans of Anatolia. Ottomans began to use *Qizilbash* to designate the Turkish population based in Anatolia in the late 15th century, and that is its most common definition. However, my research into 16th century Ottoman narratives showed that the term was also applied to the Safavids of Iran, a group allied with the heterodox Turcomans.³ After all, these Turks founded the Safavid state.⁴ As a result of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, Turcomans migrated to Iran where they tended to serve as the main source of labor for the Safavid army during the first century of the Safavid state. There was no strict differentiation between the Safavid and Turkish identity in Safavid Iran until the late 16th century when the *Qizilbash* was declined in Iran to a noticeable extent. Moreover, by calling them “*Qizilbash*,” I differentiate heterodox Turcomans of Anatolia from those any other nomadic and tribal groups who did not participate in rebellious activities against the Ottoman authority.

The Ottoman-*Qizilbash* political and religious conflict created also an ideological rivalry between the both. Many Ottoman scholars at that time attempted to justify political and military acts of the Ottoman dynasty through the anti-*Qizilbash* polemical literature. This literature included *risalas* (booklets on certain

³ İlyas Üzümlü, “Kızılbaş,” *DİA*, XXV, p. 546.

⁴ Faruk Sümer, *Safevi Devleti'nin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü: Şah İsmail ile Halefleri ve Türkleri* (Ankara: Selçuklu Tarih ve Medeniyeti Enstitüsü, 1976).

issues written by religious scholars) and fatwas (legal judgment on or learned interpretation of issues pertaining to Islamic law). These sources have been acknowledged and examined by modern historians with little attempt at determining the ideological positions of the Ottomans and the Qizilbash.

This study investigates the repercussions of the Qizilbash image in 16th century Ottoman historiography. The focus is on events which occurred as background to a struggle for the Ottoman throne that took place between 1509 and 1513 between the sons of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) and Selim I (r. 1512–1520), ultimately the victor of this struggle. Specifically, I examine the ways in which 16th century Ottoman well-educated bureaucrat-historians imagined and represented the Qizilbash as heretical, sacrilegious, ignorant, atrocious, licentious, and rebellious. The four-year period under study offers considerable insight into the Qizilbash issue and the Ottoman polemical reactions to it. Narrative mentions of the Qizilbash were always derogatory.⁵ In their narratives, the historians discussed why the Qizilbash had to be regarded as the most dangerous contemporary enemy of religion and state (*din ü devlet*). Although the Ottoman-Qizilbash conflict had been primarily a political one since its early days, humiliation and criticism of religious beliefs of the Qizilbash were at the core of the 16th century Ottoman historiography. The bureaucrat-historians of the Ottoman Empire deemed themselves, as the followers of the “True Path” of the religion of Islam, excluding the Qizilbash as heretics or as “those out of the circle,” (a term used by Ahmet Yaşar Ocak).⁶ The enmity towards the Qizilbash as “other” has also drawn the boundaries of the “self.” I suggest that anti-Qizilbash religio-political discourse was created by Ottoman historians as an

⁵ Colin Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth,” *Turcica*, XIX, 1987.

⁶ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler: 15–17. Yüzyıllar* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2013).

ideological response to the Qizilbash challenge, which had religious and political dimensions. I also argue that these depictions helped the Ottoman dynasty to justify the act of war against a newly emerging religio-political threat.⁷ With these works, I contend, Ottoman official discourse on the Qizilbash became more visible and more clearly outlined.

The anti-Qizilbash works can be categorized as “literary propaganda,” a type of discourse used to legitimize political authority since the early periods of Ottoman quest for self-identification.⁸ The claims of legitimacy in the early Ottoman period were derived from popular/literary epics or vernacular Islam. However, the consolidation of Sunni dominance over the Ottoman religious and political discourse in the 16th century, led to new claims derived from learned historiography and from the orthodox Islam of the *ulemâ* (religious learned class).⁹ It is important to note that legitimacy claims were not derived from a single source, but rather from a set of myths and legends, each of which appeared at a different time to answer a certain political need.¹⁰ The Qizilbash/Safavid challenge was a typical example of such needs.

Prior to discussing the primary and secondary literature, it will be useful to examine certain concepts, such as identity, legitimacy and justification that will be important to the present study. For historians, studying collective identity has always

⁷ Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 69.

⁸ Hakan Karateke, “Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate: A Framework for Historical Analysis” in *Legitimizing the Order: the Ottoman Rhetorics of State Power*, ed. Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), p. 15. According to Bernard Lewis, legitimacy means that the ruler was qualified and entitled to the office which he held, and that he had acceded to it by lawful means. He also states that the definition of legitimacy changed over the course of medieval centuries. As long as the ruler had the necessary armed strength and was a Muslim, these were enough for him to be legitimate. Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 99.

⁹ Colin Imber, “Dynastic Myth.”

¹⁰ Colin Imber, “Ideals and Legitimation in Early Ottoman History,” in *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age*, ed. Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (London-New York: Longman, 1995), p. 138.

been an important means to better understand the deeds of people in history. Although it is difficult to provide a single definition of the concept of collective identity, perhaps it is best defined as a group affiliation differentiating one culture from the other.¹¹ That is, this differentiation is usually implemented through creating and defining the "Other." The image of the Other, i.e. as an enemy or a rival, enables a culture to draw the boundaries of its self-image and differentiate it from the "other" which is defined. That is, attempting to define the "other" is a method of defining the "self." As Edward Said explained, for example, imagining the Orient was a way for people in the West to define their society:

Many terms were used to express the relation: Balfour and Cromer, typically used several. The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal."¹²

Likewise, Orientalists not only tried to understand the Oriental culture, but also to crystalize their own identity by benefiting from the contrast between the Orientals and the Westerners.

Identity construction may be seen as an attempt at "legitimization" when it acts as a form of propaganda in the hands of power groups. As Claessen stated, power can be obtained in four ways: by force, by threat, by manipulation, or by legitimacy. For him, legitimacy is the right to govern of the just and fair political authority.¹³ A definition of political legitimacy might be when subjects' believe in the rightfulness of the ruler or the state and, more specifically, in their authority to

¹¹ Stephanie Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge-Malden: Polity Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 40.

¹³ Henri J. M. Claessen, "Changing Legitimacy" in *State Formation and Political Legitimacy*, ed. Ronald Cohen and Judith D. Toland (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1988), p. 23.

issue commands.¹⁴ In this conceptualization, being legitimate does not presuppose being just and fair; rather, it is about convincing the ruled subjects that the people and offices vested with political authority are just and fair. In other words, legitimacy exists if the subjects believe wholeheartedly that they should obey the commands and heed the words of their rulers. If obedience is procured through force or for the self-interest of a certain group, there is certainly no legitimacy there.¹⁵

Political authorities often build their claims to the legitimacy of their rule, meanwhile defining the self and the other. In politically-traditional authorities, arguably the best way to disseminate such claims was through literary propaganda. Works might be commissioned to legitimize the rule of the authority and to prove the correctness of the rulers' actions. Commissioned literary propaganda attempted to glorify the self-image of the society, especially through glorification of the ruler's image, while simultaneously alienating and humiliating the other. This deliberate "othering" through literary propaganda included hostile characterization of either external rivals and enemies, or of internal opposition to the current regime. The "other" represented the exact opposite of the self-identity they attempted to construct.

Yet the two similar concepts that are often intertwined, legitimacy and justification, should be employed carefully. Although recent scholars tend to make no distinction between them, throughout this study legitimacy refers to the broad claims of the state, legitimizing its right to rule, whereas justification refers to their claims specifically aimed at justifying their actions.¹⁶ In fact, there is a connection

¹⁴ Hakan Karateke, "Legitimizing the Ottoman Sultanate," p. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 16.

¹⁶ A. John Simmons, *Justification and Legitimacy: Essays on Rights and Obligations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 755.

between these conceptualizations. Justifications may be considered a subset of legitimacies.

1.2. Primary Literature and Method

This study focuses on a special genre of literary propaganda, the *Selimnâmes*. These works, devoted to the reign of Selim I (1512–1520), began to be written in the last years of Selim’s reign and reached a peak during the reign of Süleyman (1520–1566). However, the primary sources used are not limited to Selimnâme literature: I include a variety of works that were important for various reasons. All of the primary sources used aimed to achieve cultural, political, as well as religious legitimacy for the Ottoman dynasty, however.¹⁷ I believe that they contributed a great deal to the othering of the Qizilbash, by addressing the Qizilbash issue, arguably one of the most significant problems of the 16th century. As mentioned previously, 16th century Ottoman historians conjured not only the identity of their enemy but also the religio-political identity of the Ottoman Empire through their depiction of the Qizilbash. In this regard, the Ottoman historiography of the 16th century may be considered a justificatory tool in the hands of the Ottoman dynasty. By Ottoman identity, I mean the imperial ideology that crystallized in the 16th century and which included espousal of Sunnism as theological and practical orthodoxy, as a parallel.

It would be useful to give a brief analysis of the rise of Ottoman historiography with an attempt to analyze its evolution from the 15th to the 16th

¹⁷ Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 241.

century. The beginning of Ottoman chronicle-writing dates to the first half of the 15th century. However, there are sharp differences between the narratives written during the reign of Bayezid II (1481–1512) and those of earlier historians. Victor L. Menage, who examined the nature of early Ottoman historiography, argues that 15th century historians wrote either to express their piety or simply to entertain themselves and the readers.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that the pre-Bayezid Ottoman historians, *Şükrullah* and *Enverî* gave only a marginal place to the Ottoman dynasty in their Islamic histories, and presented the Ottoman sultans as merely holy warriors, fighting in the frontiers of the Muslim world. In contrast, 16th century Ottoman historiography possessed a more powerful political and religious discourse. The latter focused on the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule and the formation of a legendary image for the sultan. For example, the chroniclers in Bayezid II's time introduced him as *Eşrefü-s Selâtin* (the most excellent and glorious of all Muslim rulers, with the exceptions of Prophet Muhammad and the four initial caliphs) and *Sofu Sultan* (pious sultan).¹⁹

As implied above, the historiographical activity increased significantly in the reign of Bayezid II. This increase can be explained by following reasons. First, Bayezid gained his power in reaction to the centralist and expansionist policies of his father, Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481), i.e. vowing to overturn these policies, while Bayezid's brother Cem (d. 1495) was viewed as the continuation of his father's regime. The historical works used as a propaganda tool for Bayezid's style of rule critiqued those styles of Mehmed the Conqueror, and his viziers.

¹⁸ Victor L. Menage, "Osmanlı Tarihyazıcılığının İlk Dönemleri," in *Söğüt'ten İstanbul'a*, ed. Oktay Özel and Mehmet Öz (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2000), p. 82.

¹⁹ Halil İnalcık, "The Rise of Ottoman Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. Bernard Lewis and P. M. Holt (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 164.

Second, as a result of the increase in territories and political aspirations of the dynasty, Ottoman sultans increasingly became aware that they were governing a large Muslim Empire. Thus, they aimed to use these dynastic histories to display their superiority over the other Muslim powers of the time, i.e. Safavids and Mamluks.²⁰ Accordingly, Bayezid found the chronicles penned under previous sultans to inadequately reflect the prestige of the Ottoman dynasty. In response, he ordered two respected scholars of his time, İdris-i Bitlîsî and Kemalpaşazâde, to write a history of the Ottoman dynasty in the Persian and Turkish languages respectively.²¹ Menage regards these works as a turning point in Ottoman historiography:

The first (Bitlîsî's *Heşt Bihişt*) demonstrated that Ottoman history could be recorded in Persian as elegantly and grandiloquently as the history of other dynasties had been, the second (Kemalpaşazâde's *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*) showed that the Turkish language was now an adequate vehicle for the same rhetorical devices.²²

The Selimnâme corpus which unlike other chronicles of their time, maintains a distinctive and important emphasis on the reign of Selim I. They were panegyric accounts of Selim's life and military exploits.²³ The initial examples were started in the final years of Selim's reign (1512–1520) and became popular during the reign of his son, Süleyman I (1520–1566). Selim was the first Ottoman sultan, to whom a special sub-genre was devoted. In the 20th century, this attracted the interest of several historians. Ahmet Ateş initially distinguished these works as a separate

²⁰ Ibid, p. 166.

²¹ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, pp. 238-239.

²² Victor L. Menace, "Ottoman Historiography," p. 168.

²³ Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Lands Under Ottoman Rule, 1516–1800* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 134.

corpus of narratives.²⁴ Agah Sırrı Levend approached the grouping as part of *gâzavâtnâme* literature (chronicles of raids), because they focused on the military activities of Selim.²⁵ Erdem Çıpa states that with some exceptions that were written before Süleyman II (i.e. the works of İshak Çelebi, İdris-i Bitlîsî and possibly Edâ’î), Selimnâmes should be seen as a systematic project of early modern Ottoman revisionist historiography commissioned by Süleyman to clear his father’s name from his “unlawful” deeds and, indirectly, to establish his own legitimacy.²⁶ In a similar way, Rıza Yıldırım suggests that it is better to consider Selimnâme authors as ideology-makers rather than historians.²⁷ To add these comments, I must also emphasize that the Selimnâme corpus should be considered as a continuation of the tradition of legendary-historical or epic literature, beginning with Ahmedî’s *İskendernâme* (“Epic of Alexander the Great,” 1390, 1405). It seems that the tradition of epic literature, based on this earliest example written by Ahmedî, continued after the 14th century. Thus, it is not surprising that Selimnâme writers usually liken Selim to Alexander the Great in their epics of Selim.

Related to their role in legitimizing the deeds of Selim and shaping him into a legendary figure, Selimnâmes enabled the construction of an official Ottoman discourse on the Qizilbash. Selim used the alleged urgency of the Qizilbash threat to present himself as the champion of *gazâ* and Sunni Islam by highlighting his fights against both the Christian “infidelity” and “heretical” Shi’ism vanguarded by the Qizilbash so that his ascension to the throne could be justified. In order to prove his

²⁴ Ahmet Ateş, *Selim-nâmeler* (Istanbul University: PhD Dissertation, 1938).

²⁵ Agah Sırrı Levend, *Gazavât-nâmeler: Mihaloğlu Ali Bey’in Gazavât-nâmesi* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1956).

²⁶ H. Erdem Çıpa, *The Centrality of the Periphery: The Rise to Power of Selim I, 1487–1512* (Harvard University: PhD Dissertation, 2007), p. 126.

²⁷ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans Between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qizilbash Identity in Anatolia (1447–1514)* (Bilkent University: PhD Dissertation), p. 21.

military prowess, Selim conducted raids against the Georgians and the Qizilbash during his governorship in Trabzon in north-eastern Anatolia. Selimnâme literature, which takes a pro-Selim stand, indicates that Selim and pro-Selim factions, including Janissaries and Ottoman governors in the Balkans, developed and employed a strategy during the dynastic struggle brought about by the Qizilbash hostility.²⁸ Selim deemed himself as the only prince equipped with necessary skills to deal with this serious threat. He thought that the Qizilbash posed alarming threats to the foundations of the Ottoman state, and to Sunni Islam, because they supported religious and political propaganda within the Ottoman borders.

To return our discussion on the Ottoman historiography, we can generally say that 16th century Ottoman historiography possessed a eulogistic way of expression.²⁹ These histories were based on praise for the political system and the sultan, and efforts to establish him as a legendary figure. Mustafa Âli was an exception to this practice; however, as will be explained below, his writings were probably influenced by his personal disappointments during his bureaucratic career. Obviously, in their use of eulogistic expressions, Ottoman bureaucrat-historians hoped to win the favor of the Ottoman dynasty. Although the royal patronage was not as strong as it would be after the late 16th century, when the state itself appointed official historians called *Şehnamecis* who have written historical works in Persian language, historians already adopted a pro-dynastic attitude in their works.³⁰

The extent to which the authenticity of these works was limited by their authors' political motives is a matter of debate. One who criticizes the limits of their

²⁸ Ibid, p. 418.

²⁹ Rhoads Murphey, *Essays on Ottoman Historians and Historiography* (Istanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 2009), p. 278.

³⁰ Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 240.

authenticity should consider two points to understand why Ottoman historians used anti-Qizilbash discourse, and what they wanted to explain with it. First, while it is difficult, if not impossible, to suggest that all historians were explicitly ordered and commissioned by the sultan himself, most of the texts were the products of the Ottoman *kul* (servant) system, which compelled authors to be extremely respectful of the state and the sultan.³¹ For these historians, the main purpose of writing history was to exalt and glorify the state and the sultan.

In addition, Ottoman historians worked in a cultural environment where they were influenced by each other's ideas and works. Hopes or expectations of financial gain and greater bureaucratic status led almost all historians to present works to their patrons, who were mostly prominent statesmen. This patron-client relationship was one of the factors that prevented their authenticity. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that Mustafa Ali, a 16th century Ottoman historian, made the harshest critiques of the regime in his time. He had spent a career full of disappointments and many times had to deal with the lack of patronage. Moreover, it should be noted that some historians, such as Kemalpaşazâde and Celalzâde, were themselves at the highest ranks of the bureaucratic hierarchy, thus, did not need any patronage.

The manner of expression adopted by the chroniclers when mentioning the Qizilbash problem—the most alarming problem of the state—influenced Ottoman state ideology by creating a contrast with the alienated Qizilbash image. The Ottomans who, particularly after Selim I's 1517 capture of Arab provinces, regarded themselves as the sole protector of orthodox Sunni Islam must have fought against the Qizilbash “heresy” just as they fought non-Muslims. As stated earlier, the

³¹ The Ottoman *kul* system is explained in Chapter II.

fundamental conflict between the Ottoman state and the Qizilbash was not religious. But religion, as a justification for the anti-Qizilbash stand, had tremendous repercussions on the military personnel as well as the ruled subjects in the long run. As Marcus Dressler states, religious contention was a result of the conflict, rather than its cause.³²

Undoubtedly, Ottoman historians writing after the 16th century have continued to mention the Qizilbash issue, if only occasionally. Nonetheless, the present study is limited to the 16th century texts, for three reasons. First, the eulogistic historiographical tradition of the 16th century was replaced by a more authentic one in the 17th century. This transformation becomes clear in Rhoads Murphey's words:

Once the Ottoman imperial ethos was firmly established—history ceased to be a vehicle for the sole use of and manipulation by the monarch. 17th century historians in the Ottoman Empire became increasingly inclined to record popular as well as regal sentiments as they reflected on contemporary developments and events of the recent past.³³

In other words, over the course of time, the legitimizing role of Ottoman historians became less prominent. Second, and building on first point, perceptions of the Qizilbash held by 17th century historians were greatly influenced by the writings of their predecessors. Lastly, the Qizilbash challenge gradually ceased to be a serious one for the Ottomans as a result of their persecutions, their subsuming into more mainstream *Bektashi* sect to refrain from the prosecutions, and their voluntary migrations to Safavid Iran. For these reasons, I believe that anti-Qizilbash discourse can be examined through the 16th century texts alone, rather than calling on work

³² Marcus Dressler, "Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict," in *Legitimizing the Order*, pp. 151–173.

³³ Rhoads Murphey, *Essays on Ottoman Historians and Historiography*, p. 91.

from later periods, when the problems between the state and the Qizilbash were less frequently observed.

Nearly twenty-four examples of Selimnâme genre are recorded. The present study will focus on six pieces written (respectively) by İdris-i Bitlîsî (d. 1520–written in the reign of Selim); Kemalpaşazâde (d. 1536 –Süleyman); Celalzâde (d. 1567 –Süleyman); Edâ’î (d. 1521 –Selim); Şükrî-i Bitlîsî (d. after 1530 –Süleyman) and Hoca Sâdeddin (d. 1599 –Selim II). This study uses three non-Selimnâme works as well: Haydar Çelebi’s *Rûznâme* (written in 1514 –Selim), Kemalpaşazâde’s Book VIII (Süleyman) and Lütî Paşa’s (d. 1564 –Süleyman) *Tevârih-i ‘Al’i Osman*. The limitation is based not only the need to choose a sampling of works in order to make the study feasible, but also on the fact that not all Selimnâmes are original in content and style. Of the entire corpus, some relied heavily on the accounts of their predecessors while some are almost shadow copies or translations of earlier accounts.³⁴ For example, Sâdi’s Selimnâme is the same as Kemalpaşazâde’s and Celalzâde’s accounts in many respects.³⁵

Apart from the chronicles, I also use fatwa collections in order to support my arguments. These fatwas were those written by a certain mufti called Hamza, well-known *Şeyhülislam* (the highest position among the ulemâ) of Süleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), Ebussuud (d. 1574), and Kemalpaşazâde who also served as Şeyhülislam to Süleyman from 1526 to 1534.

³⁴ For a list of Selimnâmes, see, Şehabettin Tekindağ, “Selimnâmeler,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, I, 1970, pp. 197–231.; for an extended list, see, Mustafa Argunşah, “Türk Edebiyatında Selimnâmeler,” *Turkish Studies*, 4/8, 2009, pp. 32–47. In a chapter of his dissertation, Erdem Çıpa discusses the previous scholarship on the Selimnâme literature, compares their approaches, and debates how to use and interpret them. Erdem Çıpa, *The Centrality of the Periphery: The Rise to Power of Selim I, 1487–1512*, pp. 73–127.

³⁵ Şehabettin Tekindağ, “Selim-nâmeler,” p. 218.

The importance of these texts lies in the critical positions of their authors within the Ottoman system, or in the crucial roles they played during the Qizilbash issue. Celalzâde, Kemalpaşazâde and Lütî Paşa were important statesmen, determining the Ottoman religio-political discourses in the 16th century. İdris-i Bitlîsî, Haydar Çelebi, Şükri-i Bitlîsî and Edâ'i played prominent roles on the Qizilbash issue during the 1510's. Sâdeddin's later account cannot be categorized in any of these groups. However, as İdris-i Bitlîsî had, Sâdeddin reported the Qizilbash issue and the reign of Selim from an ideological point of view, which makes his writing important for the scope of this study. He wrote his work based on what he heard from his grandfather, Isfahanlı Hafız Mehmed who participated in the battle of Çaldıran in person. It is also noteworthy that Edâ'i, Şükrî-i Bitlîsî and İdris-i Bitlîsî were Iranian refugees and did not receive their education in the Ottoman territories. However, as they wrote their works under the Ottoman patronage, I argue that their narratives are accurate reflections of the general intellectual discourse of the period in question.

I use critical and comparative perspectives to analyze the chosen texts. Each author's attitude towards the Qizilbash is evaluated, where applicable, by considering biography, government position or positions held, and personal relations as found within or out of the texts. I investigate possible historical influences on their works by probing the exact or approximate dates they were written. In doing this, I attempt to uncover the authors' adherences to and links with the official state ideology and examine whether these historians wrote independently from this ideology.

It is crucial to note that the present study does not attempt to deal with what actually happened or what it may have meant to be the Qizilbash. Rather, it is about how Ottoman bureaucrat-historians, trained in a certain intellectual and cultural

environment, perceived the Qizilbash and interpreted what happened through their self-identity and self-interests. For this reason, literary works are the primary sources of this study rather than administrative documents of the Ottoman Empire. It is not state documents, found in the archives, which create discourses; it is the books that are often employed as a vehicle for disseminating imperial discourses.

It is important to answer an important question here. Who were the audience of these literary works? It is difficult to determine properly to what extent these works were read in 16th century Ottoman realms, and thus the magnitude of their propagandist effect. I should first emphasize that these texts were mostly circulated among a class of elites, first the sultan himself and his entourage. So the readers were confined to a small group of the educated. Then why take such care with the production of these works if they were not intended widely read and to have influence? The answer is that the circulation of the books should not be considered the sole source of transmission: In the Ottoman Empire, knowledge was also circulated orally or through *fermans* (edicts) of the Sultan read in the provinces and where the Ottoman official ideology was reflected. I suggest that the official ideology was created by these scholars and spread through imperial edicts and fatwas to the masses.

1.3. Survey of Literature

Although modern historiography has been interested in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict to a significant extent, there are still a limited number of studies that address the Qizilbash dimension of this conflict. The list of relevant scholarly works begins

with Ahmet Refik Altınay's book on the Rafızism and Bektashism in the 16th century.³⁶ In his book, Altınay compiled the documents and reports concerning the Qizilbash from mühimme registers maintained between the mid-16th and 17th centuries. These documents, when examined in a chronological order, reveal the decisions of the state on certain events and people. Altınay's book was later supplemented, by Hanna Sohrweide. In an article about the Qizilbash sect, Sohrweide cited certain archival documents published by Ahmet Refik.³⁷ However, although this article was the first detailed study of the Qizilbash, it did not take into consideration the Selimnâme literature.³⁸ Colin Imber also described the persecution of the Qizilbash, but based on mühimme registers that were not published by Ahmet Refik.³⁹ Following the same tradition, Saim Savaş recently published a book, which focuses on the Ottoman policies towards the Qizilbash.⁴⁰ However, these works were more or less limited to the collections of primary sources rather than expressing detailed points of view concerning the Ottoman discourse on the Qizilbash.

Although authors of the current literature tend to assume that the emergence of the Qizilbash threat consolidated the political and religious identity of the Ottoman Empire, this assumption has yet to be supported with a careful examination of Ottoman chronicles, especially the Selimnâme literature. Mühimme records and fatwas of religious scholars have already been studied, to a certain extent. However, the important role of historiography in the definition of Ottoman imperial religio-political doctrines, using the Ottoman-Qizilbash conflict, seems to have been

³⁶ Ahmet Refik Altınay, *Onaltıncı Asırda Râfızilik ve Bektâşilik*, abbreviated by Mehmet Yaman (İstanbul: Ufuk Matbaası, 1932).

³⁷ Hanna Sohrweide, "Der Sieg der Safaviden in Persien und seine Rückwirkung auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert," *Der Islam*, 4, 1965, pp. 95–223.

³⁸ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 10.

³⁹ Colin Imber, "The Persecution of the Ottoman Shi'ites According to the Mühimme Defterleri, 1565–1585," *Der Islam*, 56, 1979, pp. 245–73.

⁴⁰ Saim Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu'da Alevilik* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2002).

ignored. Nevertheless, a few studies are worth mentioning. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, a leading historian of heterodox movements in the Muslim world, has alluded to the Ottoman official ideology of the Ottoman Empire on the heretic movements.⁴¹ His description of this ideology will be discussed in the following chapter. Elke Eberhard was the first scholar to investigate anti-Safavid polemical literature and fatwas given by 16th century Ottoman theologians; her work emphasizes their justificatory role on the war against the Qizilbash, particularly accusations of heresy and infidelity against the Qizilbash.⁴² İsmail S. Üstün's study also focused on the ideological alienation of the Qizilbash.⁴³ He studied the "orthodox" counter propaganda of the Ottoman ulemâ. Relying on fatwas, risalas, and letters issued by a certain Hamza⁴⁴, Kemalpaşazâde (d. 1536) and Ebussuud (d. 1574), Üstün argues that, during the 16th century, there was a marked shift towards establishing the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule via canonical Islamic sources.⁴⁵ Even though Üstün's study presents a broad picture of the Ottoman official discourse on the Qizilbash, its focus is neither the chronicles themselves nor the Selimnâmes. Rıza Yıldırım was another scholar who studied the alienation of the Qizilbash from the Ottoman society: In his path-breaking study of the origins of the Qizilbash identity during the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, he elaborates on the ways that an intensifying imperial regime in the Ottoman state alienated the Qizilbash.⁴⁶ However, Yıldırım concentrates on socio-economic alienation and historical incidents rather than the Qizilbash image in the Ottoman historiography, which at the same time helped the consolidation of Ottoman

⁴¹ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Zındıklar ve Mülhidler*, pp. 81–122.

⁴² Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik*.

⁴³ İsmail Safa Üstün, *Heresy and Legitimacy in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century* (The University of Manchester: PhD dissertation, 1991).

⁴⁴ Although there is no agreement among modern scholars about the identification of Hamza, what is important here is that a certain mufti called Hamza issued the fatwa that justified the battle of Çaldıran in 1514.

⁴⁵ İsmail Safa Üstün, *Heresy and Legitimacy*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*.

self-identity. The first researcher to call attention to the role of historiography in the definition of the Ottoman religio-political discourse on the Qizilbash was İ. Kaya Şahin with his study on the career of Celalzâde as an Ottoman intellectual, bureaucrat and historian.⁴⁷

As the present study also considers the notion of political legitimacy, a unique general study, edited by Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski, must be unmentioned.⁴⁸ It examines the reflections of political legitimacy in the Ottoman world. Together, the essays create a seminal study that enabled me to comprehend and interpret the methods employed by the Ottoman state to justify its political and military actions. In one article, Christine Woodhead showed how Murad III (r. 1574–1595) attempted to counter criticisms and opposition to his ruling style through *Şehnâme* historians of his reign.⁴⁹ Markus Dressler's article is also of particular importance.⁵⁰ Similar to my arguments, Dressler asserts that Ottomans and Safavids constructed their religious ideologies, imperial identities and legitimacies through their conflict and enmity. He emphasizes that Ottomans and Safavids, as well as the Qizilbash, had overlapping worldviews, self-images and terminologies that benefited their political aspirations.⁵¹

After analyzing the modern literature on the Qizilbash, I realized there was little research that examined the historiographical works to understand the Qizilbash image in the eyes of the Ottoman historians. If we know that the historians reflected the ideology of the central authority, modern historians seem to have neglected how

⁴⁷ İ. Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman; Narrating the Sixteenth Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ Hakan Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski, ed. *Legitimizing the Order*.

⁴⁹ Christine Woodhead, "Murad III and the Historians: Representations of Ottoman Imperial Authority in Late 16th Century Historiography" in *Legitimizing the Order*.

⁵⁰ Marcus Dressler, "Inventing Orthodoxy," in *Legitimizing the Order*.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 156.

the Qizilbash image was perceived by the justifying perspective of Ottoman bureaucrat-historians. The mechanisms of the Other, through which the Ottoman historians glorified and polished the Sunni character of the state in the 16th century are also a mystery. Mühimme registers and fatwas undoubtedly indicate ways the central authority justified the anti-Qizilbash acts. However, these documents alone are not enough to evaluate the Qizilbash image within the general context of political events. In contrast, the histories are more useful to grasp the image within the cause and effect relationship established by their authors. For these reasons, my research is based on a sample of narratives chosen deliberately from the 16th century Ottoman historical corpus. By investigating texts that show the Ottoman side of the Ottoman-Qizilbash ideological rivalry, I believe that my research will contribute to a better understanding of the Ottoman perception of the Qizilbash in the 16th century.

In the first chapter, I re-consider the increasing tension between the Ottomans and the Turcoman population. I present a concise history of the socio-economic aspects of Qizilbash alienation within the context of the Ottoman transformation from a tribal organization into a bureaucratic empire. Moreover, in relation to the Ottoman Empire, I analyze the rise of the Safavid dynasty in Iran. I present the Ottoman-Safavid conflict as a process of simultaneous identity construction, in which both parties used the power of religious and political justification.

The second chapter is focused on the political use of the Qizilbash image, as depicted by the Ottoman historians as they narrate events of the struggle for the Ottoman throne, and the reign of Selim I until the aftermath of the battle of Çaldıran (when Selim eliminated the Qizilbash problem to a significant extent). I argue that the Qizilbash issue played an important role on the internal politics of the Ottoman

Empire, and the Qizilbash as portrayed by Ottoman historians explained the necessity of Selim's ascension to power.

In the third chapter, I examine the Qizilbash image in the 16th century Ottoman historiography from social, cultural and religious perspectives with the help of some theological and legal discussions. In this chapter, I suggest that Ottoman historians drew a picture of the Qizilbash to justify the Qizilbash persecutions that continued through the 16th century and, through this, consolidated the political and religious position of the Ottoman Empire. Also in this chapter, I analyze the contrasts developed by the authors to describe the self and the other through Selim's occupation of Tabriz and the Battle of Çaldıran.

CHAPTER II

TENSION BETWEEN THE OTTOMAN STATE AND TURCOMANS

2.1. A Glimpse into the Ottoman Bureaucratic Transformation

Khoury and Kostiner argue that tribal peoples played an important role in the establishment of Islamic states such as Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Seljuk, Ottoman, Safavid and Qajar. The initial structure of each of these states was a tribal confederation led by tribal military leaders.⁵² The warlike character of the tribal peoples contributed a great deal to the foundation of these states. Scholars have noted that this warlike character developed both to survive in unprotected outlying areas (those not surrounded by the walls as in cities), and also to search for the booty and pasturelands on which their nomadic economy was traditionally based.⁵³

⁵² Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, "Introduction: Tribes and the Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, ed. (Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), p. 2.

⁵³ As Ibn Haldun, a Muslim scholar of the 14th century, argued, relatively weak states were vulnerable to attack and were ultimately replaced by tribes with superior military ability and group solidarity (*asabiyyah*).

However, as these states required more complex institutions and experienced administrative transformations, tribal structures lost their significance, and they were gradually pushed out of the system, opposing all the values and legalities of the new states. This transformation may be observed in Ottoman history as well. The Ottoman state was established by tribal-nomadic Turcoman holy warriors (*gazîs*) and had a loose organization in the beginning. Over time, it evolved into a bureaucratic state. As a result of territorial expansion and population growth, the necessity for efficient political administration that the tribal structures could not supply became inevitable.

In other words, territorial expansion made the Ottoman transformation from a weak into an institutionalized structure inevitable. The increasing quantity of territories not only complicated the governance but also brought about some new identities. Below is a short summary of the Ottoman expansion from Mehmed I (r. 1413–1421) to Süleyman I (1520–1566). Ottoman sultans expanded the territories more or less steadily from Mehmed I's reestablishment of the political unity of Anatolia in 1413 to the siege of Vienna in 1683. By the mid-15th century, the Ottoman state was no longer a frontier principality that could be governed by weak institutional structure and army; rather a need for very efficient and well-organized institutions emerged. This need to institutionalize the governmental structure became more urgent after Mehmed II conquered the city of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, in 1453. Mehmed II pursued various centrist policies to keep peripheral elements under control and reinforce the political and economic power of the central authority.⁵⁴ He also passed a *kanun-nâme* (law code) that created

⁵⁴ Halil İnalcık, "Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time," *Speculum*, Vol. 35, No 3, July 1960, p. 426.

impersonal bureaucratic procedures.⁵⁵ This law code became the core and basis of the subsequent Ottoman laws to the 17th century.⁵⁶ Although the conquest of Istanbul brought about an imperial vision to the Ottomans, it is still not possible to say that during this period the dominant identity in the state was Muslim.⁵⁷ Mehmed II's son and successor, Bayezid II, consolidated the territories conquered by his father, and further built the imperial regime that dismantled the tribal aristocracy of the early Ottoman period.⁵⁸ With the subjugation of Arab principalities, including Islamic holy cities, *Mecca* and *Medina*, by Selim I in 1517, the sultan assumed the title of caliph, which permitted him to take first-hand religious authority for himself and his successors.⁵⁹ As caliphs, the Ottoman sultans regarded themselves as the supreme leaders of Islam and protectors of orthodox Sunni tradition (*şeriat-penâh*) against heresy and infidelity.⁶⁰ Also, in contrast to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the early Ottoman period, Selim's conquests in Eastern Anatolia and in Arab lands shifted the religious demographics of the Empire, so that the Sunni population became the majority.⁶¹ Finally, throughout the long reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566), who continued the expansionist imperial policy of his father, Selim, the Ottoman Empire became one of the major players in the world politics and reached its largest territorial borders.

⁵⁵ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of Ottoman State* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 153.

⁵⁶ Halil İnalçık, "Mehmed II," E12.

⁵⁷ Karen Barkey, *The Empire of Difference; The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 103–104.

⁵⁸ Halil İnalçık, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 19.

⁵⁹ In fact, the importance of this title had declined since the 13th century, even the idea of a unique Caliph over the whole Islamic world had been abandoned. According to a caliphate theory formulated during the Abbasid reign, the *Imam*, religious leader of the Islam ummah, had to be from the Prophet's clan (*seyyid*). Halil İnalçık, "Osmanlı Padişahı," in *Doğu Batı Düşünce Dergisi* 13:54, 2010, pp. 9–20.

⁶⁰ Colin Imber, "Dynastic Myth."

⁶¹ Karen Barkey, *The Empire of Difference*, p. 103.

One aspect of the imperial transformation was a solidification of the official political and religious ideology of the Ottomans. This is a process that I term “ideo-religious transformation.” Rudi Lindner puts forward that “state ideology,” led and consolidated by orthodox ulemâ and centralizing bureaucrats, especially in the 16th century, masked the tribal core of the state.⁶² Similarly, Gabriel Piterberg posits that bureaucratic regime was idealized by the Ottoman ulemâ and courtiers.⁶³ Indeed, the Sunni identity of the Ottoman state became significantly more prominent over time, with the emergence and rise of Sunni religious officials, the ulemâ by the mid-15th century. In other words, reformulation of the Ottoman identity was conducted and expressed through the incorporation of Sunni Islam into the state apparatus.⁶⁴ An Ottoman high culture, which relied on this identity, was formed beginning from the reign of Bayezid II, and reached maturity under his grandson, Süleyman.⁶⁵

As Halil İnalçık states, Süleyman I’s reign marked the beginning of a more conservative Shari’a-minded official ideology both on practical issues and as a discourse.⁶⁶ İnalçık remarks that, under Süleyman, the Ottoman state was no longer a frontier state, as it became a rather worthy successor to the classical Islamic caliphate with its institutions, policies and culture.⁶⁷ Although construction of the ideological constituents of this transformation was underway prior to Süleyman’s reign, it was at

⁶² Rudi Lindner, “Stimulus and Justification in Early Ottoman History,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 27, 1982, pp. 207–224.

⁶³ Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 163–164.

⁶⁴ Cornell Fleischer, “The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, Gilles Veinstein, ed., (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), pp. 171–174.

⁶⁵ Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ Halil İnalçık, “State, Sovereignty and Law During the Reign of Süleyman” in *Süleyman the Second and His Time*, Halil İnalçık and Cemal Kafadar, ed., (İstanbul: The ISIS Press, 1993), p. 70.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 72.

that time that the official ideology of the Ottoman state reached its ultimate character as a reaction to certain internal and external developments.⁶⁸

2.2 The Nature of the Early Ottoman State

The Ottoman state was founded by Turcoman warriors, forced by Seljuk administrators to settle near the Byzantine borders. This situation enabled the tribes to be flexible in their movements and allowed them opportunities to plunder neighboring enemy territories.⁶⁹ This flexibility was partly due to the absence of a strong political authority in where the Ottoman state was founded. When Seljuk authority in Anatolia collapsed, following their defeat by the Ilkhanid Mongols at the battle of Kösedağ in 1243, Turcoman *begs* established autonomous or semi-autonomous principalities in Anatolia. These tribal leaders employed the notion of *gazâ* to motivate their armies. According to the *gazâ* thesis, tribal rulers of the early Ottoman principality were most interested in conducting raids, warring for both religious reasons and to gain spoils and pasturelands.⁷⁰ However, there are contradictions within the *gazâ* thesis: the Ottomans did not hesitate to incorporate Christian warriors into their armies, and they did actively fight against the other Muslim principalities in 14th century Anatolia. Given that, one may argue that religion had only a marginal place in the identity of early Ottomans. Heath Lowry's

⁶⁸ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar Anadolu'sunda İslam'ın Ayak İzleri: Osmanlı Dönemi* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2011), p. 197.

⁶⁹ Halil İnalcık, "The Question of the Emergence of the Ottoman State," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2, 1980, p. 72.

⁷⁰ Early Ottoman chronicles point out that Alaaddin, the Seljuk ruler, granted Osman's father Ertuğrul and his brothers the area of Söğüt-Domaniç and Ermeni-beli. During the first half of the 14th century, Aydınoğlu Umur Beg, a Turkish sailor chief in western Anatolia, was considered to be the champion of holy war. Following his death, the Ottomans took on the role of champions of *gazâ*. Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 90.

argument supports that: what made someone Ottoman was the degree of his or her contribution to the common initiative based on conquest and capture.⁷¹

As Ömer Lütü Barkan initially suggested, the Ottoman administration also benefited from dervishes, religious leaders of the Turcoman population of Anatolia. These dervishes, known as *Horosan Erenleri* or *Abdalân-ı Rum*, served as architects of the rise of the Ottomans.⁷² Administrators of the state used their influence to assist with colonization and Islamization of newly conquered lands.⁷³ In exchange, dervishes received the right to settle on occupied areas, and given lands as *waqfs* (religious endowments) while enjoying some degree of independence from the central administration.⁷⁴ Thus, the dervish-state relationship was based on mutual profit.

The dervishes maintained cordial relations through three early Ottoman sultanates, those of Osman I, Orhan and Murat I.⁷⁵ Suraiya Faroqhi states that early Sultans, in particular, did not hesitate to present gifts to the heterodox dervishes.⁷⁶ According to the early Ottoman narrators, such as Aşıkpaşazâde (c. 1484) and Neşrî (c. 1520), Osman was a disciple and son-in-law of *Şeyh Edebali*, a well-esteemed

⁷¹ Heath Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 135. For further reading, especially see, Rudi Paul Lindner, *Exploration in Ottoman Prehistory* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Fuat Köprülü, *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, tr. Gary Leiser (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992); Halil İnalcık, "The Question of the Emergence of the Ottoman State" in *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol. II, 1980, pp. 71-79; Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*; Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*. In the second chapter of his book, Lowry critically examines if *gazâ* really existed or was a product of later historiography.

⁷² Aşıkpaşazade divides the early Ottoman society into four groups: the Holy Warriors (Gaziyan-ı Rum), the Craftsmen (Ahiyan-ı Rum), the Dervishes (Abdalan-ı Rum), and the Women (Bacıyan-ı Rum). Aşıkpaşazade, p. 237.

⁷³ Ömer Lütü Barkan, "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda bir İskan ve Kolonizasyon Metodu olarak Vakıflar ve Temlikler; İstila Devirlerinin Kolonizatör Türk Dervişleri ve Zaviyeler," *Vakıflar Dergisi*, II, 1942. Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 105.

⁷⁴ Gábor Ágoston, "Ottoman Warfare, 1453–1826," in *European Warfare*, Jeremy Black, ed.; (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 122.

⁷⁵ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, p. 87.

⁷⁶ Suraiya Faroqhi, "The Tekke of Hacı Bektaş: Social Position and Cultural Activities," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7., 1976, p. 206.

guild sheikh in Konya. Cemal Kafadar has suggested, however, that Edebali is a fictive character and that Osman's kinship to him fabricated by early Ottoman chronicles.⁷⁷ In any case, building good relationships with the dervishes was important owing to their influence on Turcomans; they could be persuaded to play a mediator-like role for the central political authority to control rural population.⁷⁸

The limited number of sources on the early Ottoman state includes the chronicles produced in the 15th century, contemporary Byzantine chronicles, travel books, as well as hagiographies (*menâkıb-nâmes*) of early dervishes. These sources clearly indicate the presence of a *heterodox* Islam in Anatolia prior to the foundation of the Ottoman state. According to Ahmet Y. Ocak, three religious factors shaped Anatolian heterodoxy. First was a folk-vernacular Islam, containing influences of old pagan traditions of the Turkish tribes, such as Shamanism, the worshipping of nature through totems and spirits.⁷⁹ All pre-Islamic Turkish faiths possessed such mystical characters.⁸⁰ Nomadic Turkish tribes, migrants from Central Asia to Anatolia as a result of Mongol invasions, held on to this mysticism as one of their customs, habits and beliefs.⁸¹ After conversion to Islam, non-Islamic traditions and motives of the nomadic tribes lingered on in their belief system. This esoteric form of religion was more dominant than the commands and prohibitions of Sunni orthodox Islam.

A second aspect of the heterodoxy was the important influence of Sufism. Sufism is a tolerant belief system, with singular emphasis on the power of love. The

⁷⁷ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 87.

⁷⁸ Rıza Yıldırım, *Dervishes in Early Ottoman Society and Politics: A Study of Velayetnames as a Source for History* (Bilkent University, M.A. Thesis, 2001), p. 3.

⁷⁹ Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume I, Empire of the Gazis, the Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280–1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Ortaçağlar Anadolu'sunda İslam'ın Ayak İzleri: Selçuklu Dönemi* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2011), p. 375.

⁸¹ Rıza Yıldırım, *Dervishes in Early Ottoman Society and Politics*, p. 1.

tenets of Sufi tradition do not impose strict rules requiring discontinuation of old traditions, which eased the conversion process of Turcomans into Islam. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the Sufis *Hacı Bektâş* (d. 1271), *Celâleddin Rumi* (d. 1273) and *Yunus Emre* (d. 1321) were among the most influential religious figures in pre-Ottoman Anatolia. The thought of the famous Andalusian Sufi mystic, *Ibn Arâbî* (1165–1240) that was based on the doctrine of the Unity of Being (*vahdet-i vücud*), was of particular importance in shaping the religious structure of the 12th and early 13th centuries. Ibn Arâbî, who later settled and died in Damascus, brought the mystical tradition of Andalusia into an Anatolia ruled by the Seljuks.⁸²

Third, vernacular heterodox Islam was even influenced by religious principles and practices of other religions, especially Christianity. Historians emphasize that there was a significant interfaith dialogue (*syncretism*) in the pre-Ottoman era.⁸³ The well-known story of the monk who became a disciple of Rumi while remaining a Christian is one good example of the religious nature of early Ottoman Anatolia.⁸⁴ Franz Babinger depicts the nature of Anatolian Islam in that period as “not a prosperous religion; rather it was popular, hereby easily understandable among Turcoman tribal-nomadic populations living in the frontiers and highlands.”⁸⁵

Heterodox Sufi orders of medieval Anatolia can be categorized in two groups: a *conformist* group that was loyal to the central authority and accepted waqf lands from the state, and a *non-conformist* group, which was in opposition to the authority,

⁸² Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 10.

⁸³ Frederick W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929).

⁸⁴ Speros Vryonis, “Nomadization and Islamization in Asia Minor,” *Dumbarton Oaks Paper*, 29, 1975, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Franz Babinger, “Anadolu’da İslamiyet; İslam Tetkikatının Yeni Yolları,” in Franz Babinger and Fuat Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, ed. Mehmet Kanar (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1996), pp. 11–12

independent and rebellious in nature.⁸⁶ The Bektashi order, which many Qizilbash joined in the 16th century to escape Ottoman prosecution, was part of the conformist group. The religious nature of the non-conformist group was based on vernacular heterodox Islam that was popular among the Turkish population. The *Babai* revolt, led by the non-conformists *Baba İshak* and *Baba İlyas* against the political authority of Anatolian Seljuks, was contained with difficulty.

The same form of religion continued to shape the religious beliefs of Turkish masses until the 16th century. This is because the dervishes, who fled from persecution by the Seljuk authority due to their roles in the *Babâi* revolt, found refuge in the farthest regions, especially in Ottoman territories.⁸⁷ It is no coincidence that the heterodox religious discourse of the *Babâi* revolt was not different from that of the *Şeyh Bedreddin* revolt, which broke out in 1416 in Ottoman Anatolia. The religious discourse of the *Babâi* revolt also paved the way for the Qizilbash rebellions and established a foundation for the creation of the Qizilbash identity in the 16th century.⁸⁸

Cemal Kafadar has suggested that usage of *orthodoxy* and *heterodoxy*, terms derived from European history, are inappropriate for the religious milieu in pre- and early Ottoman Anatolia. He argues that one should remember that the so-called orthodoxy did not take the form of state behavior until the 16th century, when Ottoman-Safavid religious confrontation occurred.⁸⁹ According to Kafadar, the terms

⁸⁶ Halil İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Üzerine Araştırmalar I: Klasik Dönem (1302–1606) Siyasal, Kurumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişim* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009), p. 22.

⁸⁷ Halil İnalçık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, p. 20; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, “Kalenderi Dervishes and Ottoman Administration from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Manifestations of Sainthood in Islam* ed. G. M. Smith and C. W. Ernst (İstanbul: ISIS Press, 1994), p. 244.

⁸⁸ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Ortaçağlar*, p. 76.

⁸⁹ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 73.

are inadequate descriptions of the nature of religion during the period in question. He suggests that there were no strict boundaries between the two spheres in pre- and early Ottoman Anatolia and so prefers *metadoxy* as a description. Metadoxy references the absence of any polity concerned with creating and enforcing such orthodoxy.⁹⁰ I will, however continue to employ the terms heterodoxy and orthodoxy as they have been used by most modern historians.⁹¹

There was also Sunni orthodoxy in Anatolia during this period. The Mongol invasions of the 13th century had forced not only nomadic Turkish tribes but also learned Sunni scholars to migrate from Central Asia to Anatolia. Although nomadic groups, which continued to follow a diversified religious culture of Islam and archaic Turkish beliefs, constituted the largest population of pre-Ottoman Anatolia, the rulers' preference for Sunni institutions and scholars shaped the religious and political history of Anatolia.⁹² *Medreses*, Islamic educational institutions based on Sunni orthodoxy, were established by the Seljuks and Turkish principalities in Anatolia during the 13th and 14th centuries.⁹³ The royal patronage of Seljuks and, later, of Turkish beys, attracted religious scholars to Anatolian cities, especially such prominent ones as Konya, Kayseri and Sivas.⁹⁴ While urban areas were populated by merchants and artisans as well as Sunni religious scholars (forming an urban elite), nomads were living in frontiers.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 76.

⁹¹ For a discussion on this question, also see, Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1998), pp. 45–48; and Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

⁹² Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Selçuklular ve Beylikler Devrinde Tasavvufi Düşünce," in *Anadolu Selçukluları ve Beylikler Dönemi Uygarlığı*, vol. 1, pp. 435–437.

⁹³ Halil İnalcık, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Klasik Çağ (1300–1600)* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2009), p. 13.

⁹⁴ Rıza Yıldırım, "Dervishes," p. 33.

As the Ottoman principality expanded its territories, the emergence of Ottoman ulemâ went hand in hand with the consolidation of Sunni identity of the state. Orthodox scholars, called *fakırs*, who were trained in Islamic law, served as advisers to the Sultans as early as Osman and Orhan, particularly on the issue of governing newly conquered lands.⁹⁵ Early viziers were chosen from among these scholars.

The 16th century witnessed the redefinition of Sunni Islam in the Ottoman realms through the religious works of ulemâ that were incorporated into the bureaucratic apparatus. Linda Darling has suggested two factors to help explain this process: Ottomans wanted to distinguish themselves from the Shi'ite Safavids and they wanted to accelerate the absorption of the Arab lands conquered by Selim I.⁹⁶ Baki Tezcan suggests another factor: Ottoman law, which was mutually symbiotic with Sunnism, had to be systemized in order to respond to the needs of an Empire-wide economic market.⁹⁷ Of these three possibilities, this study will focus most closely on the Shi'ite Safavid factor, which has been well explained by Colin Imber:

The rise of the Safavids after 1500 reinforced the tendency to stress the orthodoxy of the Ottomans. The need to defend the "True Faith" against the infidelity of the Safavids, and their guardianship of the Holy Places after 1517, led the Ottoman Sultans to enlarge their claims during the 16th century.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Halil İnalcık, *Devlet-i Aliyye*, p. 34.

⁹⁶ Linda Darling, "Political Language and Political Discourse in the Early Modern Mediterranean World," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Volume 38, Number 4, Spring 2008, p. 527.

⁹⁷ Baki Tezcan, "The Ottoman Mewali as Lords of the Law," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 20, 2009, p. 387.

⁹⁸ Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Myth."

2.3. The Rise of Ottoman Imperial Institutions

The Ottoman bureaucratic and imperial regime began to rise in the mid-15th century. With the rise and development of structural mechanisms, the Ottoman state evolved into an empire with a hierarchical bureaucracy. This process, which strengthened the imperial culture and identity, alienated Turcomans. Three institutions at the core of Ottoman bureaucratic development—*timar*, *devshirme* and *ilmiyye*—played significant roles on the alienation process. It is important to understand how their rise worked against the Turcomans.

The *Timar* system was the Ottoman land regime, in which tax revenues of a certain region were given, in part or entirely, to appointees of the administration, in return for some military, fiscal and administrative services.⁹⁹ In the Ottoman Empire, *timar*'s presence can be traced to the reign of Orhan. However, it took its classical form under Murat II.¹⁰⁰ We know that similar land regimes had been applied by Abbasid, Byzantine and Sassanid states.

Although *timar* was a method used for efficient collection of taxes, it provided the state with certain advantages in centralizing its power.¹⁰¹ This is because the *timar* holder possessed only the right to collect taxes, not the land itself, on behalf of the sultan. In traditional Ottoman law, all of the properties belonged to God and then to the sultan as God's shadow on earth. The Ottoman state did its best

⁹⁹ İlber Ortaylı, *Türkiye Teşkilat ve İdare Tarihi* (Cedit Neşriyat: Ankara, 2007), p. 124.

¹⁰⁰ Halil İnalcık, "Timar," EI2. Once a region was captured, Ottoman administration appointed an official, called *tahrir emini*, whose duty was to determine the sources of income in that region. After this official recorded people of the region, *dirliks* (fiefs), which were in different sizes, were granted to certain government officials, mostly from the *kul* origin.

¹⁰¹ Halil İnalcık, *Klasik Çağ*, p 111.

not to limit the political or financial power of timar holders in any regions, often by appointing them far away from their hometown and frequently changing their places of duty. Likewise, in the classical age of the Ottoman Empire, this right of tax-collection could not be inherited by family members.¹⁰² This prevented local groups and families from rising to power. Generally speaking, peasants were not allowed to cultivate land larger than that which could be managed with a couple of oxen.¹⁰³

With the timar system, army and bureaucracy also became more centralized. An army of provincial cavalry, called *timarlı sipahis*, was recruited at wartimes. As timar holders were also loyal servants of the sultan, these troops emerged as an institution that further enabled the state to centralize its power. Moreover, the state controlled all lands of the empire, even those extremely distant from the center, through timar holders, who served also as the political administrators for their places of duty.

Devşirme was a system in which non-Muslim children were periodically recruited and Ottomanized; as adults, they could climb to the highest positions of the Ottoman bureaucracy.¹⁰⁴ Inherited from the Seljuk sultanate of Rum, *devşirme*, also known as the *kul* system, refers to the fact that these children were raised as loyal servants of the sultan.¹⁰⁵ Although the exact period when the Ottomans began to recruit non-Muslim children is not certain, *devşirme* as an Ottoman institution was founded roughly in the first half of the 15th century.¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷ *Devşirmes* also constituted

¹⁰² The period between 1453 and 1566 is usually called the classical age of the empire. Gabor Agoston, "Ottoman Warfare, 1453–1826," p. 127.

¹⁰³ Halil İnalcık, "Tımar," EI2.

¹⁰⁴ Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 141; Gabor Agoston, "Ottoman Warfare, 1453–1826," p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ Halil İnalcık, "Ghulam," EI2.

¹⁰⁶ Halil İnalcık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," p. 105; Victor L. Menace, "Devshirme," EI2.

¹⁰⁷ J. A. B. Palmer, "Yenicerilerin Kokeni," in *Söğüt'ten İstanbul'a*, pp. 449–450.

the primary source for the Janissary corps.¹⁰⁸ They were expected to remain unmarried and to avoid engagement in moneymaking affairs, although these rules were occasionally breached, especially after the 17th century. As the *devşirme* had no recognized lineage after they were recruited, they were assumed to be reluctant to accept bribes or abuse their jobs to benefit family members.

Ultimately, the system replaced the Turkish or *gazî* families in army and bureaucracy. While the situation was the opposite before the conquest of Istanbul, most of Mehmed II's grand viziers were picked from the *kuls*. He persecuted his grand vizier Çandarlı Halil Paşa, a man of Muslim Turkish origin, whose family had acquired significant authority in state affairs, as soon as the conquest was completed.¹⁰⁹ It would be plausible to ground his preference for the *kuls* in the fact that they were considered unquestionably loyal to the sultan, a result of both the way they were educated and the fact that they lived their lives at the mercy of the sultan.¹¹⁰

As the topic of this study is the discourse produced by the Ottoman elites, the formation period of *ulemâ* is significant. As Ottoman power multiplied with new conquests, the Ottoman lands became increasingly more attractive for Sunni scholars in search of royal patronage. Since Orhan's reign, rulers, statesmen, commanders, as well as notables, had financed the construction of medreses and provided them with

¹⁰⁸ According to *Devşirme*, recruited children were divided according to their physical and mental abilities. The most gifted ones were brought to the Ottoman palace, where they received a superior education. The rest were sent to Turkish families in Anatolia in order to learn Turkish language and Islam, and then to the Janissary army as waged soldiers. After receiving their education, those who stayed in palace, called *içoğlanı*, would be appointed to positions in Ottoman provinces in a system called *çıkma*. Based upon their ability, networks and chance, the *içoğlanı* could reach the top of bureaucratic hierarchy. Or, in case of the death of patron, one could remain totally unsupported with no promotion at all.

¹⁰⁹ Halil İnalcık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," p. 106.

¹¹⁰ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 101.

continuous income through foundations.¹¹¹ Thus, the Ottoman sultans became the patrons of scholars, enabling them to benefit from their scholarship in scientific, judicial, governmental, educational and military issues. Success on the battlefield increased faith in the future well-being of the Ottoman state, which indirectly strengthened the Sunni identity due to the increasing number of scholars under the Ottoman patronage. But other Sunni political authorities in Anatolia or elsewhere still presented alternatives to the patronage of the Ottoman sultan, especially following Bayezid I's defeat by Timur in the battle of Ankara in 1402. The capacity of the Ottoman dynasty to patronize religious scholars significantly increased under Mehmed II and reached its peak after the Ottoman Empire became the only Muslim empire following the conquest of Islamic holy region. However, despite the existence of Sunni institutions and scholars prior to and following the establishment of the Ottoman state, Sunni identity was less apparent over the state polity and institutions before the 16th century, especially during the reign of Süleyman I.

Sunni ulemâ was incorporated into the Ottoman bureaucratic system in the 15th century.¹¹² Needless to say, Sunni religious scholars took the place of the mystical leaders of nomadic-tribal subjects, *babas* or *dedes*. In contrast to the mystics, whose teachings were not based on a written systematic theology but on oral tradition and folklore, ulemâ received and lectured on canonical education in Islamic law.¹¹³ As a result of the rise of ulemâ, the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of the early modern Ottoman Empire was influenced greatly by the Arabo-Persian

¹¹¹ Abdurrahman Atçıl, *The Formation of the Ottoman Learned Class and Legal Scholarship (1300–1600)* (The University of Chicago: PhD dissertation thesis, 2010), pp. 49–50.

¹¹² Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, p. 265.

¹¹³ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Ortaçağlar*, p. 75.

culture.¹¹⁴ Thus, it is no surprise that while heterodox mystics, as well as the Turcomans of Anatolia, used an unsophisticated version of Turkish, the languages of ulemâ were Arabic and Persian, or a dialect of Turkish strongly influenced by those languages, and generally less unfamiliar to Turcoman nomads and to peasants.¹¹⁵ In addition, just as janissary corps and *timar* holders were, ulemâ were more loyal to the sultan's authority. They were not only clerics but also government officials, who served as judges and professors at various ranks, in contrast to mystics who had an independent and rebellious character.

Another duty of the ulemâ was to formulate Ottoman law and, as a result, it was systematized as a mixture of *örf* (Sultanic law) and *şeriat* (Islamic -mainly Hanafi law). Ebûssuûd (1545–74), the longest serving Şeyhülislam during the reign of Süleyman I, was the person most responsible for modifications to contemporary Ottoman law. He incorporated *şer'î* principles formulated by the great imams of the 9th century, considered the founding fathers of four Sunni schools of law, particularly in the Hanafi school of law. Meanwhile, sultanic law-making also developed significantly.¹¹⁶ Thus, it can be said that ulemâ class contributed to the construction of the Ottoman official ideology, arguably more than any other classes.

As I stated above, the rise of these three institutions worked against nomadic subjects of the Ottoman Empire. By the early 16th century when the Qizilbash rebelled against the Ottoman administration, the formation and development of these institutions was mostly complete.

¹¹⁴ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 111.

¹¹⁵ Sara Nur Yıldız, "Ottoman historical writing in Persian, 1400–1600," in *A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Charles Melville (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 437.

¹¹⁶ Halil İnalcık, "Süleyman the Lawgiver and Ottoman law," *Archivum Ottomanicum*, 1 (1969), p. 120.; Halil İnalcık, "Kânun" EI2.

2.4. Alienation of Turcomans

As a result of the Ottoman imperial transformation, the nomadic Turkish populations that had played a military role in the foundation of the Ottoman principality were excluded from the rising imperial regime. The alienation was both socio-economic and ideo-religious. Socio-economic alienation was a result of the centrist policies of the strengthening imperial regime in the Ottoman Empire. As the principality transformed from a tribal chieftaincy into a centralized bureaucratic empire, Turkish nomadic population gradually became disconnected from the state. The second stage of the Turcoman alienation was conducted through certain writings, including chronicles, fatwas, religious texts etc., produced by 16th century Ottoman scholars and statesmen. Their goal was to glorify the dynasty and create a religio-political contrast with the Safavids, with whom they were engaged in a conflict with the Ottomans that began just after the foundation of the Safavid state in 1501.¹¹⁷ As I will discuss below, these writings clearly determined the ideological and religious differences between the Qizilbash and the Ottoman identities. This is why I call the second stage of Turcoman alienation ideo-religious.

The main purpose of this study is to explain the ideo-religious alienation of Turcomans conducted by Ottoman historians through their pejorative perception of the Qizilbash. However, in order to understand the fundamentals of the Qizilbash discontent and their rebellions in the early 16th century, it is also important to examine the socio-economic alienation within the context of the rise of Ottoman imperial regime. Once the Ottoman principality was established by tribal elements, it

¹¹⁷ Rhoads Murphey, "Ottoman Historical Writing in the Seventeenth-Century: A Survey of the General Development of the Genre after the Reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603–617)," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 13, (1993–1994): 278–279.

required a well-structured bureaucracy rather than a tribal government mechanism functioning through oral tradition and kinship relations.¹¹⁸ During the Ottoman bureaucratic transformation, tribal practices and quasi-institutional structures were replaced by a central government and efficient bureaucratic apparatus.¹¹⁹ For instance, the Janissary corps, which the central powers assumed to be more dependent on and loyal to the rulers, replaced tribal military forces, which had previously, played a significant role in the establishment of the Ottoman state.

Moreover, the Ottomans abandoned tribal economics based on raids into the neighboring enemy lands in favor of a more complex economic system based on tımar. In addition, the aggressive raiding mentality of the tribal chieftaincy was replaced with a more rationalist and less warlike mentality that capitalized on developing cordial relations with neighboring countries.¹²⁰

In the 15th century, the gap between heterodoxy and orthodoxy started to widen. A group of orthodox scholars were appointed as judges and muftis to the provinces. Although the heterodox Sufis played important roles on the conversion activities in the Balkans, the incorporation of Sunni scholars into the Ottoman bureaucracy had greater benefits for a rising imperial regime. This is because Sunni orthodoxy, promulgated by ulemâ, relied on a bookish religious tradition and had a long history that produced a great volume of religious and legal scholarship. Thanks to this scholarship, which ulemâ possessed, the Ottoman state established its orthodoxy in law, education and even state ideology.

¹¹⁸ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ Ira M. Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History," *Tribes and State Formation*, p. 34.

¹²⁰ Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume I, Empire of the Gazis, the Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire, 1280–1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 15.

The most important development for the alienation process of Turcoman population was the centralization attempts of early Ottoman sultans; an effort by them to sedentarize and so better control the nomads. Yıldırım Bayezid was the first sultan who applied a deliberate centralist policy. It is possible to say that he was responsible for evolution of the semi-feudal state into a real Islamic sultanate.¹²¹ Bayezid captured most of the territories of other Turco-Muslim beylicates in Anatolia, as well as a significant amount of territories in Balkans. He appointed governors chosen from within the *kul* system to these new lands.¹²² The Ottomans' defeat by Timur, in the battle of Ankara in 1402, meant loss of newly conquered lands, however. This defeat also failed Bayezid I's centralization efforts.¹²³ Nonetheless, his policies remained as a good example of the attempt to centralize for subsequent sultans, especially for Mehmed II.

Mehmed II is accepted by many scholars of Ottoman history as the real founder of centralized Ottoman Empire.¹²⁴ In addition to expanding the volume of territories under the Ottoman control and the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Mehmed increased the significance of a slave-based central bureaucracy at the expense of the Turkish aristocrat families.¹²⁵ His policies created discontent among

¹²¹ Halil İnalçık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," *Studia Islamica*, No. 2, 1954, p. 105.

¹²² Halil İnalçık, *Klasik Çağ*, p. 21.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 22.

¹²⁴ Among the centralist policies of Mehmed II, those which increased the power of central authority are the consolidation of the *kul* (slave) system, authorization for fratricide allowing the sultan to eliminate his brothers, diminishing the influence of frontier begs and mystics, forcing nomads to sedentarize and pay taxes and providing the safety of pilgrimage roads. He espoused some ideals and identities, which are the gaza mission, making Constantinople, or now Istanbul, the capital of his universal empire, claiming to be the inheritor of Rome. Another important policy is the reconstruction of Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and general Rabbinate primarily for tax-paying purposes. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, pp. 36–42.

¹²⁵ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, p. 42; Halil İnalçık, *Klasik Çağ*, p. 34.

many groups including the old landed classes, nomads and heterodox dervish lodges, whose lands were expropriated.¹²⁶

The discontent is closely related to the aim of Mehmed's centralist policies, which was to increase the revenues of the central treasury. Revenue growth was necessary to cover the costs of the new central Janissary army, and also because Mehmed was constantly engaged in warfare. Military technology such as gunpowder, big size cannonballs etc. was expensive. Two main revenue sources were used to meet these expenses. One was imperial confiscations, especially of the lands of the descendants of frontier warriors and heterodox dervish lodges. These lands had been granted to them permanently during the early Ottoman period.

The other revenue source was the sedentarization and subsequent taxation of nomads, a means that met with resistance from nomadic-tribal Turcomans, who wanted to continue their nomadic lifestyle.¹²⁷ Nomadic Turcomans constantly moved from one pastureland to another for the care of their livestock, a situation that made tax-collection almost impossible for the Ottoman officials. Thus, their status was mostly *haric-ez defter* (out of the record).¹²⁸ Ottoman administrators constantly sought to sedentarize nomads to ease tax collection and increase control over these subjects.

¹²⁶ Halil İnalcık, "Mehmed II and His Time," p. 426.

¹²⁷ In the Ottoman Empire, the less favored groups were those not recorded in the defters because they could not be controlled. Therefore, the purpose of the Ottoman government was to record as many people as it could. Many people escaped registration even if they were settled.

¹²⁸ It is important to note that by the 17th century, a new state representative, called *Türkmen Voyvodası*, appeared. This was an agent between the tribes and the state. Among many duties of him, he was responsible for tax collection typicaş of 17th century found in any place the tax collection was done through *mültezim* or *emin*. See, for example, Onur Usta, *Türkmen Voyvodası, Tribesmen and the Ottoman State (1590-1690)*, (Bilkent University: M.A. Thesis, 2011).

In contrast to nomadic groups and landed powerful Muslim Turkish families, the centralization increased the role of the Sultan's kuls.¹²⁹ After the conquest of Istanbul, and Mehmed's execution of Çandarlı Halil Paşa (d. 1453), who was the grand vizier of his father, Murad II (r. 1421–1444 and 1446–1451), inborn Muslims could barely rise to the top of bureaucratic hierarchy.

The centrist policies created a conflict between the Ottoman state and nomadic Turcomans. Turcomans were displeased with these policies because they were to lose their freedom of movement and had to pay taxes. Yet the new order could not properly transform nomadic-tribal people, whose lifestyle was incompatible with the abovementioned measures taken by the state.¹³⁰ Turcoman tribes had difficulties in adapting to changing conditions and did not want to make concessions from their traditional life styles.

The roots of the conflict are better understood when one considers the effects of population pressure in the Ottoman Empire, which multiplied especially between 1450 and 1600, and the effect of natural disasters in the early 16th century.¹³¹ Using *tahrir* registers of the 15th and 16th centuries, Ömer Lütfi Barkan became the first historian to determine the existence of a population pressure and economic stress this may have caused on resources.¹³² In addition, the population pressure was exacerbated by a series of natural disasters, including a severe earthquake in 1509,

¹²⁹ Halil İnalcık, "The Policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 23–25, 1969–1970, pp. 235–24, and Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelovic (1453–1474)* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), p. 59.

¹³⁰ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p.62.

¹³¹ Michael Cook, *Population Pressure in Rural Anatolia, 1450–1600* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 9.

¹³² Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "Tarihi Demografi Araştırmaları ve Osmanlı Tarihi," *Türkiyat Mecmuası* 10 (1951–1953), pp. 1–27. For a contemporary discussion on the population changes, see, Oktay Özel, "Population Changes in Ottoman Anatolia During the 16th and 17th Centuries: The "Demographic Crisis" Reconsidered," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, May 2004, pp. 183–205.

plague and a famine in the early 16th century.¹³³ These factors created a heavy tax burden on all Ottoman subjects and thus increased the tension between the state and the Turcomans.¹³⁴

2.5. Ottoman Official Ideology

This study examines the ideo-religious alienation of the Qizilbash within 16th century Ottoman historiography. We should first investigate, however, the existence of state ideology in the Ottoman Empire and, in particular, an ongoing debate about it. Official ideology consists of the religious, political and ideological stance of the state, that is, the beliefs that permit the state to respond to similar developments in a similar way. Although I accept that such an ideology existed in the 16th century, I do not believe that it was a constant ideology. Instead, I recognize shifts, in accordance with certain external and internal conditions. For example, Ottoman state ideology became more bureaucratic in the 16th century as a result of many factors, including the Safavid/Qizilbash threat. The official stance of that time was not the same as that of the 19th century, which can be called the age of modernization.

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak has argued for the existence of an Ottoman official ideology, concluding that there was such an ideology despite two major objections from those opposing this view. The first point of those who oppose Ocak's view is that the concept of "official ideology" suggests an imposing structure, and there was neither pressure nor imposition of Ottoman official ideology. The second objection is

¹³³ Hanna Sohrweide, "Der Sieg der Safaviden in Persien und seine Rückwirkung auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert," pp. 139–141.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman Decline and Its Effects Upon the Reaya," in *Aspects of the Balkans, Continuity and Change: Contributions to the International Balkan Conference at UCLA in 1969*, ed. H. Birnbaum and S. Vryonis (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), pp. 338–354.

that if an official ideology did exist, it should have been propagated by systematic and institutionalized methods for a long period of time, but this did not happen in the Ottoman case. Rejecting these objections, Ocak defines the roots of Ottoman official ideology as:

...neither a conscious program created by those in the center exclusively to suppress those in the periphery nor an ideology, like in modern ages, shaped by a certain individual or a group based on a philosophical background, intended for a certain objective. Instead it was formed over the course of time under the influence of internal and external conditions.¹³⁵

Ocak's argument that official ideology was not formed by a group of people needs to be reexamined. I believe that a group of imported religious scholars, as well as those educated in medreses, contributed significantly to the formation of this ideology. For instance, Kemalpaşazâde's (d. 1536) and Ebussuud's (d. 1574) fatwas, as well as their *risalas*, established the official ideological position of the Ottoman Empire in many issues during the 16th century.

Development of an Ottoman state ideology should be read together with certain religious and secular notions. Frequently used in Ottoman documents, the notion of *din ü devlet* (state and religion), adopted from Islamic political theory, regards state and religion as conjoined twins.¹³⁶ Maintaining their continuation was one of the major duties of an Islamic ruler. Another notion, reflecting the attention paid to the state in the Ottoman political theory, is *devlet-i ebed müddet* (the eternal state). This refers to the necessity of protecting the state, which is sacred, at all costs. They were also the sultan's obligations to maintain an "ever-victorious army" and an

¹³⁵ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, p. 197.

¹³⁶ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Zındıklar ve Mulhidler*, p. 73. Also, see Halil İnalcık, "Islam in the Ottoman Empire," *Cultura Turcica*, 5–7, 1968–1970, pp. 19–29. Madeline Zilfi, *Politics of Piety: The Ottoman Ulemâ in the Postclassical Age (1600–1800)* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988), p. 26. Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), pp. 105–106.

“ever-expanding frontier” for the sake of *nizam-ı âlem* (the world order). Indirectly, these obligations meant that all rights of diversity or even life could be sacrificed to maintain the existence and unity of the state.¹³⁷ It goes without saying that an eternal state could not be imagined without religion and a pious ruler.

Ottoman official ideology defined an ideal human type, which the state presented to its people as a model. The right to rule of the sultan, the shadow of God on earth (*zillullah fi'l 'arz*), was believed to have been given by God.¹³⁸ Another title which was used by the sultan was *el müeyyed min indillah* (supported by God).¹³⁹ According to the sultan, his subjects were trusts of God (*vediatullah*). He had the responsibility to make them live in wealth and secure the justice among them so that *nizam* (the order) could be achieved.¹⁴⁰ In return for these sultanic duties, *reaya* (tax-paying subjects) were expected to be loyal to their status of *reaya ibn reaya* (son of a *reaya*), cultivate and pay taxes on time, join the army of *tımarlı sipahis* when needed, never dabble in politics, which was not their business, and be obedient to the commands and requests of their administrators, appointed from the administrative center.¹⁴¹

As will be examined in the subsequent chapters, the Qizilbash described the opposite of this idealized Ottoman subject. The Qizilbash were introduced as *etrak-ı bi-idrak* (Turks with a low capacity of perception) in the writings of Ottoman historians. This attitude toward the Qizilbash should be read together with the fact that Ottoman urban areas were under the influence of Arab and Persian high cultures;

¹³⁷ Ömer Çaha and M. Lütfullah Karaman, “Civil Society in the Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Economic and Social Research* 8(2), p. 55.

¹³⁸ Ann Lambton, “Some Reflection on the Persian Theory of Government” *Theory and Practice*, pp. 138–139.

¹³⁹ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, p. 198.

¹⁴⁰ Halil İnalcık, “Osmanlı Padişahı,” in *Doğu Batı Düşünce Dergisi* 13:54, 2010, pp. 9–20.

¹⁴¹ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 116; Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Zındıklar ve Mülhidler*, p. 92.

the Qizilbash were perceived as ignorant nomads who could not get along with urban culture.¹⁴²

2.6. The Advent of the Safavids

The origins of the Safavid state begin with *Şeyh Safiyeddin* (1252–1336), the founder of the Safeviyye Sufi order. He was based in Ardabil in Azerbaijan near the Caspian coast. Safiyeddin assumed the leadership of the Safavid order in 1301. Financed by the Ilkhanids, who ruled Iran at that time, the sheikh gained an enormous reputation, as a result of religious propaganda conducted not only in Iran but also in Anatolia, Syria, Caucasus and in Egypt.¹⁴³

Scholars have debated whether this order was Shi'ite in its origins. Minorsky argued that the order strictly adhered to Sunni Islam, but turned toward Shi'ite Islam under Ismail's grandfather Şeyh Cüneyd.¹⁴⁴ Roemer, on the other hand, noted that Shafi'i sect of Sunni Islam, to which he believed Safavids adhered earlier, was the closest to Shi'a. Furthermore, there was Sunni-Shi'ite syncretism in Iran at the time and the order could have been based in this.¹⁴⁵ Another interpretation suggests that the rise of Sufism as a bridge between Shi'ite and Sunni Islam during the period between Mongols and Safavids paved the way for the rise of Shi'a. Hussain Nasr and

¹⁴² F. Aslı Ergül, "The Ottoman Identity: Turkish, Muslim or Rum?," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 48:4, 2012, p. 635.

¹⁴³ Roger Savory, "Safawids," EI2.

¹⁴⁴ Vladimir Minorsky, "Shaykh Bali Efendi on the Safavids," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1/3, 1957, p. 439.

¹⁴⁵ Hans .R. Roemer, "The Safavid Period," *The Cambridge History of Iran* 6, ed. Peter Jackson, 1993, pp. 194–196.

Henry Corbin interestingly argue that Sufism and Shi'ism are inseparable.¹⁴⁶ This argument is represented in Corbin's statement that "true Shi'ism is the same as *Tasavvuf* (Sufism), and thus, genuine and real Tasavvuf cannot be anything other than Shi'ism."¹⁴⁷

Yet a famous historian of Sufism, Annamarie Schimmel, argues against Corbin and Nasr. Schimmel underlines:

...Yet from that time [advent of the Safavid house in 1501] Sufism and the Shia creed were rarely combined, and only a few Shia orders exist today. In spite of the relatively close relationship between the two movements in the period of formation, the Sufi congregations usually supported the Sunni case and often became defenders of the official Sunnite creed under the later Abbasid caliphs.¹⁴⁸

It must also be noted that the Ottomans were sending precious gifts every year to Ardabil under the name of *çerağ akçesi*.¹⁴⁹ This is not surprising because many sources support the view that early Safavids were Sunnis.

Religious identity of Cüneyd and his son, Haydar, is significant for the process of consolidation of power of Safavid house in the early 16th century. Cüneyd's quest for material power led the *Kara Koyunlu Cihanşah*, the strongest ruler of the region at the time, to expel him from Ardabil with his forces. Cüneyd found asylum with Cihanşah's rival, the *Ak Koyunlu* ruler *Uzun Hasan* (d. 1478).¹⁵⁰ He travelled around Anatolia and attracted many supporters among heterodox Turcomans by claiming to be a descendant of Ali. Cüneyd changed the nature of the order into a militant

¹⁴⁶ Hussain Nasr, "Religion in Safavid Persia," *Iranian Studies*, 7, 1974, p. 272.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in M.M. Mozzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1972), p. 83.

¹⁴⁸ Annamarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 85.

¹⁴⁹ Selahattin Tansel, *Sultan II. Bâyezî't'in Siyasî Hayatı* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1966), pp. 234-235.

¹⁵⁰ Roger Savory, "Safawids," E2.

political movement.¹⁵¹ Cüneyd made the Safavids into a militant political movement. He was killed in battle by the ruler of Şirvan. Uzun Hasan, the Turcoman ruler, had placed himself in a position of power by marrying his sister to Cüneyd and his daughter to Cüneyd's son, Haydar. This permitted him access to the military and spiritual power of the Safavid dynasty. On Hasan's death, however, his son threatened rather than appeased by growing Safavid power, allied himself with the new ruler of Şirvan. Together they caused the death of Haydar in 1488.

Shah Ismail's early life represents the most important period of his life explaining why the Safavid Sufi order became a political movement. Ismail became the leader of the order after the death of his brother in 1494, at the age of seven. During the next five years, he lived under the protection of Mirza Ali Kirkaya in the city of Lahijan near the Caspian Sea in northwest Iran. He was educated in Quranic studies, Persian and Arabic and the seven Qizilbash commanders of Lahijan were responsible for his military education.¹⁵² According to Roger Savory, the resourceful emotional and educational support of the Qizilbash chiefs was strongly influential in making Ismail a revolutionary leader.¹⁵³ They also kept alive the network of the Safavid order in Anatolia, Syria and Azerbaijan. Ismail left Lahijan in 1499 to make his bid for power. One Qizilbash emir who served the Shah Tahmasb (r. 1524–1576) narrates Ismail's move in this way: "The Khan, as glorious as Alexander the Great, decided to go to Ardabil, the home of *irshad*, in order to rescue the country from the

¹⁵¹ Kathryn Babayan, "The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamate Shi'ism," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 27, No: 1/4, Religion and Society in Islamic Iran during the Pre-modern Era, 1994, p. 136.

¹⁵² Qadi Ahmed Qumi, *Hulasat al-Tavarih*, edited and translated into German in Erika Glassen, *Die fruhen Safawiden nach Qazi Ahmad Qumi* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag), 1970, p. 171.

¹⁵³ Roger Savory, *Iran under the Safavids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 22.

hands of infidels and ask for the help of the souls of his ancestors.”¹⁵⁴ Successful military raids against Georgia and Şirvan permitted Ismail to avenge his father and grandfather. Undoubtedly, his successes were achieved with the help of Qizilbash tribes, which rallied to Ismail since the summer of 1500.¹⁵⁵ By joining with the Safavid army, the Qizilbash, who did not conform to the Ottoman authority, had found a new environment in which they could pursue the gazâ ideal. Eventually, Ismail captured Tabriz after a victory against Akkoyunlus in 1501 and acclaimed himself as the Shah there, starting the dominance of Safavid dynasty in Iran that would last until 1736.¹⁵⁶ One of the causes of his success was the chaotic political atmosphere in Iran at the time stemming from the fact that the descendants of the Akkoyunlu Sultan Yakup were in a struggle for the throne.¹⁵⁷ Roger Savory puts forward three factors to explain the Safavid success. First, the Safavid sufis were unquestioningly obedient to their Shah. Second, as explained below, from the time of Cüneyd, the head of the Safavid order was considered divine, believed to be the son of God by his supporters. Third, the Safavid Shahs claimed to be the representatives on earth of the Twelfth Imam or Mahdi, the ultimate savior of humankind.¹⁵⁸

When Shah Ismail I established the Safavid state following a series of battles, in 1501, he proclaimed Shi’a Islam as the official religion of the new state. It became a formidable Shi’ite state in the region with well-defined and complex institutions, religious teachings and political paradigms by adhering to an orthodox interpretation

¹⁵⁴ Hasan-ı Rumlu, *Ahsenu’l Tevarih*, translated into Turkish and abridged by Cevat Cevan (Ankara: Ardiç Yayınları, 2004), p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ Roger Savory, “Safawids,” EI2.

¹⁵⁶ Hans Roemer, “The Safavid Period,” p. 212.

¹⁵⁷ Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906–962/1500–1555)*, (The University of Utah: PhD Dissertation, 1980), pp. 1–2.

¹⁵⁸ Roger Savory, “Safawids,” EI2.

of Shi'a Islam called Twelver Shi'a.¹⁵⁹ Two factors led him to this conversion: his own Shi'ite inclinations, formed during his education in Lahijan; and his desire to provide the new state with an ideology that would differentiate it from the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Uzbeks.¹⁶⁰ However, it should be noted that the incorporation of Twelver Shi'a into the Safavid state ideology was not completed until Shah Abbas (1587–1629), who significantly reduced the power of the Qizilbash in the state affairs and imported Shi'ite scholars from Jabal Amil.¹⁶¹

Shah Ismail enjoyed widespread support among the Qizilbash people of Anatolia who were followers of his Sufi order. He had ambitions to incorporate Anatolian lands into his greater Iranian project.¹⁶² Ismail possessed an important tool to make this plan happen, as he could rely on the Qizilbash elements of Anatolia who had been adherents of the Safavid order as a result of religious propaganda made its previous leaders, Cüneyd and Haydar. The Qizilbash, considered an undesirable group living within the borders of the Ottoman state, were willing to recognize the political and religious leadership of the Safavid shah. Indeed, Ismail's continued religious and political propaganda in Anatolia through his caliphs (*dâi*) had broad repercussions throughout the region. Ismail used the influence of his spirituality among the Qizilbash Turcomans to achieve both his political and religious goals. Thus it is important to examine the religious relationship between the Qizilbash and the Shah. In the eyes of the Qizilbash, Ismail was the *mürşid-i kâmil* (perfect guide); sometimes he was perceived as a God-like figure. This acceptance of the spiritual

¹⁵⁹ Sussan Babaie, *Isfahan and Its Palaces: Statescraft, Shiism and the Architecture of Conviviality in Early Modern Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ Roger Savory, "Safawids," EI2.

¹⁶¹ Rula Abisaab, *Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 53–89.

¹⁶² Özer Küpeli, *Osmanlı-Safevi Münasebetleri (1612–1639)* (Ege University: PhD Dissertation, 2009), p. 3.

character of Ismail differentiated the Safavid state from its contemporaries in western Asia.

Safavid territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottomans led, inevitably, to conflict. This conflict has been the topic of considerable research. Although initially considered a religious conflict, more recent literature tends to accept a mixture of reasons. There were five dimensions to the rivalry/conflict in question: religious, political, military, cultural and economic. As stated above, religion was used as a tool of legitimacy by both parties. Some historians still apply the paradigm of European confessionalization during the 16th century to the conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids, arguing that they encountered the same challenges as their European counterparts. Tjana Krstic, for instance, sees little difference between Catholic-Protestant schism and Sunni-Shi'ite schism in their use of religious discourse in the identity construction processes of the states.¹⁶³ Politically speaking, Ismail was aware that the Ottoman had to be challenged to extend his power. Ismail's intention was to establish an empire that would incorporate parts of the Ottoman and Mamluk territories. To achieve this goal, he wanted to use the Anatolian Turcomans, instead of waging a pitched battle against the Ottoman army, which was equipped with superior weaponry. Safavid political propaganda, inviting Turcomans to join under Ismail's leadership, was disseminated all over Anatolia through the spies (*da'i*) of Shah Ismail. For the Ottomans, this cooperation was even more dangerous than the presence of a Shi'ite rival in its eastern borders.

Economically, the rise of a power in the East was a serious threat for the Ottoman trade through the Silk Road. Thus, each state pursued trade policies that would minimize the other's benefit from international trade. For example, Selim

¹⁶³ Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, p. 14.

prevented the importation of Iranian silk into Ottoman lands.¹⁶⁴ The economic rivalry intensified during and after the reign of Süleyman (1520–1566)

There was also a cultural competition between the Ottomans and the Safavids. The opposite of *Rumi* was primarily *Acem* (Iranian).¹⁶⁵ In this cultural rivalry, the Ottoman Empire represented the urban and educated culture; the Safavids represented tribal and nomadic culture. It is ironic that the Sultan wrote to the Shah in Persian, which was seen as an ornamented language fashionable to use at the time, and the Shah replied him in a simple Turkish, the language of his tribal origins.¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, in their eulogy of the sultans, Ottoman historians did not hesitate to refer to Persian mythical kings—Feridun, Cem, Dara, Hüsrev and others. These mythical figures are known from the *Şehname* of Firdevsi. Although their deployment can be considered an influence of Iranian literary tradition on Ottoman historiography, Ottoman historians may also have aimed to show the sultans as heirs to antique Persia while excluding the Safavid rulers as usurpers of the region.

2.7. Concluding Remarks

The rise of the Ottoman imperial regime created some hostile groups within the Empire, including disposed timar holders such as Turcoman notables in Anatolia, *akıncı* (raider) families of the Balkans (who had enjoyed some degree of independence in the lands they conquered and ruled) and medrese graduates who were not appointed to their expected positions after graduation. The centrist policies of the Ottoman state led such groups to join together against the Ottoman authority,

¹⁶⁴ Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*, p. 125.

¹⁶⁵ Tjana Krstic, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ Bernard Lewis, *Political Language of Islam*, p. 114.

especially at times when this authority was relatively weak. It is no accident that the *Şeyh Bedreddin* (d. 1420) revolt broke out in 1416, when the state had just gone through a period of civil war (interregnum –*fetret devri*).¹⁶⁷ The unpleasant banded together under Şeyh Bedreddin, a Sufi theologian and the most profound scholar of Islamic law.¹⁶⁸ The Ottoman government's suppression of this revolt may be interpreted as the beginning of a new period, during which Sunni orthopraxy was molded into official state ideology.

This new period, however, could not succeed in internalizing nomadic-tribal groups of Anatolia. Ottoman bureaucracy and institutions developed at the expense of these groups. Over time, they became more alienated from the Ottoman central authority. As a result, joining with the ranks of the Safavids, the heterodox Turcomans rebelled during the final years of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), who pursued relatively softer policy towards the Safavids and the Qizilbash.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Michel Balivet, *Islam mystique et revolution armee dans les Balkans Ottomans vie du Cheikh Bedreddin le Hallaj des Turcs (1358/59–1416)* (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁸ Halil İnalcık, *Devlet-i 'Aliyye*, p. 229.

CHAPTER III

THE POLITICAL USE OF QIZILBASH IMAGE AS DEPICTED BY THE 16TH CENTURY OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways 16th century Ottoman historians used the Qizilbash image as a pro-Selim vehicle within narratives written between 1509 and 1513. During this period, Ottomans were challenged by a serious religio-political threat from the heterodox Turcomans of the Ottoman Empire and their collaborators from the Safavid dynasty of Iran. Supported by the Safavids, the Qizilbash rebelled against the Ottoman political authority. These rebellions hastened the triumph of Selim over his brothers. Prior to his ascension to power in 1512, Selim was known for his hostility towards the Qizilbash. The modern historians rather focused on giving a history of the events and people. In this chapter, I investigate ways that Ottoman historians perceived these events and people. I argue that Ottoman historiographical literature of the 16th century used the image of the other in narrations of the Ottoman civil war (1509–1513) as a means to support the political legitimacy of the Ottoman dynasty. In addition, the authors' comparisons of Selim and his brothers, Ahmed and Korkud, relied on what Bayezid's brothers achieved against the Qizilbash before and during the Qizilbash revolts of the early 16th

century. Ottoman historians' narrations of the military failures of Ahmed and Korkud, and of Selim's successes as governor of Trabzon, justify Selim's ascension to power. In this chapter I will also discuss the pejorative image of Şahkulu (the slave of the Shah) and Nur Ali Halife rebellions, which broke out in the same period. Sixteenth-century Ottoman histories deemed these rebellions serious threats that would have caused the collapse of the Empire in the absence of Sultan Selim.

3.1. The Role of the Qizilbash Challenge in the Ottoman Domestic Politics (1509-1513)

The illness and old age of Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512) made him unable to govern the Ottoman Empire efficiently or lead the army at the chaotic time of the Qizilbash rebellions. This situation led to a dynastic struggle between his sons, in which even Bayezid himself played a prominent role. Prince Şehinşah, who died in 1511, was not a part of the struggle, but Korkud (d. 1513) and Ahmed (d. 1513) continued fighting at the cost of their lives. In the end, Selim I (r. 1512–1520), the youngest of Bayezid's princes, overran his brothers and also forced his father to abdicate. Selim I's success is attributed to his skillful use of the Qizilbash problem. Afterwards, in 1513, Selim secured his position through the murders of most of his rivals for the throne. The deposed Sultan, Bayezid II, died in 1512 near the village of Abalar near Hafsa in Edirne on the way to Dimetoka where he planned to spend his exile years.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Halil İnalcık, "Selim I," EI2.

Selim had a comparatively disadvantaged position at the beginning of the dynastic struggle. His aggressive character and his position as the youngest son made him the least favored prince by Bayezid himself and by the Ottoman bureaucratic circles. In contrast to Selim, Ahmed, who had a more compliant character than his brothers, had many supporters in the imperial capital.¹⁷⁰ Bayezid and his viziers had always believed Ahmed would be the next Sultan, and laid the groundwork for his enthronement. The other candidate, Korkud, was considered lacking in administrative skills, although his intellectual abilities were always admired by Ottoman historians.¹⁷¹ Under Bayezid, each son/prince was governor of a province. Şehinşah, the prince who governed Karaman, was considered to have a pro-Qizilbash stance, and did not join the succession struggle.¹⁷² Selim was the governor of Trabzon, the province farthest from the capital, Korkud the governor of Antalya and Ahmed was governor of Amasya.¹⁷³ Therefore, Selim had several disadvantages: no supporters in the capital and no physical proximity to Istanbul. These disadvantages would deprive him of the throne, as he would not be the first to arrive if his father died: it would take too long for news of the vacancy to reach him and for him to travel to Istanbul.

İnalcık and Yıldırım agree that Selim succeeded in ascending to the throne through a strategy based mainly on the use of Qizilbash issue.¹⁷⁴ Selim's use of the anti-Qizilbash policies allowed him to ascend to the throne and provided him with political legitimacy during his rule. It may be argued that his reign was born as a

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 417.

¹⁷³ Istanbul's distance from these cities: Trabzon: 1070; Antalya: 730; Amasya: 680 kilometers. In the Ottoman Empire, princes were appointed as governors to the provinces so that they could become more experienced in both military and political issues when they were enthroned.

¹⁷⁴ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 418. Halil İnalcık, "Selim I," EI2.

reaction to Bayezid's moderate foreign policy towards Iran. Although Bayezid took some precautions, such as the deportations of the Qizilbash usually to western regions such as Modoni and Koroni in southern Greece, he often preferred not to provoke Ismail.¹⁷⁵ Dissatisfied with his father's foreign policy, Selim was ready to fight against the Qizilbash. Selim's raids, as governor of Trabzon, against the lands occupied by the Qizilbash won the favor of the Janissaries, the *tımarlı sipahis* and *Akıncıs*. Meanwhile, Ahmed and Korkud were criticized for ineptness in their struggles against Qizilbash troops.

As a result, Ottoman historians present Selim as the champion of the warfare against the Qizilbash.¹⁷⁶ Historians' depiction of a warrior Selim against the Qizilbash threat also aimed to boost his legitimacy as ruler, although it raised questions among the Ottoman bureaucrats in Istanbul who favored Ahmed.

3.1.1. The Rise of Selim's Fame as a Warrior: Anti-Qizilbash Activities in Trabzon

One argument to justify Selim's ascension to the throne in the Ottoman narratives pointed to his successful struggle against Shah Ismail's occupying army in Erzincan and Bayburt in eastern Anatolia. In fact, Shah Ismail had first come to Erzincan in 1500. There, he met with his Anatolian disciples, with the intention of receiving their support for his fight against Halilullah, the ruler of Şirvan, a city in

¹⁷⁵ Cambridge History of Iran, p. 219.

¹⁷⁶ Selim's raids against Georgia will not be discussed here, as they are not relevant to the topic of my thesis.

Azerbaijan. His intention was to avenge the deaths of his father and grandfather, both killed by Halilullah. About 3,000 armed Turcomans agreed to support Ismail in his fight against Halilullah. When he asked them whether they would like to engage in his fight against Şirvanşah (the ruler of Şirvan), they answered “You are the son of our *şeyh*; we sacrifice our heads in the service of you, command!”¹⁷⁷ This obedience was the main source of Ismail’s political success.

The city of Erzincan was occupied by Shah Ismail’s troops in 1503. As Celalzâde narrates, Selim was quite angry about this “illegitimate” occupation, which clearly showed Ismail’s political aspirations toward eastern Anatolia.¹⁷⁸ Recognizing this threat, Selim decided to conduct a surprise attack on Ismail’s army. When God’s supreme assistance arrived, Celalzâde adds, Selim captured the city from the Qizilbash with devastating force.¹⁷⁹ While Celalzâde does not mention the details of Selim’s entrance into Erzincan, Şükrî, does provide a detailed account of the battle between the armies of Selim and Ismail. Şükrî states that although the city had been ruled by the Ottomans during the reign of Bayezid I, it changed hands until it was captured by an unworthy (*nâ-sezâ*).¹⁸⁰ Şükrî narrates Selim’s motivation behind attacking Ismail’s army in Erzincan, using Selim’s own quotes:

Who is that Ismail? How dares he to occupy someplace close to my property? I am the worthy one. What does that red head (Qizilbash) say? Bayındırlu (Akkoyunlu) is now gone; now, this region is mine. They (Qizilbash) need to be obedient to Rum (the Ottomans).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Lütü Paşa, *Tevârih-i Ali Osman*, ed. Kayhan Atik (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2001), p. 193.

¹⁷⁸ Celalzâde Mustafa Çelebi, *Selim-name*, ed. Ahmet Uğur-Mustafa Çuhadar (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1990), p. 274.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 274.

¹⁸⁰ Şükri-i Bitlîsî, *Selim-nâme*, ed. Mustafa Argunşah (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1997), p. 69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 67.

These statements reveal Selim's position when he was a *şehzâde*, governing Trabzon. Obviously, he perceived himself as the new ruler of eastern Anatolia, once the Akkoyunlu power disappeared. Eventually, Selim triumphed in the battles against the Qizilbash in Erzincan and Bayburt in 1503 and 1507. His successes were narrated by Hoca Sâdeddin as follows: "He had raised the Ottoman standard many times in these cities, devastating and baffling the Qizilbash, who are bloodthirsty lot with soiled swords."¹⁸² One result of Selim's anti-Qizilbash stance during his rule in Trabzon was a growing fame among the Janissaries.

The Safavids, on the other hand, claimed territories once ruled by the Akkoyunlus and considered themselves as legitimate heirs to the Akkoyunlu dynasty. One reason for this was that Ismail's father Haydar was married to the daughter of Uzun Hasan, the Akkoyunlu ruler, and his grandfather Cüneyd had married Uzun Hasan's sister. Clearly, Selim did not accept the Safavid legitimacy claims for these territories.

It is important to note that Bayezid did not approve Selim's aggressive warfare against the Qizilbash. He wrote Selim several times, warning him that he should stop his attacks. In one of these letters Bayezid stated his preferences: "We were told that you wage untimely wars in that region. You should be on the safe side, confining yourself solely to self-defense of your city. We do not give you consent to increase our enemies."¹⁸³ According to Celalzâde, obedience and commitment to his father led Selim to cease attacks on the Qizilbash.¹⁸⁴ Kemalpaşazâde also mentions the content of these letters as such "Be in peace with our enemies in your region, be

¹⁸² Hoca Sadettin Efendi, *Tâcü't-Tevârih*. 5 vols. ed. İsmet Parmaksızoğlu (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1999), p. 6.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Celalzâde, p. 274.

it Qizilbash or Georgian, we do not give you consent to increase our enemies.” Like Celalzâde, Kemalpaşazâde also says that Selim he kept his silence although these letters annoyed him.¹⁸⁵

Selim’s aggressive policies won the favor of the military classes, however. Those who joined his raids made voluntary propaganda about prince Selim on returning to their homelands. In his Selimnâme, Celalzâde recounts a speech Selim gave to the notables of the provinces:

It is not a good sign for a sultan to dignify the unskillful, the stingy and the rascal just because they are of *kul* origin. It is not appropriate to turn away from the men of the people like you. God willing, I am decisive in this intention. Tell my intentions to your people so that they give up loving and supporting the Qizilbash.¹⁸⁶

Apparently, with this promise, he wanted to receive the support of Turks in Anatolia in a war against the Qizilbash or his brothers. He also claimed to reinforce the lost soul of gazâ in the Ottoman Empire, which would make Anatolian masses once again sympathetic towards the Ottoman cause. Celalzâde continues: “Selim’s fame increased when these *begs* returned to their homelands and told of his speech. Sayings such as “Go on Sultan Selim, the time is yours” (*Yürü bre Sultan Selim, devran senindür!*) became widely circulated.”¹⁸⁷

People of Tekeli region, on the other hand, were influenced by Ismail’s propaganda. He claimed to be the new gazî of the Islamic world. Selim also attempted to reinforce gazâ ideal and to not leave the title gazî to the Safavid ruler. It is best reflected in Şükri’s words: “Gazâ against the infields belongs to us. It is only

¹⁸⁵ Kemalpaşazâde, *Tevârih-i Al-i Osman*, VIII and IX. Defters, in Ahmed Uğur, *The Reign of Sultan Selim in the light of Selimname Literature* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1985), p. 40.

¹⁸⁶ Celalzâde, p. 284.

¹⁸⁷ Celalzâde, p. 285.

we who can provide any remedies for such seditions. We dyed the abode of infidels with blood. The Shah of the east (Shah Ismail) learnt gazâ from us.”¹⁸⁸

Even before his accession, Selim was known for hostility against the Qizilbash and he based his policy on the Qizilbash threat. In a letter he dispatched to his father, he says:

In addition, a group, especially in the defeated country of Acem (Iran), came up with the faithless Qizilbash pursuit. From day to day, their properties are significantly increasing. It is known that they are the enemies of the Ottoman dynasty in terms of religion and nation. A big disorder and sedition is expected from that faction. If they continue to be approached with negligence and inattention as it was case in the past, the disorder it caused may reach an unpreventable level. And, these disorders and tumults may spread everywhere in the country. It is now obligatory that someone should assume this religious and civil duty.¹⁸⁹

Here, Selim stresses the urgent nature of the Qizilbash problem. If it was not dealt with immediately and properly, he emphasizes, the outcomes could be more disastrous.

3.2. The Images of the Actors of the Dynastic Struggle (1509–1513)

A comparative examination of the images of four contenders to the dynastic struggle, as depicted by Ottoman historians, is significant to this study. This examination reveals the pivotal role of the Qizilbash issue in the four-year struggle from which Selim emerged the victor. In the period 1509-1513, Qizilbash uprisings,

¹⁸⁸ Şükri, p. 61.

¹⁸⁹ İdris-i Bitlîsî, *Selim Şah-nâme*, ed. Hicabi Kırılancıç (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2001), p. 91.

related to the succession struggle, broke out; the new sultan was expected to solve this problem. Ottoman historians used Selim's tactics to solve the Qizilbash problem as part of their explanation of Selim's superiority over his brothers. In doing this, they also emphasized why Bayezid's abdication was necessary.

3.2.1. Selim versus Bayezid

To 16th century Ottoman chroniclers, Selim was a savior, struggling to protect his country: in contrast, Bayezid is portrayed as a gullible man misguided by the statesmen. Critiques of the reign of Bayezid are principally critiques of the statesmen with whom he surrounds himself, particularly the corrupt practices of high-ranking bureaucrats. This is a general tendency in Ottoman historiography; critiques are not directed at the sultan. In the accounts of the Ottoman historians, Bayezid was a seraphic, good-tempered, pious and charitable sultan (*sultan-ı melek-hisâl*), who did not like to shed blood.¹⁹⁰¹⁹¹ According to the historians, this soft nature, and his advanced age, made him susceptible to deceptions and misinformation from his viziers. Bayezid's sole mistake was his appointment of inappropriate men to the vizier positions. Celalzâde describes these viziers as insufficient in knowledge, precaution and manners, as well as weak in religion: he goes so far as to refer to them as "uneducated idiots."¹⁹² Another historian, Sâdeddin, who wrote in the late 16th century, also complained about the viziers' corruption, drinking alcohol, taking bribes and, in general, paying more attention to earthly (*dünyevî*) issues than ethereal

¹⁹⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 68.

¹⁹¹ Sâdeddin, pp. 106–109.

¹⁹² Celalzâde, p. 385; 279

(*uhrevî*) ones. According to Sâdeddin, the great earthquake of September 1509 was God's retaliation for these blasphemies.¹⁹³

Ottoman chronicles argue that, Selim prevented the collapse of the Ottoman state due to the Qizilbash challenge. İdris-i Bitlîsî describes the situation as follows:

Now, riot and opposition, always damaging to property anywhere, come to the pride in the Islamic world, this dynasty. The enemies of religion and state, especially regional infidels and cruel Qizilbash heretics, have infiltrated our territories. These riots will quickly spread through all Anatolian lands and reach to the Balkans.¹⁹⁴

İdris-i Bitlîsî also states that Bayezid was not able to wage military campaigns owing to both his disposition and his physical condition. He continues: "Of course, it is now necessary to think about the continuity of the state and to protect the lands. However, this duty requires a brave commander!"¹⁹⁵ It is easy to understand that this brave commander capable of saving Ottoman lands would be Selim. A twentieth-century historian, Çağatay Uluçay, has explained Bayezid's passiveness against the Safavid threat as related to his love of Iranian culture. According to him, consciously or not, Bayezid contributed to the spread of Shi'a. This statement is not much credible, however, as Uluçay bases this assertion merely in the names given to his sons, Selimşah, Şehinşah and Alemşah since Şah was the title of Safavid rulers.¹⁹⁶ At that time, it was fashionable to use higher Persian culture. This is also why Selim himself was corresponding in Persian.

Selim's approach and attitudes were the exact opposite of his father, as they always emphasized his intention to reassert the aggressive warfare style of his

¹⁹³ Sâdeddin, p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 91.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 97.

¹⁹⁶ Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu," *Tarih Dergisi*, VIII, cilt 11–12, 1954, p. 56.

ancestors. Selim's role models must have been Sultan Mehmed II, who conquered Istanbul, and Bayezid I, who made tremendous efforts to create an imperial state. His espousal of aggressive warfare can be understood from his enthronement speech, recounted by İdris: "You all shall know that my main objective in accepting this Godly trust, which is the throne of the sultanate and caliphate, is to remove darkness and cruelty from the earth and to consolidate Islam, just as our ancestors did."¹⁹⁷ This attribution to the ancestors was a general rhetoric of the time. Celalzâde's assessment concurs, as he stresses that Selim kept his promise to lose no time in the fight against apostates and heretics.¹⁹⁸ Another passage from İdris-i Bitlîsî's narrative includes more detailed information about Selim's displeasure with his father's policies:

Gazâ, the tradition of my ancestors, calls for the extension of the circle of Islam through *jihad*, as allowed by the Quranic verse "O Prophet! Rouse the Believers to the fight!" To this end, our ancestors unceasingly motivated the warriors, but this tradition—obligation, even—has been disregarded for years. Old warriors have almost forgotten this heroism; adolescents have no experience of war. This good tradition of the Ottoman dynasty has been abandoned.¹⁹⁹

Selim was certainly criticizing his father's reign by emphasizing this negligence, and particularly Bayezid's passivity in the face of the Qizilbash threat. All chroniclers supported Selim's approach to the Qizilbash issue, agreeing that it indeed posed a serious threat, and one unnoticed by the Ottoman authorities at the time. Accordingly, Sâdeddin writes:

...especially the Qizilbash, whose lives are bad, had been ignored until they have destroyed the protected lands, down to the frontier of Karaman. This occurred because of the passing of state affairs to the narrow-minded viziers, employed in key positions. In fact, the most important duty of these viziers was to inform the sultan immediately from the first-hand about any new incidents.

¹⁹⁷ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 99.

¹⁹⁸ Celalzâde, p. 339.

¹⁹⁹ İdris-i Bitlîsî, pp. 90–91.

However, since all responsibility was left to them, they were suspending this duty. In order to cover up viziers' attitude, Sultan Selim employed those who were perceived unworthy in Istanbul, and who lost their hopes as a result of viziers' oblivious attitudes, for his wars against Qizilbash and Georgians.²⁰⁰

Ottoman historians justified Selim's ascension by criticizing the dismissive approaches of the viziers of Bayezid II, despite the urgency of Qizilbash threat.

Another topic of critique Selim raised was his father's increasing tendency to appoint *kuls* to important posts, rather than hereditary Muslims. In a speech made to the warriors who joined in his pre-accession gazâs, Selim stated that many useless men were preferred to inborn Muslims just because they are of *kul* origin.²⁰¹ This tactic was both an effort to gain the sympathy of the Turks, and a reaction to the statesmen in Istanbul who were also of kul origin and tended to support his brother, Ahmed.

Bayezid, and a majority of leading statesmen, favored Ahmed's succession over that of his brothers Korkud and Selim although Ahmed's enthronement, however, was prevented by the Janissaries, who preferred Selim. Although Şükrî states that nobody knew of Bayezid's preferences and it seemed there was no one in his heart, many of his contemporaries argued otherwise.²⁰² We do know from many sources that Bayezid abdicated the throne in favor of Ahmed in 1511.²⁰³

Sâdeddin reports that when requests by Selim to visit his father and kiss his hands were rejected by his viziers, he said "there is no hope from my father; he already reserved both the crown and the belt for Ahmed."²⁰⁴ The viziers were biased

²⁰⁰ Sâdeddin, p. 12.

²⁰¹ Celalzâde, p. 284.

²⁰² Şükrî, p. 82.

²⁰³ İdris-i Bitlîsî, pp. 93–94.

²⁰⁴ Sâdeddin, p. 36.

towards Selim because Selim was critical of imperial policies, for which, according to Ottoman historians, viziers were more responsible than the sultan. These viziers supported Ahmed, largely because of his compliant and manageable character. However, the struggle for the throne reached a point at which they feared losing their positions, should Selim prove victorious, because of their earlier pro-Ahmed stance. They conducted lobbying activities in Istanbul. What they were feared of did become real that all of these pro-Ahmed statesmen were eliminated when Selim ascended to the throne.

Aware of his initial slim chance for the Ottoman throne, Selim secured the governorship of the Kefe province, in Crimea, for his son Süleyman.²⁰⁵ However, as his real intention was to receive a governorship for himself in Rumelia, Selim left Trabzon for Kefe to visit his son. Selimnâme authors insist on that in requesting a Rumelian governorship Selim's intention was to fight against the infidels and this fight would be a good example for other princes.²⁰⁶ He planned to continue on to visit his father and, as the historians indicate, show him respect by kissing his hands. Correspondence between the Porte and Selim show that his requests were not accepted. As a result, a fight between the troops of Bayezid and Selim occurred in Çorlu in 1511. At the end of the battle, Selim fled to Kefe and the protection of his son. Selim was the first prince in Ottoman history to go to battle with his father, the legitimate sultan. This was unacceptable because in theory, Ottoman sultans were supposed to rule during their whole times. Therefore, any acts intending to challenge against a ruling sultan was regarded as rebellion and illegitimate.²⁰⁷ In justifying this deed of Selim, some chroniclers prefer not to mention this battle, while some

²⁰⁵ Kemalpaşâzade, p. 33.

²⁰⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 15.

²⁰⁷ H. Erdem Çıpa, *The Centrality of the Periphery*, p. 100.

refrained from providing details. One of the historians who mentioned the battle, Celalzâde, attempts to clear Selim's name from this illegitimate deed:

...[Selim's] capture of the Ottoman throne and his adventures with Sultan Bayezid, may God bless his tomb, are very well known. However, those who observed from outside did not really know what happened, and they blame Sultan Selim for rebelling against his father, writing books and booklets with their insufficient minds. Without probing inside the events, they produce writings about Sultan by fabricating scenarios with presumptions.²⁰⁸

The Selimist historian Celalzâde had assured his reader that his book was based on personal experience or information from those who knew the events very well, not fabrications. Criticizing the fabricators, he noted that the battle of Çorlu happened without the consent and allowance of Selim. According to Celalzâde, when Selim came to visit his father, the holders of the most important vizier posts communicated this news to the sultan by saying, "Sultan Selim's goal in crossing to *Rumeli* and asking for permission to visit you is nothing more than his hope for the throne and taking on the administration."²⁰⁹ If Selim had intended to war with his father, he would have started with these viziers, Celalzâde asserted.²¹⁰ Thus, he attempts to show both Selim's invincibility and reluctance to fight against his father. Many others, such as Kemalpaşazâde, Lütî Paşa and İdris-i Bitlîsî, also accuse the viziers of causing this battle by misleading the sultan.²¹¹

The Qizilbash threat reached an alarming level with the 1512 Şahkulu revolt in the Tekeli region (Antalya). Ahmed and Ali Paşa, the supreme governor of Anatolia (Anadolu Beylerbeyi), were sent by Bayezid II to suppress the rebellion. Ali Paşa was defeated and killed by Şahkulu. Because of this failure, Bayezid's

²⁰⁸ Celalzâde, pp. 251–252.

²⁰⁹ Celalzâde, p. 255.

²¹⁰ Celalzâde, p. 312.

²¹¹ Kemalpaşazâde, pp. 65–66; Lütî Paşa, p. 196; İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 36.

subsequent abdication of the throne in favor of Ahmed was objected by the military classes.²¹² Later on, Korkud would also face objects from the same groups, for much the same reason. Emphasizing his old age, Edâ'i reports that Sultan Bayezid II was a broken man; it was if his body was gone, but his spirit remained. When the Janissaries saw that the Sultan was not even able to drink water, Edâ'i himself states, they sent a letter to Selim, explaining the situation and asking him to come to Istanbul to take on the throne.²¹³

Selim arrived in Istanbul in 1512. According to the Selimist sources, Bayezid was pleased to relinquish the throne to his son, Selim, and did so of his own free will. Kemalpaşazâde writes, "there is no doubt that the Sultan delivered the throne to his son with his own will."²¹⁴ Regarding the same event, Lütfi accepts Selim's mistakes by noting that Bayezid left the throne to Selim, forgave his sins, and told Selim his wishes: "...take revenge for the Ottomans on the Egyptians (Mamluks) and for the people of Islam (*ehl-i Islam*) on the Qizilbash; and also you should get on well with your brothers."²¹⁵ If these statements are an accurate indication, Ottomans interpreted the Egyptian issue as a political problem, and considered the Qizilbash problem a problem of religion for all Muslims. Sâdeddin also narrates a longer testament of Bayezid to Selim:

If [or when?] you become the sultan, make justice your guide, have mercy upon the helpless and the desperate, and show affection to the poor and the lonely. If you want to take the world under your command, respect the wise. If you claim to be the Shah, sever the vein of cruelty and hostility. If you claim to be the servant of God, be fair. God provided you with the servitude of

²¹² Lütfi Paşa, p. 196.

²¹³ Edâ'i-yi Şirâzi, *Selim-name*, ed. Abdussamed Bilgin (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2001) pp. 42–43.

²¹⁴ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 66.

²¹⁵ Lütfi Paşa, p. 196.

Anatolian people, and you shall forbid heedlessness, not hurt anyone with cruelty, and not haze people...²¹⁶

In other parts of this advice, Bayezid also counseled Selim to get on well with his brothers, respect the Islamic law, and treat dervishes mercifully. The passage suggests that Bayezid was fearful of cruel deeds of Selim, especially against his brothers.

The same quotes also suggest that his abdication in favor of Selim was not completely voluntary. His obligation to declare Selim as the sultan is suggested by his comment that “whichever direction the public tends to, whatever the soldiers’ wish is, let it be so.”²¹⁷ A poem attributed to Bayezid also shows that the abdication of Bayezid appears to have been a necessity, not a voluntary act.

I did not voluntarily abdicate/See beys what Selimşah did to me/I supposed that he understood me/I supposed that he was my companion/I saw him not as a son but a brother/See beys what Selimşah did to me.²¹⁸

The historical sources also mention a curse of Selim, possibly belonging to Bayezid. This curse says “My son, shall God sharpen your sword, have luck of the Irish, but you shall not live long enough as you acted disrespectfully against your father.”²¹⁹ Whether these quotes belonged to Bayezid or not, it is true that there were many rumors accusing Selim of deposing his father, or even playing a possible role in causing his death by poisoning him.²²⁰ An examination of the Selimnâme literature

²¹⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 95.

²¹⁷ Sâdeddin, p. 85.

²¹⁸ TSMA, nr. E. 8525; quoted in Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1966), p. 1.

²¹⁹ Sebahattin Köklü, *Anonim Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, M.A. Thesis (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, 2004), p. 69.

²²⁰ Feridun Emecen, *Zamanın İskenderi, Şarkın Fatihi: Yavuz Sultan Selim* (İstanbul: Yitik Hazine Yayınları, 2010), p. 67.

clearly shows us that one of the motivational factors of the authors was to clear Selim's name from these rumors. Although the first Selimnâmes were written in the last years of Selim, this was mostly a project of Süleyman also to legitimize his own rule.

3.2.2. Selim versus Ahmed

In 1511, Prince Ahmed was the oldest living son of Bayezid II. He served as the governor of Amasya, where his father had been governor during his own principedom. Ahmed's being governor in Amasya is important because those who were appointed to this city was considered as the strongest candidate for the throne.²²¹ While Ahmed had many supporters in the capital, his unsuccessful struggles against the Qizilbash diminished his reputation, especially among the military classes. As a result of this lack of support, he lost the dynastic struggle to Selim. Since Ahmed tried to act like an autonomous ruler in Anatolia after Selim's rise to power, he was caught and killed in Bursa in April 1513.

In 16th century Ottoman historiography, Ahmed is portrayed as the opposite of Selim. According to these chroniclers, Ahmed was not worthy of the throne because of his unsuccessful struggles against the Qizilbash; in contrast, Selim was accorded respect as a skillful man, especially on the battlefield. According to the Ottoman historians, Selim fought against the infidels and heretics when he was governor of Trabzon, while Ahmed spent his time as governor of Amasya having

²²¹ Ibid, p. 30.

fun. This explains the Janissaries opposition to Ahmed, when he was invited to Istanbul with the hope of succeeding his father.

Ottoman historians put forward that Bayezid's preference for Ahmed was based on Ahmed's intimate relations with Bayezid's viziers.²²² Kemalpaşazâde, for example, writes that: "There were always supporters of the deceived Sultan Ahmed in the capital, when one left, the other replaced him."²²³ Ahmed's network in Istanbul provided him with support during the struggle for the throne. İdris states, as a motivating factor, hopes by these supporters that they would to retain their bureaucratic positions.²²⁴ The Ottoman historians also hint that these supporters believed they could easily manage Ahmed, once he was Sultan.

Ottoman historians asserted Ahmed's unsuitability for the throne by pointing to his addiction to entertainment throughout his governorship in Amasya. Celalzâde records this as follows:

Ahmed supposed that the sultanate could go on with the goodness and favor of his father. The things he cared about were eating and drinking both day and night, to kiss rose-bud lips, and to hold the waists of tall girls. He did not know anything about capturing countries, protecting lands under threat, the state of enemies, or afterlife (referring to the weakness of his faith).

Celalzâde reports that Ahmed was self-indulgent and without the managerial and intellectual features that a sultan should have. In contrast to Ahmed, Selim was regarded as the true heir to the throne, one who did not go a moment without thinking of the struggle against enemies. Also, he was considered to be the only prince equipped with skills to deal with the urgent Qizilbash threat.

²²² Sâdeddin, p. 11.

²²³ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 40.

²²⁴ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 87.

Selim was described as the great enemy of the Qizilbash; Ahmed was considered their partner. Selim's anti-Qizilbash stance was known both in Istanbul and in other provinces. Çağatay Uluçay mentions that Sunnis, fleeing Ahmed's palace in Amasya, went to Trabzon to reside under the governorship of Selim. In his assessment of the pro-Qizilbash stance of Ahmed, Uluçay also suggests that the activities of Shah Ismail's spies in Amasya, and their usage of the city as a base annoyed many Sunnis. Eventually, Ahmed's protections for the Qizilbash forced those Sunnis out of the city.²²⁵

It is also important to note that Ahmed's son Murad was known to be sympathetic toward the Qizilbash. As I discuss below, he would become a Qizilbash himself, wearing their red hood, i.e. becoming the Qizilbash, and joining the ranks of a Qizilbash leader called Nur Ali Halife. Celalzâde interprets Murad's becoming Qizilbash as a strategy by Ahmed to gain the support of the Qizilbash in his fight for the throne. This strategy did not work, however: After the troops of Nur Ali Halife were defeated by the Ottomans, the Qizilbash chose to join their forces to Ismail rather than supporting Ahmed. Murad accompanied them to Iran, intending to return to Anatolia with Qizilbash support. However, on arrival in Iran, Prince Murad was killed by Shah Ismail.²²⁶

Upon an invitation from his father to take the throne of the Ottomans, Ahmed left Amasya for Istanbul in 1512. However, his claim was blocked by the Janissaries, largely owing to his position in the Qizilbash threat. Ahmed started camping at Üsküdar while waiting the final arrangements of his ascension. The Janissaries first warned Ahmed through letters that they would not give consent him to take the

²²⁵ Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu," pp. 56–57.

²²⁶ Celalzâde, p. 328.

throne. When they saw that preparations to welcome Ahmed continued, five thousand Janissaries attacked the residences of pro-Ahmed statesmen, forcing Ahmed to leave Istanbul.²²⁷ Had Ahmed been successful in suppressing the Şahkulu revolt, Sâdeddin reports, the Janissaries and all of the governors would have agreed with Ahmed's enthronement.²²⁸ Despite imperial support from Ali Paşa, the supreme governor of Anatolia, and his army, Ahmed could not succeed. As İdris explains this situation,

Sultan Ahmed, who claimed to be the ruler of the Ottoman lands, has been incapable of even protecting his former throne and keeping his own region, Amasya, under control. His quality and capacity to rule was understood by the whole world in a few incidents caused by the Qizilbash opposition.²²⁹

Of all the historians, Celalzâde criticizes Ahmed the harshest. According to Celalzâde, Ahmed's foolishness was obvious and his ignorance made him unworthy of the throne. Celalzâde also described the Janissary reaction to Ahmed's arrival in Istanbul:

A non-believer and *mezhepsiz* (one who belong to no sect of Islam) group, which is a cruel and hazardous community, rebelled in the Islamic country. They shed much blood, destroying many families. They damned the post of sultanate. They killed Ali Paşa, the supreme governor of Anatolia (*Anadolu Beylerbeyi*). Ahmed could not disband the enemies of religion and Islam. How could he dare to take the throne? This is the place of the saints and the courageous men. The *ghazis* here are the servants and slaves of the religion that Prophet Muhammad preached for.

Employing similar rhetoric, Sâdeddin states that one who does not prove his power may not become the sultan. One who intends to become powerful should be patient in the face of the difficulties of governance; he should not flee as Ahmed

²²⁷ Kemalpaşâzade, p. 109.

²²⁸ Sâdeddin, p. 55.

²²⁹ İdris, p. 97.

did.²³⁰ The Janissaries continue: “We cannot allow Sultan Ahmed to take the lead, while the symbol of nobility (Selim) is there like a ripe fruit in the sultanate tree.”²³¹ Some historians, such as Sâdeddin and Edâ’i, claim that Ahmed’s assignment to join Ali Paşa to suppress the Şahkulu revolt was part of Bayezid’s strategy to provide sufficient justification for his choice of Ahmed as his heir.²³² As Bayezid wrote to Ahmed, “Prepare for the war like a roaring lion, and get rid of the Qizilbash.”²³³ Although commissioned by his father to suppress the Şahkulu revolt, Ahmed tried to use this as an opportunity to rally the support of the Janissaries in order to ascend to the Ottoman throne. What is more, he left the battlefield where Ali Paşa was killed by the rebels. As a result of his failures, his sultanate was rejected by the Janissaries. When pro-Ahmed statesmen were trying to convince the Janissaries about Ahmed’s sultanate by the pro-Ahmed statesmen, a new Qizilbash revolt, led by Nur Ali Halife broke out near Tokat. Ahmed commissioned his head vizier, Yular Kısıdî Sinan Paşa, to suppress this revolt. Ahmed’s troops were once again destroyed by the Qizilbash.²³⁴ This second failure against the Qizilbash contributed considerably to the reluctance of the Janissaries about his ascension.²³⁵

Once Selim seized the throne in 1512, Ahmed was captured and killed in Yenişehir. Selim broke with the request by his father to get on with his brothers. He cleared his own way not only by killing Ahmed and Korkud, but also their sons. Sâdeddin’s justification for this behavior is typical of the Ottoman historians. “...after their condemnable acts emerged, ignoring and delaying these acts is

²³⁰ Sâdeddin, p. 77.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 78.

²³² Ibid, p. 48-50; Edâ’i, pp. 34–35.

²³³ Edâ’i, p. 35.

²³⁴ İdris, p. 94–95.

²³⁵ Sâdeddin, p. 84.

violation of the law.”²³⁶ Sâdeddin continues: “Neither people nor soldiers will be comfortable while there are two sultans in the country. There cannot be two swords in a scabbard; and two lions in a cage.”²³⁷

3.2.3. Selim versus Korkud

16th century Ottoman historiography considers Korkud as a well-versed, intellectual, mild-mannered and quiet prince. Korkud, educated in Islamic law, was a musician and poet. He was considered an inappropriate choice for sultan, because of his interests and also because he had no son to succeed him. İdris states that his scholarship and deep understanding of religious issues are unquestionable, but he has no power or maturity in decision-making, leadership or governance.²³⁸ Emphasizing also that Korkud had no sons, Sâdeddin stated that continuation of this dynasty, which should live forever, depended on the passing of the throne from father to son. To forget this fact would have caused the collapse of the sultanate and the destruction of the country.²³⁹

The intensification of Qizilbash activities in the region managed by Korkud placed his name at the center of critique. In 1502, Bayezid had appointed Korkud, already governor of Manisa, to the province of Antalya to prevent intensification of activities by Ismail’s agents in that region.²⁴⁰ His request to return to Manisa was

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 147.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 148.

²³⁸ İdris, p. 97.

²³⁹ Sâdeddin, p. 85.

²⁴⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, pp. 233–234.

declined by the Porte.²⁴¹ Resentment over this rejection led Korkud to abandon Antalya for Egypt in 1509, on the pretext of pilgrimage. İshak Çelebi states that the reason Korkud left Antalya was offense at Bayezid's favoritism toward Ahmed.²⁴² Korkud spent more than one year in Egypt. While he was in Egypt, the central authority in Antalya went into decline, paving the way for an intensification of Qizilbash propaganda.²⁴³ Korkud came to regret his self-exile, however, and wrote to Istanbul requesting forgiveness.²⁴⁴ Eventually, he was permitted to return to Antalya, but the Qizilbash rebellions there caused him to leave—again, without permission—for Manisa. As Sâdeddin describe the series of events: “Because Prince Korkud’s sensitive soul loathed the ugly faces of the Qizilbash, one night he suddenly departed from Antalya for his old place of duty, Manisa, leaving some brave men there to transport his treasury under protection.”²⁴⁵ Kemalpaşazâde explains Korkud’s second departure as follows: “After returning from Egypt and staying in Antalya for a while, he decided to leave the region because he felt anxious from the activities of dirty Turks (*etrak-ı na-pâk*), i.e. the Qizilbash, who were human in appearance, but like unperceptive animals in sense.”²⁴⁶ Kemalpaşazâde adds: “Upon the abrupt departure of Korkud from Antalya, the qizilbash rabble (*evbaş-ı kallaş*) supposed that Sultan Bayezid died, and wanted to take advantage of this authority gap, by waving the red flag of rebellion.”²⁴⁷ The rebels then marched to the north and defeated the troops of

²⁴¹ Sâdeddin, p. 1.

²⁴² Keskin, Burhan, *İshak Çelebi'nin Selimnâmesi*, Unpublished Master's Thesis. (İzmir: Ege Üniversitesi, 1998), p. 25.

²⁴³ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 349.

²⁴⁴ Çağatay Uluçay, “Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?,” p. 59.

²⁴⁵ Sâdeddin, p. 43.

²⁴⁶ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 42.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 42.

Korkud in Alaşehir. In a battle in Kütahya, Şahkulu troops killed Karagöz Paşa, the supreme governor of Anatolia.²⁴⁸

In fact, Korkud took measures to control the Qizilbash activities during the first year of his governorship in Antalya. Referring to this situation, Sâdeddin states that the people of Antalya were safe and peaceful under him until the dirty Turks, i.e. the Qizilbash, rebelled.²⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Korkud was not considered worthy of the throne by the military classes because of his failure to deal with the Qizilbash in his region. More important, however, was the tendency to believe that by abandoning of post in Antalya without permission, Korkud paved the way for Qizilbash rebellions against the Ottoman authority.

When Bayezid was convinced about the ascension of Selim, Korkud also came to Istanbul with the intention of ascending to the throne. But, according to Sâdeddin, this was just a trickery of some deviant-minded statesmen. Şükrî states that Korkud came to the capital because he intended to suggest Selim for the throne. Other sources disagree.²⁵⁰ Once he arrived in Istanbul, Korkud saw the coalition around Selim, and fled when he realized that he had been deceived.²⁵¹ An important point for this study is that Sâdeddin emphasizes that Selim became sad when Korkud was captured in Bursa, but does explain why he did not attempt to stop Korkud's execution.²⁵²

In sum, Ottoman historians' narrations of the civil war highlighted the warrior image of Selim, while emphasizing the advanced age of Bayezid and insufficiencies

²⁴⁸ İshak Çelebi, p. 42.

²⁴⁹ Sâdeddin, p. 42.

²⁵⁰ Şehabettin Tekindağ, "Selim-nâmeler," Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi, 1970, I, p. 216.

²⁵¹ Sâdeddin, pp. 88–90.

²⁵² Ibid, pp. 158–159.

of either Ahmed or Korkud in dealing with the Qizilbash problem. These histories were focused to justify Selim's ascension to power. It may be interesting to note that all these narratives were written in the waning years of Selim's reign, or immediately after. Clearly, this was a strategy of Selim's son, Süleyman, to clear his father's name from certain questionable and unlawful acts. Criticisms of Selim had three bases: he was the first Ottoman prince to rebel against his father, when Bayezid was the legitimate ruler. Selim was even accused of poisoning his father, a possibility also raised by Münecimbaşî Ahmed Dede in his *Sahâif-ul Ahbar*.²⁵³ Lastly, Selim was criticized for executing his brothers and many of their sons.²⁵⁴ Even though the fratricide had been legalized in the law code of Mehmed II, provided that it was for the sake of *nizâm-ı âlem*, it remained controversial until the reign of Sultan Ahmed I (1603–1617), who brought about the rule of the succession of the eldest healthy son.²⁵⁵

3.3. The Image of the Qizilbash Rebels

My goal in this monograph is to analyze the ways that Ottoman court historians perceived the Qizilbash rebellions, particularly the Şahkulu and Nur Ali Halife rebellions of 1511 and 1512 respectively. There is no doubt that these rebellions were considered great threats to Ottoman political authority. Indeed, on including the Safavid support behind them, Qizilbash rebels posed an alarming threat

²⁵³ Münecimbaşî Ahmed Dede, *Sahâif-ul-Ahbar fi Vekayi-ul-a'sâr*, 2 vols., transliterated by İsmail Erünsal, Tercuman 1001 Eser Serisi, no date, p. 440.

²⁵⁴ Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, pp. 495–499.

²⁵⁵ Abdülkadir Özcan, "Fâtih'in Teşkilât Kanunnâmesi ve Nizam-ı Âlem için Kardeş Katli Meselesi," *Tarih Dergisi* 33, 1980–1981.

at a time of political turmoil over succession. The rebels reached as far as Bursa, very close to Istanbul, and had great influence on the intensification of the political rivalry between Bayezid's sons.

3.3.1. Şahkulu Rebellion

Şahkulu was the leader of the first Qizilbash revolt. His father, Hasan Halife, was an Anatolian agent of Şeyh Haydar, the leader of the Safavid order. Hasan Halife had been sent to the Teke region (Antalya) by Haydar to preach the mystical message of the order. Şahkulu's rebellion, which broke out in 1511 in the Teke region, was arguably the most serious and dangerous Qizilbash uprising ever. Şahkulu made use of Safavid-style ideological tools, such as the claim of *Mahdism*, to join Turcoman tribes against the Ottoman authority. As Ismail had been, Şahkulu's supporters considered him a Messiah.²⁵⁶

It would be wrong, however, to exaggerate the religious factor. In fact, socio-economic factor was even more important than the religious differences. This can be seen when looked at who participated in the rebellion. The participants included not only heterodox Turcomans but also peasants and Sunni tribes dissatisfied with the tax and settlement policies of the state and timar holders who were deprived of their *timars* by the state.²⁵⁷ Sâdeddin's account best shows this:

²⁵⁶ Abdurrahman Atçıl, *The Formation of the Ottoman Learned Class and Legal Scholarship (1300–1600)*, p. 154.

²⁵⁷ Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?" p. 61.

Those commissioned to maintain order in the country robbed people, and started the practice of bribery [and] most of former *timar* holders remained landless. They became tired of visiting the Palace in vain and, having nothing to lose, they were forced to try all sorts of ruses. Many became friends with and supporters of unruly gangs and their participation helped the sedition to expand.²⁵⁸

Sâdeddin blames “ill-intentioned” statesmen as a cause leading to the Qizilbash rebellion. This passage clearly identifies the motivation underlying the rebellion as something more than religious differences. Those involved in were rather the unhappy targets of Ottoman social and economic policies. It is telling that Ottoman historians barely refer to the socio-economic side of the rebellion although heavy taxes in the beginning of the 16th century was arguably the most important reason of the discontent among the dissatisfied groups. This negligence is important because apart from a few exceptions mentioned above the historians mostly used the religious rhetoric in their critique of the rebellion and thus ignored the socio-economic discontent among the subjects. This was probably because they found the emphasis of religious dimension more conducive to self-justification.

After defeating Korkud’s troops, Şahkulu rebels killed Karagöz Paşa, the supreme governor of Anatolia in Kütahya, and Ali Paşa, the most important supporter of Sultan Ahmed, in Sivas. Afterwards, they marched to Erzincan, where they fought against a local named Hacı Mustafa and the troops he gathered from the surrounding areas. According to Uluçay, Şahkulu probably died in this battle. His army fled to the Safavid lands, but the leading commanders in the army were executed by Ismail on the grounds that they robbed a caravan on their way.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Sâdeddin, p. 44.

²⁵⁹ Çağatay Uluçay, “Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?” pp. 72–73.

The narration of this rebellion makes it important in this study. Ottoman historians present the rebellion as the greatest threat stemming from the Qizilbash, and an event that made Selim's assumption of power imperative for the continuation of the state. The historians use identical discourse to depict the rebellion. For example, Kemalpaşazâde underlines that God created a Moses (Selim) for a Pharaoh (Şahkulu):

The hellraiser and irreligious man, known as Şahkulu, was an agent of Shah Ismail, the deviant. He came to Anatolia to spread the groundless Shi'a religion. But God did not leave what he did to people unpunished by creating a rod to swallow this chimera, and a Moses to drown the Pharaoh. Thus, God saved the world from this disaster, by granting Selim the Ottoman throne.²⁶⁰

This metaphoric narration of the Şahkulu rebellion is based on Quranic verses, and it is interesting to remember that Selim did not deal with the Şahkulu rebellion, at least not personally. Those involved were Ahmed and Korkud, though both of whom were unsuccessful. Edâ'i also provides a depiction of the rebellion:

The miserable and deplorable Tekeli and Varsak tribes put on the Qizilbash belt of turmoil and defeatism. They wore Qizilbash clothes, and espoused their methods of persecution. One individual among this community, whom destiny called Şeytankulu, was the beginning and end of all the evilness.²⁶¹

Ottoman historians occasionally adopt the term Şeytankulu (slave of the devil) instead of Şahkulu. Celalzâde also writes: "he (Şahkulu) unfurled the flag of the devil."²⁶² That is to say, Ottoman historians represented Şahkulu as an agent of the devil, while the Ottoman sultan was the shadow of God on earth. Furthermore, by emphasizing that anyone could adopt Qizilbash clothes, the historians indicate that

²⁶⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 66.

²⁶¹ Edâ'i, p. 34.

²⁶² Celalzâde, p. 297.

Qizilbash is not a birthright; instead one could be Qizilbash by wearing the Qizilbash crown.

Sâdeddin's depiction of the Şahkulu rebellion is highly significant, as it reflects the typical Ottoman perception of Şahkulu and his followers:

People of this region were already stubborn and rebellious; these features were part of their depraved character and lack of respect and virtue. They were inhuman animal-like people, without any sense of perception, whose hearts were full of sedition. When Korkud left the city abruptly they thought that Sultan Bayezid died and Korkud had gone to the capital in order to ascend to the throne. Thus, they rebelled, coming together according to the Qizilbash traditions on April 19, 1510, and choosing a scoundrel (Şahkulu) as their head.²⁶³

Sâdeddin also accuses the insurgents of attempting to rob Korkud's treasury. He states that they killed Muslims and pillaged their properties.²⁶⁴ It is easy to see that according to Sâdeddin, the Şahkulu rebels were not Muslims, but must be non-believers, because they damaged the lives and property of Muslims. Yet because not all of the rebels were from Turcoman tribes, the Muslims, mentioned by Sâdeddin were those who were unwilling to join the rebellion. As Celalzâde states, the nomadic Turcomans constituted the majority of the rebels. Here, he also explains the damages the rebellion caused.

Şeytankulu gathered all kinds of bad people: Turcomans, idle bachelors, and all of the clever but bad men, regardless of whether they live in cities, towns, villages or the mountains. They damaged property of Muslims, seizing their horses and hinnies. The rascals, mounted on the horses, ravaged all the lands in all the provinces along their way, and robbed all of their property. They killed those who opposed their acts with venomous and murderous swords.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Sâdeddin, p. 43. Regarding translation of word "aşağılık". See Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, p. 356

²⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 43–44.

²⁶⁵ Celalzâde, p. 298.

Ottoman historians of the period emphasize the distinction between social classes in the Ottoman Empire as they humiliate the Şahkulu rebels. Kemalpaşazâde depicts the Turcomans of the Antalya region as:

...*dike burun fiittaks* (the men who kill people at any opportunity and who do not obey rules) of *Tekeli* Turks were among the first to join the ranks of Ismail; they gained fame with their bravery and obedience to him. Those wastrels, none of whom ever possessed a parcel of land in their life, and never had been called human in own their region, became the generals in division units of the Qizilbash, and thus received much more respect than they deserved.²⁶⁶

Kemalpaşazâde presents Şahkulu and his troops as unworthy poor people who were never granted a timar by the state. As part of the *reaya*, the landless underclass (as discussed in Chapter II) there were limited opportunities for mobility. The state, in general, expected that the *reaya* would to accept and obey the rules they established, and follow the dictates of its officials in the provinces. Kemalpaşazâde attempted to humiliate those who joined into the rebellion, or accuses them of not staying within the determined boundaries of their social classes. Accordingly, Celalzâde records that after they defeated both Karagöz and Ali Pashas, the rebels possessed properties they have never seen in their lives:

The wicked lot (Şahkulu and his troops), who were to be vanquished, acquired, and were satisfied with, booty such as golden swords and daggers pertaining to Hüsrev [or Khosrau, a Persian King], starry silver armor, golden belts and sciuroid coifs, and wind-like horses walking like zephyr. Nobody knew what happened to Şeytankulu, the commander of this depraved community. It seemed as if just after Ali Paşa was defeated, this group of hyenas were scattered in four directions as if by wind.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Kemalpaşazade, p. 43.

²⁶⁷ Celalzâde, p. 308.

Celalzâde states that because of the acts of Şahkulu and his troops led to punishment and a curse from God. Kemalpaşazâde also emphasized that the demise Şahkulu was not certain by remarking that the seditious scoundrel known as Şeytankulu was absent in the war. Nobody knew about his end.²⁶⁸

3.3.2. Nur Ali Halife Rebellion

Nur Ali Halife was a caliph, or agent, of Ismail sent to Anatolia. Although there is no consensus on the connections between Şahkulu and the Safavids, Ottoman sources make clear that Nur Ali was a spy for Shah Ismail. Originally from Sivas (in the province of Rum), Nur Ali e succeeded in bringing together thousands of Turcoman tribesmen against the Ottoman authority.²⁶⁹ Their rebellion, under his leadership, broke out in central Anatolia in 1512, when civil war throughout the Ottoman Empire was at its peak. Taking advantage of the situation, Nur Ali's planned to capture Amasya.²⁷⁰ On the way, he and his troops captured the city of Tokat and read a *hutbe* (Islamic sermon read in mosques) in the name of Shah Ismail.²⁷¹ Hearing word of these developments, Ahmed sent his vizier and *lala* (the tutor of the prince), Yular Kısdı Sinan Paşa to suppress the revolt. Sinan Paşa was defeated and killed by Nur Ali Halife's rebels in a battle in Sivas. Thus, Ahmed lost his most important supporter in his struggle for the Ottoman throne. Subsequent to this, a locally-based Mehmed and his troops followed and caught Nur Ali Halife's

²⁶⁸ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 55.

²⁶⁹ In Islamic states, it is a tradition to have read *hutbe* in the name of the sultan, especially when he first acceded to the throne or conquered lands.

²⁷⁰ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 95.

²⁷¹ Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*, p. 96.

army in a bloody battle near Göksu.²⁷² Nur Ali and many of his soldiers were killed; and the rest fled to Iran.

Ottoman historians' depiction of the Nur Ali Halife rebellion is similar to that of the Şahkulu rebellion. The rebels represented an alarming threat for the state authority, but ultimately were humiliated and defeated. Many chroniclers, including Celalzâde, Lütî Paşa, Edâ'i and Şükrî, almost completely ignore this rebellion. This silence may only be attributed to the relatively small scale of the rebellion. Among those who did record it, İdris-i Bitlîsî narrates the rebellion as an event that accelerated the succession of Selim:

The Qizilbash community reached to Tokat, where it caused a great sedition. As the majority of population in that region was already unbelievers, who albeit seemed like Sufi mystics in appearance, they were accompanied by a large mass of people in that sedition. Eventually, some of the prominent Janissaries, Ottoman timar holders, and other wise men who were supporting Selim, joined to discuss the invitation of Selim to Istanbul to accede to the throne. Confirming the appropriateness of his sultanate, they made a great effort to secure it for him.²⁷³

As this passage makes clear, Selim, who had fled to Kefe following the battle with his father, was invited to the Porte by the Janissary corps in Istanbul, who opposed against the sultanate of Ahmed and eliminated pro-Ahmed statesmen. This passage, with others mentioned above, confirms that Selim was aided in his pursuit of the throne by the Qizilbash issue. Part of this success was the quirk of fate, but it was also, in part a strategy managed by Selim and pro-Selim faction. In addition, there is a blur distinction in this passage that İdris makes between the Sufis and the Qizilbash who participated in the Nur Ali Halife rebellion. This is extremely

²⁷² According to Uluçay, this Mehmed should be Mirahur Bıyıklı Mehmet Ağa, Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu?" p. 42.

²⁷³ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 95.

important because İdris here tries to keep the Qizilbash distant from any religious activities. He invites his readers to beware against taking the Qizilbash as Muslims although they were dressed like mystics.

Sâdeddin also mentions the Nur Ali Halife rebellion in his chronicles. In contrast to İdris, he places the events after the accession of Selim, suggesting that Nur Ali Halife took advantage of the political turmoil that stemmed from Ahmed's acting like a sultan in Anatolia.

That being the case, an *aşağılık* and deviant called Nur Ali Halife from the debouched Qizilbash, recruited many followers from the Turcomans living in the province of Rum. They rebelled together with his 20,000 hell-faced soldiers, abusing the conflict and schism in the country.²⁷⁴

Apart from their abuse of the civil war, this passage also reminds us that not all Turcomans were Qizilbash.

Indeed, after having denied the throne by the Janissaries, Ahmed crossed to Anatolia and, pretending to be a sultan, appointed statesmen to the provinces. As mentioned earlier, Ahmed's strategy was to acquire the support of the Qizilbash by making his son, Murad, a Qizilbash. Rıza Yıldırım recently posited that it was a strategy of both Bayezid and Murad, based on the latter's belief that Ismail's support was necessary for a victory against Selim.²⁷⁵ In any case, it was not surprising that Ahmed tried to create a coalition to claim or reclaim the throne given to him by his

²⁷⁴ Sâdeddin, p. 84.

²⁷⁵ Rıza Yıldırım, "An Ottoman Prince Wearing Qizilbash *Taj*: The Enigmatic Career of Sultan Murad and the Qizilbash Affairs in the Ottoman Domestic Politics, 1510–1513," *Turcica* 43 (2011), p. 114. I am indebted to Rıza Yıldırım for sharing the unpublished version of this article.

father. Ahmed understood that the outcome this was a matter of life and death, and failure would—and did—mean death for him.²⁷⁶

The pejorative narrations of the Şahkulu and Nur Ali Halife rebellions reflected a belief in the rightfulness of Selim's anti-Qizilbash struggles held by the narrators. The Qizilbash threat was perceived as a serious one, particularly to the political authority of the Ottoman dynasty. The historians criticized the rebels for exploiting the dynastic struggle to achieve their political aspirations.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued how Ottoman historians justified Selim's "illegitimate" acts as part of their role in the Süleyman's project to restore his father's image. One may argue that if it were propaganda, it should have had a large audience that was influenced by these opinions. For whom the propaganda was made? Indeed, it is not possible to say that a lot of people read these books considering the fact that the reading activity was mostly confined to a small group of elites in the Ottoman Empire, including the sultan, his entourage and advisers. But such an argument certainly misses the long run effects of discourse created in these sources. This discourse helped the creation of imperial ideology in the long run that can be followed through the imperial edicts. Therefore, while Selimist historians explained the rightfulness of Selim in his anti-Qizilbash acts, in the first instance

²⁷⁶ Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu," pp. 131–132.

they tried to win the favor of the sultan, but as an obscure purpose they wanted their opinion to spread among the masses.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IMAGE OF THE QIZILBASH IN THE 16TH CENTURY OTTOMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In this chapter, I examine how Ottoman bureaucrat-historians described the Qizilbash community from social, cultural, as well as religious perspectives. How did they portray the Qizilbash and themselves? How did they perceive the self-hood with respect to the otherness of the Qizilbash? How did these new perceptions and positions influence the cultural and religious stance of the Ottomans at any time thereafter? In addition to the general image of the Qizilbash in Ottoman historiography, I also discuss the depictions of the two events most-often used by Ottoman historians to express differences between the Ottoman and Safavid regimes and polities. The first is the battle of Çaldıran, which, as narrated by Ottoman historians, was a war of the legitimate against the illegitimate, of the true religion against heresy, of justness against cruelty and of God-supported against God-cursed. The second is the occupation of Tabriz by Selim just after the battle of Çaldıran. Ottoman narratives of this incident reveal both the city under Ismail, and the changes that occurred during its brief occupation by Selim.

Both narratives depend on an alienation of the Qizilbash as the “other.” For Ottomans, the other was most often *ehl-i küfr* (people of infidelity) until the 16th century. The rise of the Safavids, as political actors in the Middle East, opened a new era in the holy mission of the Ottomans.²⁷⁷ The Qizilbash, whether the Safavids or the heterodox Turkish population of Anatolia, became the new “other.” This othering is easily observed in 16th century Ottoman historical writing. An examination of these histories shows us three reasons why the Qizilbash were targeted as an internal religio-political threat. First, they had joined several revolts against the Ottoman rule, such as the rebellion of Şahkulu in 1511. Second, they had close connections with the Safavid Shah and joined forces with his army. The Qizilbash saw the Shah as *Mahdi* (the prophesied redeemer of Islam) and, at times, equal to God. Third, as the 16th century progressed, Ottoman and Turcoman elements gradually diverged from each other in terms of religious understanding. This issue might not have been a concern for the Ottoman state until the 16th century because, as discussed earlier, Ottomans had been tolerant towards varying religious practices in earlier periods.²⁷⁸

4.1. Depictions of the Battle of Çaldıran

The battle of Çaldıran is the best known event of Selim’s career. Therefore, this battle is the best-recorded incident in the historical sources I used. Examination of historians’ depiction of Çaldıran shows the battle as the war of good against evil. Incorporated into this is always a pejorative image of the Qizilbash. The significance

²⁷⁷ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Zındıklar ve Mülhidler*, pp. 115-116.

²⁷⁸ Marcus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy,” p. 155.

of such presentation is that, for the first time, the authors narrate an event from the first-hand, i.e. Haydar Çelebi and İdris-i Bitlîsî, or from what they heard from those who participated, rather than through rumors concerning the Qizilbash that circulated throughout the Ottoman realm. One goal of these histories was to bring a message to the readers that Selim was right in his anti-Qizilbash struggles.

For the Ottomans, the significance of the battle of Çaldıran lies in its position at the peak not only of Selim's career, but also of the Ottoman-Qizilbash conflict. Selim's anti-Qizilbash policy had enabled his ascension to power in 1512. Selim's first task as Sultan was to execute his rivals, including his brothers and their sons. He then turned his gaze towards the Safavids under Shah Ismail. The battle of Çaldıran removed, or significantly reduced the Safavid threat in 1514. In the aftermath of Çaldıran, and with tremendous efforts from İdris-i Bitlîsî, Ottoman authority in Eastern Anatolia was restored in three years; and the mountainous region from Erzurum to Diyarbakır subjugated.²⁷⁹ Following the victory in the battle of Çaldıran, Ottomans initiated a great deal of persecution of the Qizilbash, which led the Qizilbash to develop new tactics to avoid persecution. According to İdris-i Bitlîsî, more than 40,000 Qizilbash were massacred during this period.²⁸⁰ This number was never repeated by other sources, however. Until a new source is found, İdris' statement may only show the exaggerated and propagandist nature of some of the narratives.

The defeat in Çaldıran slowed Safavid propaganda in Anatolia, as it grew clear certain that their power would not expand into Anatolia. Perhaps more

²⁷⁹ Halil İnalçık, *Klasik Çağ*, p. 38. Here I will not go into details of the military history of the battle. For more information, see: Vural Genç, *İranlı Tarihçilerin Gözüyle Çaldıran*, (İstanbul: Bengi Kitap Yayın, 2011). Rıza Yıldırım, *Turkomans*, pp. 500–588.

²⁸⁰ İdris, p. 136.

important than the battle and the lands lost, Ismail never regained his old reputation and dynamism. Roemer explains the depth of damage done to Ismail's reputation by the battle of Çaldıran: "In the eyes of his followers he had also lost the nimbus of invincibility, even if the defeat had done nothing to impair his reputation for sanctity."²⁸¹ In other words, his defeat in the battle crushed the once-fanatical devotion of his followers.²⁸² The waning of Ismail's unifying image caused a continuous civil war between the Qizilbash tribes in Safavid Iran, which lasted until Shah Abbas (r. 1587-1629) who eliminated the Qizilbash power significantly. As a result of the waning of Ismail's invincibility, the Twelve Imam faith was promoted.

We shall now investigate how the Ottoman historians imagined the Qizilbash by narrating the battle of Çaldıran. The ways that Ottoman historians justify the battle of Çaldıran, fought against a Muslim state rather than a more traditional Other, contains clues to Ottoman perceptions of the Qizilbash. A detailed examination of Ottoman histories reveals that there were three sources of justification for the conflict: their heresy, the fact of their having killed Sunnis and plundered their properties, and their lack of their legitimacy to rule. All three reasons are related to and complement each other. According to the account of Haydar Çelebi, who was commissioned to write a diary of the battle, Selim invited Ismail to become Muslim before the battle: "Without using my sword, I invite you to come to Islam."²⁸³ Since it is an Islamic tradition to propose non-Muslims to accept Islam before fighting against them, we understand from Haydar Çelebi's use of this quote that the Ottomans tended not to consider Safavids within the circle of Islamic religion.

²⁸¹ Hans Roemer, *Cambridge History Volume 6*, p. 225.

²⁸² Roger M. Savory, *Studies on the History of Safawid Iran* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), p. 112.

²⁸³ Haydar Çelebi, *Haydar Çelebi Ruznamesi*, ed. Yavuz Senemoğlu (İstanbul: Tercüman 1001 Temel Eser Serisi), p. 50. Haydar Çelebi's account is of great importance for Çaldıran because he was responsible for writing a diary of the battle.

Second, as Ottoman sultans considered themselves the protector of the Sunni people, and they could not have been indifferent to Sunni persecutions by Shah Ismail in Iran. Lütî Paşa assesses this issue, noting that “It is difficult to tell how [Ismail] insulted the people of Sunnah. Wherever he found Sunnis, he killed them, receiving their properties.”²⁸⁴

Furthermore, careful intertextual examination of the Ottoman narratives shows that the historians paid attention to the lack of legitimacy in the claims to rule made by Safavids. In the relevant passage of his *Selimnâme*, İdris-i Bitlîsî explicitly describes Selim’s motivation as “...the intention of removing the darkness of the cruelty and outrage of those, who usurped the throne of Cem (a mythical king of Iran) and rebelled against the most auspicious *ummah*.”²⁸⁵ Clearly, the usurpers of Iran in İdris’ quotes were the Safavids, while the rebels against the Ottomans were Anatolian Turcomans. In another passage, İdris-i Bitlîsî claimed that Selim said to Ismail: “You have been purporting to be the conqueror of Iranian lands. What you did, however, was nothing more than capturing the unprotected lands by attacking the little children and insignificant remains of Iranian sultans (*Akkoyunlus*)...”²⁸⁶ Such accusations permit narrator to emphasize the illegitimacy of Safavid rule. İdris-i Bitlîsî adds that, in order to prove they were the legal heirs to the Iranian throne, the Safavids fabricated so-called *seyyidlik* (the state of being the descendant of the

²⁸⁴ Lütî Paşa, p. 148.

²⁸⁵ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 169.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 150.

Prophet).²⁸⁷ In contrast, Ottoman historians argue that Shah Ismail was only a sheikh, leading a religious order in his lodge; he had not real claim to the Sultanate.²⁸⁸

This discussion of legitimacy of the Ottoman historians brings us to the debate among Islamic jurists whether a usurper's rule could ever be legitimate.²⁸⁹ Some "realism-based" jurists stated that the legitimacy of the usurper had to be recognized; other "law-based" jurists insisted on that fighting against the usurper was legal.²⁹⁰ It is easy to understand that Ottoman historians espoused the law-based trend. Their purpose was to make it religiously permissible to fight against the Safavids by emphasizing the illegitimacy of their rule in Iran. One may argue that if there was such a right of fighting against the Safavid rulers this could only belong to the residents of Iran who thought that Ismail was usurper, not to the Ottomans. However, the historians knew that Ismail had political aspirations also in eastern Anatolia having been ruled by the Akkoyunlus before. Thus, their discussion of legitimacy was mostly about eastern territories both states wanted to rule on.

One signifier of Ottoman self-identity present in many of the sources I use is apparent in accounts of Selim's east campaign. In these accounts, the historians create a contrast between the Ottoman self and the Qizilbash other through descriptions of Qizilbash respect for historically important religious figures. Before marching against the Safavids, the Ottoman army visited the tombs of certain religious figures. In addition to those of Bayezid II and Mehmed II, they also visited

²⁸⁷ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 121.

²⁸⁸ Edâ'i, p. 63. It is important to note that being heirs to the Akkoyunlus was not the only claim of legitimacy for the Safavids. Much more importantly, Ismail was considered as the Hidden Imam or Mahdi. He was infallible in the eyes of his followers.

²⁸⁹ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 14.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 14.

the tombs of Ebû Eyyûb El-Ensâri and Seyyîd Battal Gâzi, near Eskişehir.²⁹¹ The latter visit is interesting because Seyyîd Battal Gâzi was a heterodox religious figure important to the Qizilbash (as well as to today's Alevi community.) The Ottoman army was on its way to fight a war against the Safavids accused of being unbelievers by the Ottomans. Moreover, the army visited the tombs of Sadreddin Konevî and Mevlana in Konya, both prominent mystical figures in pre-Ottoman Anatolia.²⁹² This information becomes more meaningful considering that Safavids were imagined as having destroyed the tombs and killed respected scholars and Sufis.

Such visits to the tombs should be considered part of Ottoman military tradition in order to ask for the help of God through the intercession of religious figures. Nevertheless, giving importance to this detail of the campaign deserves further thought, particularly considering that Konya was a detour from the route to eastern Anatolia, where the battle was fought. The historian's accounts were sufficient to confirm to readers the respectfulness of Selim toward his own traditions. In addition, Kemalpaşazâde mentions that Selim fed the poor and the hungry in Konya before marching on the Safavids.²⁹³ The description of this act consolidated Selim's image as a caring and compassionate sultan, whereas descriptions of his opponent, Ismail, indicated that people received nothing but cruelty.

The depictions of Ismail as the leader of the Safavids hold an important place in Ottoman historiography. One image emphasizes his cowardice during the Ottoman eastern campaign. Modern historians describe the Çaldıran as a psychological war, in

²⁹¹ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 97; Celalzâde, p. 366.

Ebû Eyyûb was a companion of Prophet Muhammad and has a significant place in Sunni religious culture. His shrine became the place where the ceremony of the girding of the sword of the sultans was performed. See Rhoads Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image, and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400–1800* (London: Continuum UK, 2008), p. 100.

²⁹² Kemalpaşazâde, p. 98; Celalzâde, p. 367.

²⁹³ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 97.

which both Selim and Ismail were sending threatening and sarcastic letters to each other. By distributing copies of these letters, the historians humiliated Ismail as a cowardly man, not worthy of the sultanate, especially as he was initially reluctant to face Selim in the battlefield.²⁹⁴ According to Lütfi Paşa, riding horse and the girding of the sword were not proper activities for someone afraid of death.²⁹⁵ A ruler should have no fear. Similarly, Celalzâde says that the womanized breast cannot stand in front of the arrow and he continues with a metaphor of a lion and a fox to describe Selim and Ismail respectively.²⁹⁶ Moreover, Selim, in a letter to Ismail, attempts to humiliate him for his womanly fear of battlefield confrontation: Selim could not find the Ismail's army for months.²⁹⁷ Celalzâde also reports on a letter in which Selim claimed that he had seen no sign of bravery and manhood in Ismail and advises him to give up his political aspirations by saying "You shall give up the claim of commandership by wearing headscarf instead of helmet, and chador instead of armor."²⁹⁸

Ismail is also depicted as licentious by Ottoman historians as he permitted the soldiers to bring their wives and children battlefield, which was considered against the battlefront ideal of chastity. According to Ottoman narratives, Ismail did this to prevent the desertions. As a result, Sâdeddin records, there were many fairy-faced women and girls in the Qizilbash army.²⁹⁹ At the end of the battle, Ismail's wife, Taclu Hanum, was taken captive and forced to marry Tâcizâde Câfer Çelebi.³⁰⁰ Selim's justification for this act was that Ismail was a *mürted* (apostate), making

²⁹⁴ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 101.

²⁹⁵ Lütfi Paşa, p. 203.

²⁹⁶ Celalzâde, p. 273.

²⁹⁷ Sâdeddin, p. 186.

²⁹⁸ Celalzâde, p. 371

²⁹⁹ Sâdeddin, p. 209.

³⁰⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 113; Sâdeddin, p. 211.

legally his family and all his properties halal. For that reason, he thought, there was no wrong in taking them.³⁰¹ This justification, however, does not seem valid because in Islamic law, declaring someone apostate does not give the right to get his wife and property (Only if he enslaves him, he has the right to possess them.)

A passage from *Tevarih-i Al'i Osman* of Lütfi Paşa shows the regretful image of Ismail while displaying the regularity and superiority of the Ottoman army over that of the Safavids. In his story, Lütfi Paşa uses an Anatolian named Rumî as he introduces the Ottoman army to Shah Ismail as a device to explain Ottoman superiority. Making use of quotes from Rumî, Lütfi Paşa implicitly compares the two armies: he describes all the troops in the Ottoman army, portraying the Janissaries as unbeatable, emphasizing their skill with firearms.³⁰² As Roger Savory has stated, the efficient use of firearms played a significant role in the Ottoman triumph, particularly as Ismail considered them unmanly and cowardly.³⁰³ In Lütfi Paşa's narrative, as Rumî continues to inform Ismail about the Ottoman army, Ismail becomes more and more regretful of his attempt to fight against Selim. Lütfi Paşa's description of the Ottoman troops portrays them as a systematic army, well equipped with firearms, while the Safavid army is merely a group of marauders.³⁰⁴ This contributes positively to the self-image created by Ottoman historians. The Safavid army, including irregular Qizilbash troops, is thus humiliated, while the superiority of the Ottoman army is emphasized.

When narrating the Çaldıran, the Ottoman historians claimed that the lands ruled by the Safavids had seen no prosperity during the Safavid era. According to

³⁰¹ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 219.

³⁰² Lütfi Paşa, p. 210.

³⁰³ Roger Savory, *Studies on the History of Safawid Iran*, p. 74.

³⁰⁴ Lütfi Paşa, pp. 206–209.

Ottoman texts, the Safavids were plunderers, and the biggest enemy of development and prosperity. They support this view usually by the fact that during the search of Ismail, the Ottoman army went hungry because there was no food to requisition. Indeed, the Ottoman army did not find Safavids in the battlefield for months. The long campaign with no fighting made Ottoman soldiers tired. Suffering from the lack of food and water, Ottoman soldiers were demanding to return. Some historians attribute this to the devastation the Safavids caused in the lands they captured or passed through. Idris aptly describes the havoc caused by the Safavid occupation:

Iranian lands were devastated by the mismanagement of the Qizilbash, and nobody has seen such prosperity as in the Anatolian borders and Armenia. No ears have heard the voice of drums, dogs or cocks. Obtaining drink and food for such a large army became a problem. There was nothing to eat in the month-long campaign save grass for the mounts.³⁰⁵

According to Sâdeddin too, as the Qizilbash returned from Çaldıran, they looted all the places they passed over: “those blood-thirsty people, arrived in Tabriz, plundering everywhere on their way like pigs.”³⁰⁶

On the Safavid side, however, this was probably a military delaying tactic of Ismail since his army was not prepared enough. We learn this from Busbecq, who also mentioned the plundering by the Qizilbash, but described it differently. According to him, laying waste and burning everything in their way, when their land was invaded, was a tradition means to push the enemies following them into hunger.³⁰⁷ Apart from the military side, the Turkish letters of Ogier Ghiselin de

³⁰⁵ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 155.

³⁰⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 65.

³⁰⁷ Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq: Imperial Ambassador at Constantinople 1554–1562*, tr. Edward Seymour Forster (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 110.

Busbecq suggest another reason. He says that the territories controlled by the Qizilbash were much less fertile than the Ottoman territories.³⁰⁸

Ottoman narratives emphasize the laxity of the Qizilbash in observing Islamic rules during the battle. For example, they record that the Safavids were drunk when the Ottoman vanguard troops, under the command of Şehsüvaroğlu Ali Bey, found them. They criticized the Qizilbash both for violation of Islamic rules, and their levity in the battlefield. Celalzâde reports: “It seems that the Shah was busy with wine and libation together with his subjects and commanders.” Recognizing an advantage, Ali Bey attacked the Safavids, beating them in this small-scale battle. Celalzâde continues his report, noting that the Qizilbash were not only drunk from the wine, but also from arrogance.³⁰⁹ In contrast, Lütî Paşa attributes the Safavids’ drunkenness not to religious laxity but to “Dutch courage.” Ismail, surprised at the size and regularity of the Ottoman army, ordered his soldiers to drink wine so that the hard job of victory could be achieved:

Did you see how Selim, the Sultan of the Rum, came and stand in front of us with his great army? It is difficult to achieve this job with a sober mind. Anyone, who loves me, and is loyal to me, shall drink wine so that we can achieve this job.” Suddenly, he produced some rose wine, pouring some for himself from the carafe, and afterwards for his other malignants.³¹⁰

According to Lütî Paşa, the Safavid method of preparation for a war was one of the factors that paved the way for the Ottoman victory.³¹¹ When narrating this event, the Ottoman historians express the confidence that comes from soldiers’ direct observations. Accusing the Qizilbash of violating religious prohibitions, the

³⁰⁸ Busbecq was an ambassador to Istanbul in the service of the Holy Roman Empire (1552–1564). He sent the letters to his fellow diplomat Nicholas Michault, who was then in Italy.

³⁰⁹ Celalzâde, p. 378.

³¹⁰ Lütî Paşa, p. 213.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 214.

historians' main purpose was to open the Qizilbash methods of religion and warfare to discussion.

The narratives also depict the Çaldıran war through Quranic verses. Surah al-Fil, which portrays the fate of those who aimed at Ka'bah is one often-referenced verses.³¹² The army of Ebrehe, who wanted to destroy the Ka'bah, was defeated by God through the small firestones, carried by flocks of a bird known as Ebabil (the Swift). İdris states that the Janissaries were like Ebabil, carrying bullets instead of stones.³¹³ Emphasizing the military superiority of the Ottomans, Bitlîsî states that the Qizilbash was the army of Ebrehe. Sâdeddin gave a more explicit example of the relevance of the al-Fil surah: "They (the Janissaries) turned the deviant community into the small bites of food by attacking them like Ebabil."³¹⁴ İdris employs another Quranic verse, in narrating the Ottoman soldiers "Truth has come, and falsehood has departed." The verse continues: "Indeed, is falsehood (by nature), ever bound to depart."³¹⁵ Such uses of the Quran certainly increased the credibility of the narratives for the reader, as they equated the Qizilbash with the non-believers who lived in the time of the Prophet Muhammad.

According to 16th century Ottoman historiography, the Ottoman army was blessed by God, and the Safavids were unbelievers cursed by God. Edâ'î claimed that the Ottomans received their well-being and peace from God, whereas the Qizilbash polished the armor of enmity and grudge.³¹⁶ Sâdeddin represents Ottoman troops as

³¹² Seest thou not how thy Lord dealt with the Companions of the Elephant? [1] Did He not make their treacherous plan go astray? [2] And He sent against them Flights of Birds, [3] Striking them with stones of baked clay. [4] Then did He make them like an empty field of stalks and straw, (of which the corn) has been eaten up. [5], Yusuf Ali translation.

³¹³ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 177.

³¹⁴ Sâdeddin, p. 206.

³¹⁵ İdris, p. 169. The Quran: 17:81.

³¹⁶ Edâ'î, p. 81.

soldiers on the path of religion, while portraying the Qizilbash as a community of unbelievers.³¹⁷ For Haydar Çelebi, Ottoman troops were Muslim *gâzis* supported by God, and the Qizilbash were godless people whose path was the wrong one. İdris supported this opinion, again, with a verse in the Quran: “and God supported him [Prophet Muhammad] with angels you did not see...”³¹⁸ This verse also mentions that God helped Prophet Muhammad in his struggle against the polytheists of Mecca (*Mekke Müşrikleri*). Thus, Haydar Çelebi implied, God was with the Ottomans in their fight against the unbelievers. A similarly dichotomy is expressed in Lütî’s depiction of Selim and Ismail: “One is the sea of cruelty; the other is faith. One is the soldier of evil; the other is the soldier of God. One has his black fate covering his sorrowed face. The flag of one is supported by God; that of the other is cursed by God.”³¹⁹ So it is aimed to convince the reader that the Qizilbash were not simple heretics but, according to the narrators, infidels.

The Çaldıran war, depicted as the war of good against evil, was a turning point in the history of the Ottoman dynasty. The way it is narrated by Ottoman historians teaches us a lot about the Ottoman perception of the Qizilbash. By using contrasts between various angles of the Ottoman-Qizilbash conflict, the historians provide legitimacy for Selim’s aggressive anti-Qizilbash policies.

³¹⁷ Sâdeddin, p. 198.

³¹⁸ The Quran, 9:40.

³¹⁹ Lütî, p. 262.

4.2. Turning Hell Into Paradise: Selim's Occupation of Tabriz

A description of the occupation of Tabriz by Selim is the best example of the contrasts, developed by Ottoman historians, between the Ottomans and the Qizilbash. Tabriz, the capital city of the Safavids, was located in northern Iran. Capturing the city was politically important for the Ottomans. Following the battle of Çaldıran, Selim occupied the Tabriz, staying eight days. He then departed for Amasya, where he wintered. The choice of Amasya was due to resistance of the Janissary corps tired of campaigning for months, and the fear of potential return of the Qizilbash to Tabriz.³²⁰ Tabriz was re-occupied by Ismail as soon as Selim departed. Despite the shortness of Selim's stay in Tabriz, Ottoman historians depict him as having reinforced the Sunni faith there. In this section, I will examine this reinforcement as presented in the Ottoman historians' narration of Selim's occupation of Tabriz. It is not important here to assess whether the amendments of Selim mentioned by the historians actually happened. Rather, I will focus on how Ottoman historians depicted the city of Tabriz before Selim's occupation and on his departure. This will improve understanding of the Ottoman historians' perceptions of the self and other.

The narrative of Selim's occupation of Tabriz contrasts the Ottoman and Safavid rules. According to Ottoman historians, Sunni beliefs, which had been damaged in the city by Ismail, were then renewed by Selim. Selim is shown in contrast to Ismail. When narrating the occupation, Lütî Paşa and İdris-i Bitlîsî rely on a Prophetic tradition that in each century God would send a *mujaddid* (renewer of religion), who would explain matters of religion in order to rid it of *bid'ah*

³²⁰ Edâ'i, p. 96.

(innovations).³²¹ It is typical that no consensus on the identity of the renewer exists for a certain century. However, Lütî Paşa and İdris-i Bitlîsî share the view that the renewer of the 9th century in the Islamic calendar was Selim, due to his decisive struggle against the Qizilbash.³²² They thought that Selim deserved the title of *mujaddid* because he saved the people of Islam (like Sunnis in Tabriz) from the cruelty and heresy of the Qizilbash and reinforced the strength of Islamic rules in the world, especially in Iran and Central Asia.

4.2.1. Tabriz from Ismail's Claim to Selim's Occupation (1501-1514)

Consolidating his power in Iran, Ismail established Safavid autonomy in Tabriz in 1501. The Tabriz and Iran of this time, was considered by Ottoman historians as having entered a dark age (*cahiliyye*), full of damages and insults to the core religion. The historians note that, while the city was a center of Sunni faith in past, it was now captured by a non-believer and resident Sunnis were forced to exchange their pure faith into heresy. Indeed, the majority of the Iranian population was Sunni before and after, Ismail, despite the substantial numbers of Shi'as in northern Iran and Horasan.³²³ It was not until the time of Shah Abbas (1587-1629) that the majority of the Iranian population converted to Shi'a Islam. At that time,

³²¹ Mudjaddid, EI2. This term is generally derived from a hadith of the Prophet: "Allah will raise for his Ummah at the head of every century a man who shall renew for its religion," Sunan Abu Davud, Book 37: Kitab al-Malahim [Battles], Hâdith Number 4278.

³²² Lütî Paşa, pp. 147–148; İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 63.

³²³ Ahmet Uğur, *İbn Kemal* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1987), p. 54. Stephen F. Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals*, p. 69.

religious conversion succeeded with the significant contribution of Shi'ite scholars imported from Jabal Amel in southern Lebanon.³²⁴

Among the Ottoman populations, the best known accusation regarding Ismail was his persecution of the Sunni dwellers of Tabriz. Kemalpaşazâde records that Ismail killed all of the Sunnis—adults and children—burnt them whether they were dead or alive, and scattered their ashes into the wind. He rid the city of Tabriz, once the center of Islam, of Sharia and filled it with cruelty of heresy and *bid'ah*.³²⁵ As I will discuss below, many Sunnis fled into Anatolia to escape the persecutions of Ismail. The migration of Nakshi and Halveti mystics to Anatolia, especially, consolidated the position of Sunni religious orders in the Ottoman lands.

According to the narratives of Ottoman historians, Ismail's tyranny was not limited to persecutions of Sunni people. They also portray him as disrespectful towards the mosques and traditions of Sunni Islam. For example, he was accused of converting the Uzun Hasan mosque in Tabriz into a military arsenal.³²⁶ The historians narrate that the tradition of Friday prayer was almost abandoned under Ismail and when, it was occasionally performed, the *hutbe* was recited in the name of Ismail, instead of the names of *hulefâ-i raşidîn* (the initial four caliphs following the Prophet).³²⁷ The conclusion of the narrators was that Ismail was unworthy as he attacked the family of the Prophet and the obligatory and supererogatory rituals of the religion.

³²⁴ Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "The Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501–1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change," *Iranian Studies*, volume 27, numbers 1–4, 1994, pp. 103–104.

³²⁵ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 89.

³²⁶ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 119.

³²⁷ Sâdeddin, p. 245.

4.2.2. Tabriz after Selim's Occupation

The historians who provided the Ottoman narratives mention that certain Sunni dwellers of Tabriz invited Selim to conquer the city and save them from Ismail's heresy and cruelty. In their writings, they portray Selim as the sole protector of Sunni Islam. The Tabriz Sunnis were remnants of the Seljuks and Akkoyunlus, both deemed earlier protectors of true religion.³²⁸ Such a letter inviting Selim to rescue them is recounted by Lütü Paşa. This is a letter from the ulemâ of Transoxania, in which Selim is described as the *Mehdi-yi ahiri'z-zeman* (the savior commissioned by God), and requested to help remove heresy.³²⁹ Another letter comes from someone called İsfahanlı Molla Hoca, who states that he was a Sunni and a follower of the religious sciences. He invited Selim to conquer Iranian lands and rescue the sincere believers from the cruelty of the Qizilbash.³³⁰ In the same letter, Molla Hoca also indicated that he considered Selim as *Zülkarneyn*, who he believed would come from Anatolia to conquer Iran and rule there for two centuries.³³¹ Celalzâde posits that Molla derived these clues about Zülkarneyn from the *hadith* collections, though he cites none. Zülkarneyn is mostly identified with the Alexander the Great of Macedonia (323 BC), who can be considered as the first Conqueror of the history.³³² There has been a vast amount of eulogistic literature about him in Islamic realms too. Thus, the figure of Zülkarneyn was presented as a

³²⁸ Celalzâde, pp. 263–264.

³²⁹ Lütü Paşa, 149–153.

³³⁰ Celalzâde, p. 264–266.

³³¹ Ibid, p. 266. Zülkarneyn is a Quranic figure, whose the prophethood is not certain. He built a wall or rampart of iron against Gog and Magog on request of the oppressed people. Al-Iskandar, EI2.

³³² Feridun Emecen, *Zamanın İskenderi, Şarkın Fatihi: Yavuz Sultan Selim*, p. 13.

good example of a ruler like Selim, who claimed to be the Conqueror of the World.³³³

With the support of these letters, which provide Selim with justification, the Ottoman army marched on Tabriz just after the Çaldıran war. Selim sent a vanguard of 400 Janissaries, led by İdris-i Bitlîsî, to prevent the plundering by the Qizilbash.³³⁴ İdris-i Bitlîsî described his task as saving the city from the attacks of the devils, providing the Ottomans with moral support among the city dwellers, and dispelling fears and anxieties of the population about an Ottoman occupation.³³⁵ İdris-i Bitlîsî was a former Akkoyunlu officer and spoke Persian, so his selection was reasonable. Upon arrival in Tabriz, İdris arranged a meeting in which the notables and scholars participated and he read a message from Selim:

I am honored to give the good news to the People of the Oneness (*ehl-i tevhid*) that I waged a holy war against the People of the Heresy (*ehl-i ilhad*). My intention in invading towards the East is to revive the signs of religion, and to replace the false religion, using my sword. It is my aim to revitalize the primary and secondary fundamentals of the religion.³³⁶

İdris repeats his mention that Selim's purpose: "...was solely to help the religion. He never intended to receive anyone's property. He did not sit on the throne of the Shahs in Tabriz. He did not take their properties away."³³⁷ İdris thus contrasts Selim and Ismail, who he thought was responsible for cruelty before Selim's occupation of the city of Tabriz. İdris argues that Selim's intention was not to hold and manage anyone's land, but only to serve as a renewer of the religion. While

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ İdris-i Bitlîsî, p. 195.

³³⁵ Ibid, pp. 195–196.

³³⁶ Ibid, p. 198. İdris' use of the term *ilhad* is very interesting because it means lexically the deviation from the meaning of the verses of the Quran.

³³⁷ Ibid, p. 218.

Selim's initial intention was to stay longer in Tabriz, he changed this decision. According to Edâ'i, Selim sat on the throne of Tabriz and coined money in his own name.³³⁸ Thus, Idris' statement that Selim was not willing to conquer the city is not supported by other sources.

As far as Ottoman historians are concerned, Selim was welcomed into Tabriz with a spectacular ceremony.³³⁹ This implies that Tabriz's people were fed up with Safavid pressure and cruelty. According to Kemalpaşazâde, the Sunni population of Tabriz was pleased with Selim's arrival because they no longer had to conceal their identities, as during the Safavid rule. Despite the Safavid pressure, however, they still had managed to preserve their belief that is described by Sâdeddin as the religious sect of *müçtehid imamlar* (four major interpreter imams in Sunni Islam).³⁴⁰ Sâdeddin describes the happiness of Sunnis in the city as follows:

At that time, the Sunni population, most of whom were Iranians, avoided the Qizilbash behaviors that they had not witnessed among their ancestors. For this reason, they saw the coming of the true-faith Padişah (Selim), who defeated the heretics and helped his co-religionists, as the guarantor of their wellbeing. Considering this event as the rebirth of the Shari'a of the Prophet, they welcomed the arrival of the Sultan.³⁴¹

It is also interesting that the people of Tabriz asked Selim for mercy by saying that they were not the Qizilbash:

You are like *Sedd-i İskender* (Alexander's Gate for Gog and Magog), you are the founder of the hill of the people of religion... O saint, you shall know we are all Sunnis; this is the love of Ebubekir, Osman, Ömer and Ali. O Shah, mercy upon Tabriz, your state shall live eternally, the east is scared of your sword, the fire of rage shall not destroy Tabriz.³⁴²

³³⁸ Edâ'i, p. 92.

³³⁹ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 117.

³⁴⁰ Sâdeddin, p. 245.

³⁴¹ Ibid, p. 221.

³⁴² Ibid, p. 217.

Recounting of the names of four caliphs by the Tabrizi Sunnis is important because the Safavids were accused of disrespectfulness towards the first three caliphs before Ali.³⁴³ In contrast, by showing their respect to Ebubekir, Osman and Ali, the historians conclude that Tabriz welcomed Selim's occupation.

At the request of the people of Tabriz, Selim commanded his troops not to damage the city.³⁴⁴ This act parallels Mehmed II's conquest of Istanbul, as Mehmed II had called for preservation of the city as it would be the abode of Islam. Although Selim did not pillage Tabriz, he permitted the killing of any Qizilbash caught by Ottoman soldiers. Kemalpaşazâde says that anyone suspected of being a Qizilbash was killed immediately.³⁴⁵ The persecution of Qizilbash was not limited to Tabriz, but also extended to Nahçıvan, the next-nearest city to Tabriz.³⁴⁶

I argue that Selim's occupation of Tabriz is depicted by the Ottoman historians in order to justify the future policies against the Qizilbash. In the Ottoman narratives, the purpose of the occupation of Tabriz was reconstruction of the Sunni faith in the city. According to the historians, Selim's arrival was salvation to the Sunni dwellers of Tabriz. To this end, the mosque of Uzun Hasan was immediately prepared for Friday prayer. One week later, Friday prayer was performed there with many participants, welcomed enthusiastically by the residents of Tabriz, even those who were unfamiliar with the four caliphs.³⁴⁷ In the prayer, the names of Selim, the four caliphs, and the companions of the Prophet Muhammad were mentioned. İdris reports that, once devoid of these beauties, the residents of Tabriz were now peaceful

³⁴³ See below in this chapter.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 218.

³⁴⁵ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 117.

³⁴⁶ Celalzâde, p. 383.

³⁴⁷ Edâ'i, p. 92.

and secure that they could again pursue the beautiful traditions of Islam.³⁴⁸ Kemalpaşazâde records the feelings of the people of Tabriz. “They were praying the fair shadow of the Sultan to cover all of the Iranian cities, and for his justice to remove the existence of those inauspicious peoples.”³⁴⁹

The Friday prayer in Tabriz was narrated differently by a Safavid chronicler. Hasan-ı Rumlu was the son of a Qizilbash chief in the service first of Ismail and then of Tahmasb.³⁵⁰ As he narrated events, when it came to the name of the Padişah while the *hutbe* was recited, the imam said “Sultan Abdülmuzaffer İsmail Bahadır Hân.” Rumlu adds that Ottoman soldiers wanted to kill the imam, but the Sultan Selim did not give them consent, on the grounds that it was a mistake made out of routine. Moreover, according to Rumlu, Selim said that it was a pity that three *seyyids* (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) died in the battle of Çaldıran. Rumlu attributes Selim’s early departure to his fear of the potential return of Ismail to the city by using a verse from the Quran: “He cast terror into their hearts.”³⁵¹

Rumlu’s narrative reminds us that the chroniclers one way or another will always reflect the official stance of their patrons. However, unlike the Ottoman historians, Rumlu used a neutral language when talking about the Ottomans or the sultan. He often calls Selim the Sultan of Rum. Thus, we can consider abovementioned relatively negative comments as exception to our generalization that Safavid chronicles used a neutral way of expression about the Ottomans. The same

³⁴⁸ İdrisi Bitlîsî, p. 198.

³⁴⁹ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 220.

³⁵⁰ Hasan-ı Rumlu, *Ahsenü’l Tevarih*, translated and abridged by Cevat Cevan (Ankara, Ardiç Yayınları, 2004), p. III.

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 184.

assessment holds for the *Lübbü't Tevârih* of the Safavid historian Abdullatif Kazvinî. He even seems to ignore the Ottoman part of early Safavid history.³⁵²

It is useful to understand more of the history of Tabriz to understand why Selim's occupation of the city was narrated as it was by Ottoman historians. Tabriz was an important city of the Seljuks, of whom the Ottomans considered themselves legitimate heirs. Although the city would be ruled first by Karakoyunlu and then by Akkoyunlu polities, the majority of the population of Tabriz was still Sunni—or so the Ottoman historians insist. Sources written before 1517, when the Ottoman state captured the caliphate from the Mamluks, wrote their narrative differently. However, most of the sources I use here were written during the reign of Süleyman (1520-1566). At that time, the Ottoman sultan, as the Caliph, was presented as the sole protector of people of Sunni Islam, regardless of where they lived. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to state that this narrative thread was a product of such a perception of the caliphate. This kind of narrative also gives the readers of Ottoman histories an understanding of Safavids' lifestyles, religions and administrative mentalities.

Moreover, I argue that this narrative was written to justify Ottoman occupation of the capital city of a neighboring Islamic state. It is well known that Tabriz was occupied many times by the Ottomans after this first occupation. Yet there was an Ottoman rule between 1585 and 1603.³⁵³ This information is also important to understanding the value of Tabriz as an eastern garrison for the Ottomans. In order to justify the occupation, Ottoman historians had to argue that the

³⁵² Abdullatif Kazvinî, *Lübbü't Tevârih*, tr. Hamidreze Mohemmednejad (Ankara: Birleşik Yayınevi, 2011).

³⁵³ "Tabriz," EI2.

city was filled with Ismail's heresy and cruelty until the day Selim arrived there. Both the Ottoman defeat of the Safavids on the battlefield, and that the Safavid disrespect to the traditions of Islam legitimized the occupation of their lands.

4.3. Humiliating the "Other", Glorifying the "Self"

The emergence of the Qizilbash threat clearly drew the boundaries of Self and Other in the 16th century Ottoman historical works. The authors of those works determined the Self as more urban, more educated, more just and finally more Sunni; in these texts the Qizilbash Other consisted of uneducated nomads who followed a heretical religion. Qizilbash were also condemned for rebelling against the central authority by allying with Shah Ismail.

In this section, I will examine the social, cultural and religious aspects of the Ottoman perception of the Qizilbash. I argue that the extensive use of historiography as a vehicle for political and religious propaganda began in the 16th century as a response to the Qizilbash threat. Although I will look to other sources, İdris-i Bitlîsî's *Selimshahnâme* is the main source for this section, as it includes a considerable quantity of information about the social, cultural and religious aspects of Ottoman official discourse regarding the Qizilbash. While other Selimnâmes focus on the political events, and the legendary figure of Selim, İdris includes long depictions of the Qizilbash.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ As we learn from *Selimshahnâme* itself, İdris-i Bitlîsî died before he completed his work and it was later finished by his son, Ebu'l Fazl Mehmed Çelebi.

4.3.1. Nomadism: Ignorance and Poorness

As described above, the Ottoman state was founded by Turcoman nomads at the turn of 14th century.³⁵⁵ However, in the process of establishing an imperial order, the behavior of Ottomans towards the nomadic Turcomans altered significantly. Turcoman rebellions, and Turcoman allegiance to the Safavids, alienated them from the Ottoman regime. This alienation can be observed through an examination of 16th century Ottoman sources including *mühimme* registers, fatwas, anti-Qizilbash polemical literature and historical writing. Before analyzing the alienation as it is described in the historiography, it will be useful to examine further the image of Turcomans in pre-Selim chronicles to see differences. Although pejorative expressions regarding the nomadic Turcomans and heterodox religion can be traced in 15th century chronicles, use of the word “Turk” in these instances was not necessarily pejorative. For example, Neşri (d. circa 1520) did not hesitate to use “Turk” as a synonym for Muslim or Ottoman.³⁵⁶ Two factors, the subjugation of Islamic holy lands, and the Qizilbash rebellions and coalition with the Safavids, meant that the Turkish character of the state was subsumed into the more powerful Sunni Islamic character in the 16th century, and Ottoman lands entered a Arabo-Persian cultural hegemony. This situation would last until the 20th century, when Turkishness was revived as the pillar of identity.

³⁵⁵ See Chapter Two, especially pp. 20–30.

³⁵⁶ Hakan Erdem, “Osmanlı kaynaklarından yansıyan Türk imaj(lar)ı,” in Özlem Kumrular, ed. *Dünyada Türk İmgesi* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2005), pp. 18–22.

Yet in the 16th century, Ottoman sources tend to use the word Turk pejoratively. This is ironic, as many of authors seemed proud of attributing the roots of the Ottoman dynasty to Oğuz Turks of Central Asia. It is equally ironic that these authors did not believe that the Muslim and pre-Islam Turkish identities contradicted each other.³⁵⁷ Still, not only the religion of the Qizilbash but also what we recognize as their ethnic identity came under rigid criticism by Ottoman historians. One explanation offered for this contradiction is that the humiliation efforts were not about ethnic identity, but about class stratification.³⁵⁸ Ottoman society was divided into two groups, *reaya* and *askeri*.³⁵⁹ Ottoman historians considered the *askerî* well-educated, religious and just, honored with the service of the Ottoman dynasty. As Celalzâde describes the pre-Bayezid Ottoman statesmen, they:

...consulted in state affairs, were the courageous, the virtuous and the mature of their time. They indeed had pure faith, and were just, merciful, sincere and religious. To this group, deviance from the truth and bribery were great crimes. Despite not being nobles, the ordinary people could also reach the post of the vizierate, provided that they received a good education.³⁶⁰

Celalzâde states that a door was left open to members of the *reaya*, that is, a *reaya* could become join the ruling strata. However, we know that this was seldom possible, especially after the mid-14th century. Nobility (i.e., an *askeri* ancestor) was generally required for one to reach the highest ranks of the imperial hierarchy.

As far as Ottoman narratives are concerned, the *reaya* can be divided into two groups in terms of their obedience to the state. A careful examination of Ottoman histories reveals that there was always an ideal subject in the Ottoman Empire. The

³⁵⁷ Lütî Paşa, p. 154.

³⁵⁸ Aslı Ergül, "The Ottoman Identity," p. 634.

³⁵⁹ Karen Barkey, *Empires of Difference*, p. 76.

³⁶⁰ Celalzâde, p. 278.

accepted, ideal, or conformist *reaya* is loyal to the Ottoman regime. The unaccepted or non-conformist *reaya* is not. Of course, accepted and unaccepted types changed according to the different conditions. Generally speaking, however, 16th century developments determined the idealized model. This new type of ideal subject was the exact opposite of the Qizilbash: Obedient (not dealing with the political issues, which are not his or her business), tax-paying, and remaining within the boundaries of his or her status of *reaya*.

Images of the Qizilbash in sixteenth-century Ottoman historical writing reflect these assumptions. In certain narratives, being Turcoman is equal to being poor and idle. In his writing about the Şahkulu rebellion, Sâdeddin refers to the social stratification of those involved noting “the jobless, the penniless people, who spent their lives on foot, possessed the brilliant horses, riding while yelling “Shah!”³⁶¹ Similarly, İdris recounts that “it could be only a dream for a nomadic Turk to possess such a beautiful horse...”³⁶² Emphasizing the poverty of the Turks, Kemalpaşazâde continues the same line of argument, describing “the dirty Turks, who had wooden feet and never mounted a horse.”³⁶³ Considering that these passages were derived from the portions regarding the Şahkulu rebellion, one may argue that the Ottoman historians were attempting to create a contrast between the Qizilbash soldiers and the better-equipped Ottoman soldiers. In other words, with an attempt at humiliation, they emphasized that normally it was nearly impossible for a nomadic Turcoman to be a part of the Ottoman cavaliers.

³⁶¹ Sâdeddin, p. 46.

³⁶² İdris, p. 113.

³⁶³ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 45.

The Ottoman historians also characterized the Qizilbash as ignorant and mentally deficient people. This image was the opposite of the Ottoman self-image, which emphasized education and urbanity. In fact, the central authority viewed not only the Turks but all of peasants and nomads in the same way. For example, Turks were *etrak-ı bi idrak* (Turks with low capacity of understanding), and Kurds, a mountainous people, were nothing more than *ekrad-ı bi idrak* (Kurds with low capacity of understanding). They were expected to remain within their social position without becoming involved in political affairs. Addressing the problem between the Ottomans and the Dulkadir leader Alaüddevle, a man of Turcoman origin, İdris calls him “a foolish, woolly-minded Turk who dares to show me the way with bloodshedding! Oh how uncultivated!”³⁶⁴ Sâdeddin, recounts comments of those who believed that Ahmed was not worthy of the throne. In these quotes, the Qizilbash are defined as “some *çarıklı*s (those wearing simple shoes made of rawhide) among the Anatolian Turks” and “some bald and barefooted” people.³⁶⁵ Sâdeddin describes the Turks of Antalya in passing as those who understand nothing, like animals.³⁶⁶ The overall impression is that Turks were widely regarded as ignorant people without any sense of understanding.³⁶⁷

Using such imagery of the Qizilbash, Ottoman historians drew a boundary between the educated *askerî* class and uneducated or ignorant masses—the Self and the Other. This was in part a result of the rise of Ottoman urban culture—high culture—under the influence of Arab and Persian traditions in the 16th century. High culture representatives included scholars, educated statesmen, professional

³⁶⁴ İdris, p. 250.

³⁶⁵ Sâdeddin, p. 77.

³⁶⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 42.

³⁶⁷ Celalzâde, p. 356; Sâdeddin, p. 171.

bureaucrats and merchants. The description of the Qizilbash as poor nomads was a product of the growing gap between the urban culture of the Ottoman elites and the low culture of the nomads such as the Qizilbash, who were portrayed as unsophisticated people living in rural areas. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the authors regarded being nomad, and, by extension being a Turk, as a sign of ignorance and saw nomadic existence as the main cause of the Qizilbash rebellions. According to the Ottoman historians, these poor nomads should have been loyal to the sultan, of whom they always needed protection.

4.3.2. Uncultivated Men: Atrocity and Mercilessness

The Qizilbash were not only condemned for their nomadism, they were also portrayed as wild and merciless. They were portrayed as killers of anyone regardless, man, woman or child, young or old. Their main target, according to the Ottoman history chroniclers, was religious men and women, especially Sunni sheikhs. According to Şükrî, Shah Ismail legalized the merciless persecution of the pious.³⁶⁸ Sâdeddin cites an occurrence when the Şahkulu rebels were fleeing to Iran:

On their way back, they encountered a caravan. Killing the caravan owner, they stole all of their properties. Sheikh İbrahim-i Şebüsteri, the author of *Enbiyanâme*, and his son were also in the caravan. He took such a risk with the intention of making a pilgrimage. The caravan plunderers martyred him as well. Yet they say that when the sheikh saw that those blood drinkers are attempting to kill his son, he begged them to kill himself first. Ignoring his pleas, those killers first killed the sheikh's son only for oppression and torment.

³⁶⁸ Şükrî, p. 137.

Seeing this, the sheikh fell down, screaming “Allah”. They immediately martyred him in that position.³⁶⁹

This passage includes several important points about the Other. They stole from innocent and pious people. This was “unlawful warfare” (*hirabah*). It was well-known to Sâdeddin’s audience that Islam permits Muslim holy warriors to take the property of the enemy following a victory. There was no religious or legal base to robbing the innocent, however. Second, the Others did not hesitate to kill a religious scholar. Sâdeddin records later that İbrahim-i Şebüsteri was highly versed in the sciences of *tafsir* (the Quranic exegesis) and *hadith* (the prophetic tradition). He was a mystic adhering to Nakşibendi Sufi sect, which suffered from Ismail’s Sunni persecutions in Iran.³⁷⁰ Sâdeddin implies that ruthless persecution of such a scholar shows that the Qizilbash had no respect for scholarship or for Islamic sciences. Such persecutions were even a religious duty for the Qizilbash, according to İdris.³⁷¹ Third and most important, despite the fact that Şebüsteri begged them not to show him the murder of his son, they did so deliberately according to Sâdeddin. That is, they had no sense of mercy. They killed him too while he was facedown and defenseless.

Kemalpaşazâde recounts a similar story regarding the atrocities of Ismail. According to his chronicle, Ismail persecuted the Şeyhülislam of Herat, a descendant of Sâdeddin Taftazâni, together with his 60 students because they did not pay homage to him.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ Sâdeddin, p. 65.

³⁷⁰ Hamid Algar, “Naqshibandîs and Safavids: A Contribution to the Religious History of Iran and her Neighbors,” *Safavid Iran and her Neighbors*, ed. Michel Mazzoui (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2003), p. 31.

³⁷¹ İdris, p. 132.

³⁷² Kemalpaşazâde, p. 85.

In another passage, Sâdeddin attempts to show Ismail as a ruthless individual: “This deviant ugly-face Shah killed his birth mother, who was the daughter of Hasan Han, because she attempted to divert him return from the path of heresy and cruelty.”³⁷³ Further accusations of cruelty can be found in Sâdeddin’s accounts. He accuses Ismail and his soldiers of cannibalism: He states that Ismail ordered his soldiers to eat the bodies of Alaüddeve’s two grandsons who had been captured and killed during the campaign against the Dulkadirs.³⁷⁴ The practice of cannibalism is also mentioned by Safavid sources, but as a sign of loyalty and piety.³⁷⁵

In the hands of the Ottoman historians, images of the Qizilbash as savages capable of the most extreme acts of barbarity carried obvious implications. By condemning the Qizilbash as barbarians, Ottoman historians presented the Self as civilized and claimed that those suffering from the cruel acts of Ismail in Iran asked for mercy from the Ottoman sultan. İdris, for example, indicates that “Most of the innocent in danger were asking for the mercy of this dynasty that grants the plenty of livelihoods. They were appealing for the help of this *dergah* with the intention of taking shelter in the shadow of compassion.”³⁷⁶ Similarly, and in contrast to the cruel image of Ismail in the Ottoman narratives, Selim is portrayed as a merciful sultan against the suffering of people. İdris reports that Sultan Selim ordered his troops to act mercifully against the bystanders during the campaign. No victim of Ismail should be harmed, Selim told his men.³⁷⁷ Sâdeddin presents Selim as punishing

³⁷³ Ibid, p. 89.

³⁷⁴ Sâdeddin 3, p. 351.

³⁷⁵ For more information on the practice of cannibalism in the Safavid state, see Shahzad Bashir, “Shah Isma’il and the Qizilbash: Cannibalism in the Religious History of Early Safavid Iran,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 45, No: 3, February 2006, pp. 234–256.

³⁷⁶ İdris, p. 120.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 136.

toward the cruel, and mild against the victim.³⁷⁸ Using a similar language, Celalzâde says that he returned goodness with goodness, and malignancy with harsh malignancy.³⁷⁹ In sum, Ottoman lands were presented as peaceful place under the protection of the sultan, whereas Safavid lands were not safe because of the tyranny of Shah himself. This merciful portrait of Selim, who pursued a harsh policy against the Qizilbash, in the Ottoman historiography probably aimed to present him as a man who differentiates the good and the evil, and thus to better justify his acts.

The merciless image of the Qizilbash also justified the act of war against the Qizilbash. It was the sultan's duty to protect not only his own subjects and Sunnis of Iran who were suffering from the cruelty of the Qizilbash. Thus, the political confrontation between the Qizilbash and the Ottomans consolidated the religious position of the Ottoman Empire.

4.3.3. Disobedience and Waywardness

An ideal *reaya* should be obedient to the state and the sultan, and should act in accordance with his or her social status. In Islamic terminology, the legitimacy of the command for obedience to the sultan was derived from the verse of Nisa in the Quran: "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you."³⁸⁰ Providing that the authority did not command his subjects to disobey God's commands, obeying him was equal to obeying Allah and the

³⁷⁸ Sâdeddin, p. 92.

³⁷⁹ Celalzâde, p. 269.

³⁸⁰ Quran, 4:59.

Prophet.³⁸¹ Although during the initial two centuries of Islam there was a place for rightful political activism (*kīyam*) when faced with an unjust ruler, later Islamic jurisprudence advocated for a surrender and absolute obedience to authority, rejecting the right of rebellion.³⁸² It became a duty to obey the ruler, whether he was good or bad, or even if he were a tyrant. Tyranny was better than anarchy.³⁸³

Another legal issue important to discussions of Self and Other in the 16th century Ottoman world is the concept of territorialism, as expressed in the Hanafi School of law, the official sect of the Ottoman Empire. According to this doctrine, the territories ruled by Muslims are called *dâr'ü-l Islam* (the abode of Islam), while those ruled by non-Muslims are called *dâr'ü-l harb* (the abode of war or non-Muslims).³⁸⁴ There was an implicit contract between the state and the dwellers of the abode of Islam, whether Muslim or not. Adherents to Hanafi territorialism believed that every individual living in *dâr'ü-l Islam* had accepted this contract innately. Those who broke this contract by rebelling against the ruler would make their persecution legal.³⁸⁵

This information makes clear why Ottoman historians condemned the Qizilbash rebellions for their disobedience as *fitne* (civil strife) instead of *kīyam* (the legal right of rebelling against an unjust ruler). According to Ottoman historians, civil strife would plunge a country into anarchy and anarchy was the purpose of the Qizilbash, who were wicked by nature and incapable of obeying the state and the

³⁸¹ Idris, p. 247; Sami Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 92.

³⁸² Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, p. 12.

³⁸³ A. K. S. Lambton, "The Theory of Kingship in the *Nasihat al-Muluk* of Ghazali," *Islamic Quarterly*, 1/1, 1954, p. 51.

³⁸⁴ Samy Ayoub, "Territorial Jurisprudence, *ikhtilaf al-darayn*: Political Boundaries and Legal Jurisdiction," *Contemporary Islamic Studies*, 2012:2, pp. 2–3.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

sultan. Within the context of Şahkulu rebellion, the historians used similar phrases to describe the Qizilbash character. Sâdeddin stated that the Turks of Antalya were unruly and stubborn by nature and ill-temperedness was another feature of their inferior natures.³⁸⁶ One of the frequently used terms to describe the Qizilbash is *dike burun*, which means a stubborn person who does not obey.³⁸⁷

As for the Ottoman historians, the rebellious Turcomans took advantage of the chaotic environment in the Ottoman Empire that stemmed from the dynastic struggle between Bayezid's sons. Celalzâde records:

Seeing the movements and insurgences of the princes, Şahkulu came to realize that the country was empty and there was no one protecting it. Also, there was nobody in the sultanate. Without any delay, he gathered the mischief-makers around him and rebelled.³⁸⁸

It is also possible to show the importance of obedience to the Ottoman state by comparing the historians' depictions of the Qizilbash with their depictions of the Kurds of eastern Anatolia. The Ottomans were supported by Kurds in their struggle against the Qizilbash. Şükrî reports that the Kurds showed their obedience by kissing the hands of the sultan during the campaign of Tabriz.³⁸⁹ This obedience was a result of the promise of the Sultan to honor the Kurds, and to shower them with gifts if they showed their loyalty to the sultan by fighting against the Qizilbash.³⁹⁰ The chronicler İdris-i Bitlîsî was of Kurdish origin, and his narrative reveals very well how the Kurds allied themselves with the Ottomans. He met with prominent Kurdish leaders, to invite the pure-faith Muslim community to be subject to and in compliance with

³⁸⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 42.

³⁸⁷ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 43.

³⁸⁸ Celalzâde, p. 297.

³⁸⁹ Şükrî, pp. 198–201.

³⁹⁰ Haydar Çelebi, p. 49.

the sultan in the duty of fighting against the Qizilbash. After accepting this invitation, İdris states, the Kurds kicked the Qizilbash out of their region and plundered their properties.³⁹¹ İdris continues, remarking that “With the benefit of alliance with the sultan of holy warriors, they managed to take back the hereditary lands that were usurped by the Qizilbash through oppression and violence.”³⁹² İdris also mentions that Kurdish leaders asked him if the Ottoman administration would appoint a commander who could enable the Kurdish troops to act in unity. Since they were mountainous people, İdris adds, they were not able to act together and opposing against their peers was their temper.³⁹³ The Ottoman elites preferred Kurdish nomads and peasants to their Turkish counterparts. İdris repeatedly alleges that this preference was owing to the fact that Kurds were Sunni religious people. However, there were also practical reasons: use of their military ability against the Qizilbash, and receiving the properties of the Qizilbash. In essence, using the example of mountainous Kurdish tribes, İdris attempts to explain how a low status subject should behave.

Another sign of the ideal of obedience expected by the Ottoman administration is elaborated by Edâ’î. Following the Çaldıran battle, the Ottoman troops marched on Alaüddevle, the ruler of the Dulkadir and of Turcoman origin. He was explicit in his denial of Ottoman authority. An interesting note is that Alaüddevle was the grandfather of Selim and father in law of Bayezid. Selim was angry of Alaüddevle’s preventing the convoy of food going to the Ottoman army waiting for the war against the Safavids.³⁹⁴ As Edâ’î reports:

³⁹¹ İdris, p. 274.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Edâ’î, p. 107.

[Alaüddevle] possessed many properties and much wealth; but he got all this wealth thanks to the state of the sultan of Rum. There was an agreement between him and the sultan that the sultan would not covet his crown and throne, and in exchange Alaüddevle will not leave the path of obedience and never ride a high horse with arrogance.³⁹⁵

Edâ'i then mentions the suggestions of a member of Alaüddevle's entourage. These suggestions perfectly reveal the strength of the Ottomans, and the potential result of rebelling against them. In order to show this strength, Edâ'i goes on saying that nobody could defeat the sultan in the battlefield; nonetheless, if he [Alaüddevle] apologizes, the sultan of the world, with his great forgiveness, would have forgiven him.³⁹⁶

This disobedient character of the Qizilbash—as defined by the Ottomans or the Ottoman historians—was one factor that justified the Ottoman war against them. Disobedience against the ruler was in itself enough to justify the war. Ebussuud, the Şeyhülislam of Süleyman I, he replied to a question asking about the legality of Qizilbash persecution by stating that “Their persecution is legal for two reasons, one being their having brought swords against the soldiers of Islam (*bagî*) and the other being they are infidels in many respect.”³⁹⁷ One problem, however, in the fatwa of Ebussuud is that a *bagî* is theoretically a Muslim rebel against legitimate ruler and cannot be infidel. A modern scholar suggests that an explanation to this contradiction may be that Ebussuud implied that the Ottoman sultan was just ruler and must therefore be obeyed.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Edâ'i, p. 112.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislam Ebussud Efendi Fetvaları Işığında 16. Asır Türk Hayatı* (İstanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983), p. 109.

³⁹⁸ İsmail Safa Üstün, *Heresy and Legitimacy*, p. 63.

4.3.4. Betrayal: Alliance with the Safavids (Qizilbash?)

Prior to examining the Ottoman accusations of betrayal by the Qizilbash, it is important to restate that the Ottoman historians generally make no distinction between the Anatolian Turkish people, called “Qizilbash”, and the Safavids of Iran. It is more important to remember that the Qizilbash were Anatolian nomadic-tribal Turks who had founded the Safavid state. In a strict sense, then, it may not be correct to argue that the Qizilbash allied with the Safavids but rather, recognize it as a way for both to avoid succumbing to the Ottoman autonomy. Nonetheless, we can assume that there was an alliance between the Qizilbash and the governing strata of the Safavid state, and that this alliance had a religious impact on the Qizilbash.

By the tenth century, and especially under the sheikdom of Cüneyd, the sheikhs of the Safaviyye order became spiritually important for Anatolian Turcomans. This continuing relationship intensified when the Safavids became both political and militant, culminating under Ismail in 1501. Ismail conducted intense religious and political propaganda campaigns in Anatolia; the Ottomans considered these activities a great challenge for the existence of state and religion. However, it was not until the reign of Selim that the Ottomans employed harsh policies against the Safavids and their Anatolian collaborators. Furthermore, these policies were supported by literary works. Without any doubt, this collaboration was the most significant factor for the harsh reaction of the Ottomans to the Qizilbash.

It should be emphasized that in addition to discontent created by the Ottoman imperial regime, and the religious links between the Safavid sheikhs and Anatolian Turcomans, an economic factor also motivated these masses to rally around the

Safavid flag. In the 16th century, the Ottoman sultan still considered himself as supreme *gazî*.³⁹⁹ However, one result of increasing military institutionalization and developing international relations was that the Ottoman state ceased to be an ideal place for *gazâ*, military raids into the enemy lands. Nomadic-tribal Turcomans living in the frontiers were replaced by *Kapıkulu* troops and earthbound provincial soldiers, i.e. *tımarlı sipahis*. With the rise of the Safavids, Anatolian Turks found new opportunities for *gazâ*, in which they gained plunder in return.

Ottoman historians portrayed the insurgent Qizilbash as betrayers, the agents and provocateurs of the Safavids in Anatolia. Sâdeddin explains the relationship between Turks of Anatolia and the Safavids as one in which

Turks, devoid of any understanding, got into contact with and adopted the deviance of the grubby ones, without knowing their true face. They sacrificed their children and properties to the Shah. Those who are able to visit him with oblations and gifts. Sending countless offerings through their shamelessly deviant caliphs, they see the door of the Shah, who is proud of his sins, as *hacet kapısı* (a gate of giving for the needy), even the Ka'ba of desires. They present their grown up daughters or sisters as gifts to the Shah's men, who should be defeated. When they hear of the name of the Shah, they immediately fall prostrate.⁴⁰⁰

This passage includes many clues to the close relationship between the Qizilbash and the Safavids. We understand that the relationship was facilitated by Ismail's caliphs, or agents in Anatolia. Second, Sâdeddin states that the Anatolian Turks were seduced by Ismail. In fact, a relationship had been established by the mid-15th century. Also, regardless of their contact with the Safavids, the Qizilbash were not Sunnis and they were gradually alienated from the Ottoman imperial regime in social and economic terms. Furthermore, this passage also suggests that the Qizilbash saw Ismail as God,

³⁹⁹ Colin Imber, "Dynastic Myth," p. 23.

⁴⁰⁰ Sâdeddin, p. 171.

his post as Ka'bah, and any visits paid to him as pilgrimage (haj). Finally, they are represented as a people with no concept of chastity. Their obedience to the Shah reached to such an extent that they were presenting their women to the service of the Shah and his men.

Many other statements in the Ottoman histories imply that the Anatolian Turks betrayed the Ottomans by allying with the Safavids against the Ottoman political authority. Ismail's first meeting with the Qizilbash in Erzincan is commented-upon by Kemalpaşazâde as: "Wherever there are dissolute people, seditious and unbelieving, proud of their faith, they became subject to the malignant Shah, coming together in Erzincan."⁴⁰¹ Accordingly, Şükrî depicts the Qizilbash-Safavid cooperation one of deceit and coercion: "He initiated the fight, saying I am Mahdi, made Turks worship himself. He became Murshid and made people prostrate himself..." Şükrî also records that Ismail tempted the people toward mischief.⁴⁰²

4.3.5. Ottoman Piety versus Qizilbash Heresy and Deviance

Religious imagery regarding the Qizilbash is especially important, as the historians made extensive use of religious rhetoric in describing them. According to the narratives, the Qizilbash religion was nothing but heresy, deviating from the true path of Islam to which Ottomans adhered—Sunnism. But the roots of the conflict between the Qizilbash and the Ottoman central authority were not only religious; they were also political, social and economic. Condemning their beliefs was the most

⁴⁰¹ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 88.

⁴⁰² Şükrî, p. 298.

effective means to justify Selim's anti-Qizilbash acts using such narrative portrayals. Furthermore, according to the Islamic law, the only way to justify war against Muslim rivals would be to accuse them of heresy and deviation from the core Islam.⁴⁰³

To understand how Ottoman historians explained the Qizilbash religion, I will first probe how they positioned the Self, i.e., being Ottoman, within the Islamic world. As I have stated, the Sunni identity of the Ottoman Empire intensified in the 16th century, a result of the conquest of Islamic holy lands and the emergence of the Qizilbash threat. The Ottoman sultan was now not only a gazî, fighting against the infidelity and heresy in the Islamic frontiers but also a caliph, the successor to the Prophet.⁴⁰⁴ Another important factor in consolidating the Sunni identity relates to the establishment of Safavid state. For the authors of the Ottoman chronicles, many of Sunni scholars, mystics, artists and merchants took refuge in Ottoman lands. Upon Selim's orders thousands were brought from Tabriz.⁴⁰⁵ In the following decades, they contributed in significant ways to the consolidation of Sunni culture in the Ottoman Empire.

The Islamic character of the state became increasingly apparent by the early 16th century. Thus, claims of legitimacy were now not enough to describe the self. In his legitimizing efforts, Lütî Paşa succinctly explains how the Ottomans legitimized their rule through Islamic terminology. According to Lütî Paşa, some Sunni Muslims, worthy of the throne owing to their pure and uncontaminated religion, had

⁴⁰³ Caroline Finkel, *Rüyadan İmparatorluğa Osmanlı*, tr. Zülal Kılıç (İstanbul: Timaş Basım, 2007), p. 94.

⁴⁰⁴ Colin Imber, "Ottoman Dynastic Myth," p. 11.

⁴⁰⁵ Celalzâde, p. 383, Kemalpaşazâde, p. 122, Edâ'i, p. 96. In the Selimnâme of Edâ'i, Selim's order is given: "God, with his all generosity, granted me the throne of Anatolian and Iranian lands. The whole country is ours. But they are the dwellers. Let them live in rightness and contentment."⁴⁰⁵

risen since the Prophet and the four Orthodox caliphs. Among these pure Muslims, were the Seljuks, who paved the way to the Ottomans. Lütfi Paşa saw other states straying from the righteous path as *küfran-ı nime* (ungrateful), as they showed ingratitude to the religion sent by God.⁴⁰⁶ Lütfi Paşa adds that it was known that some early Muslim rulers, including some of Abbasid, Buyids and Fatimid rulers, were actually *rafizi* (heretic). In some states, such as Gaznavids and Kharezmis, the subjects were the ungrateful, rebelling against their rulers. However, following the same path as the Seljuks, the Ottomans refrained from being ungrateful to Islam. In a manner similar to that of 15th century chroniclers such as Neşri, Lütfi Paşa also claimed that the Ottomans were the rightful heirs of the Seljuks as the Seljuk ruler, Alaaddin, granted Ertuğrul the lands where the Ottoman principality was founded.⁴⁰⁷ According to his narrative, God gave abundance to the Ottomans' lives and properties because of their preference for true Islam as their religion. Even when the Ottomans fought with few men, they became victorious with the help of God. Moreover, Lütfi Paşa drew attention to the fact that, especially in the early Ottoman period, the sultans were pious people who abstained from drinking alcohol and all state-related decisions were made in accordance with the Islamic law in line with ulemâ's recommendations.⁴⁰⁸

Within the books I used for this study, Ottoman sultans were routinely portrayed as the representative, or shadow, of God on earth, as well as the protector of orthodox Islam against the infidels and heretics. For instance, İdris-i Bitlîsî states that the Ottoman state can be differentiated from the other Islamic states through its intense struggle with heresy. İdris claims that, after the period of four caliphs, no

⁴⁰⁶ Lütfi Paşa, p. 144.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 153–154, Colin Imber, "Dynastic Myth," p. 15.

⁴⁰⁸ Lütfi Paşa, p. 162.

sultan had fought against the infidels as much as the Ottomans did.⁴⁰⁹ To him, Selim was the sultan who limited the lifetime of the Qizilbash or infidels, and protected the world with his alertness.⁴¹⁰ He was also the servant of *harameyn* (Mecca and Medina), removing the heresy and impiety of the people of obstinacy with his mace.⁴¹¹

I shall now examine the Ottoman perception of the Qizilbash religion. Above all, it is essential to know that Ottoman historians deliberately do not use pejorative expressions when they mention the *Safaviyye* Sufi order. They praise the early period of the order since they thought that it was a Sunni order, while stating that it was Cüneyd, the grandfather of Ismail, who twisted the order into a “heretic” one. As I stated above, contemporary scholars do not agree about the religious nature of the early Safaviyye order, and its Shi’ite versus Sunni basis. However, there is no doubt that 16th century Ottoman historians tend to accept the order as inherently Sunni. Celalzâde describes *Şeyh Safiyyeddin*, the founder of the Safavid order, as “...an eminent person at the rank of sainthood from the Ardabil dynasty, who possessed the knowledge of religious sciences.”⁴¹² İdris also employs positive rhetoric when writing about the early times of the order. He remarks that the sheikhs of Ardabil were on the pure path of the Sharia, and that many of naïve Anatolian people were their adherents.⁴¹³ Later in his *Selimshahnâme*, İdris writes that the Safavid order had turned to the path of “heresy” three generations before the time of Ismail. That is, according to İdris, the order was Sunni prior to the sheikhdом of Cüneyd.⁴¹⁴ Accordingly, when Selim arrived in Tabriz, he ordered the persecution of those who

⁴⁰⁹ İdris, *Heşt Bihişt*, p. 60.

⁴¹⁰ İdris, *Selimşahname*, p. 52.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, p. 65.

⁴¹² Celalzâde, p. 272.

⁴¹³ İdris, p. 120.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, p. 130.

have been adherent to Ismail, his father and grandfather.⁴¹⁵ According to İdris, Ismail's ancestors (before Cüneyd) were pious men who never delayed their prayers, and their piety enabled Ismail to gather so many supporters in Anatolia who later granted him the sultanate.⁴¹⁶ Celalzâde attributes Ismail's deviation from the Prophetic path of his ancestors to his becoming friends with the Turks of Anatolia, without any sense of perception.⁴¹⁷ In sum, the Ottoman historians prefer to make a distinction between Safavids before and after Cüneyd. Using such distinction they show that Ismail, his father and grandfather, betrayed the religion of their ancestors, and so cut their links to a 200-year history. That history was one of the claims of legitimacy of their rule.

According to the Ottoman historians, the Qizilbash, who deviated from the pure path of earlier Safavid sheikhs, did not refrain from violating even the fundamental rules of the orthodox Islam. Our sources state that anything forbidden by Islam was allowed and legitimate in the religion of the Qizilbash. Furthermore, it is emphasized that these religiously illicit acts were the most important parts of their religion. In other words, the Qizilbash are accused of fabricating a new religion by denying the illicitness of their behavior. Şükrî reflected this view by stating "They call him Shah Ismail. He has grudge against the religion of Islam. Instead, he formulated an invalid wrong religion."⁴¹⁸ Among the acts forbidden by religion were disparaging mystics, the Prophet's companions, the four initial caliphs, and even the Prophet himself, destroying the mosques, attacking and firing on the graves of important Sunni religious figures, killing Sunnis, drinking alcohol, fornicating and

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, p. 130.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid, p. 137.

⁴¹⁷ Celalzâde, p. 356.

⁴¹⁸ Şükrî, p. 137.

homosexuality. In one of his fatwas, Kemalpaşazâde summarized the illegitimate acts as such:

The unbelievers occupied territories belonging to Sunnis, and they spread their invalid religious sect. They damned the three initial caliphs, denying their caliphate. They reviled the people of the sciences and the great interpreters of Islamic law. They supposed the Shi'ite path of their leader, Ismail, was the easiest and most correct path to follow. Shah was the limitless authority in religion. According to them, whatever Shah permits is permissible; whatever he forbids is forbidden. For example, Shah made it permissible to drink alcohol; then they regarded it as permissible. Consequently, there is countless number of evil and heretic acts by them.⁴¹⁹

Emphasizing Safavid deviance from the religion of their ancestors, İdris remarked that the remains of the adherents of the order fell into heresy, pursuing the way of the ignorant. He used a verse from the Quran to explain their deviance: "But there came after them successors who neglected prayer and pursued desires; so they are going to meet evil."⁴²⁰ According to İdris, they were violators of the religious duties in Islam. In another passage, İdris points out that in the religion of Ismail *zina* (fornication) and homosexuality were unhampered; they were even forcing good people to homosexuality.⁴²¹

Moreover, according to İdris, Ismail considered himself as a descendant of the Prophet. Indeed, the Safavid house claimed to trace itself to Ali, and thus to the Prophet. Despite this claim, İdris continues, Ismail never hesitates to insult the Prophet and his family. İdris explains this contradiction in this way:

He attributes himself to Fatıma (daughter of the Prophet and the wife of Ali), but never feels ashamed from the soul of the Prophet. Prophet would not give

⁴¹⁹ Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict*, pp. 171–173.

⁴²⁰ İdris, p. 121.

⁴²¹ Ibid, p. 132.

consent to this saying of him in the Day of Judgment. He overtly claims of imamate. But he does not have the religion neither of Muhammad nor Christ.⁴²²

Another characteristic of the Qizilbash religious imagery in 16th century Ottoman historiography is worship of Ismail as a quasi-divine figure. His adherents called him by a number of titles that were actually used by other states as well. For example, the Ottoman authors also described the Ottoman sultans with such titles as *Mehdi-yi sahib-i zaman* (Lord of the Age),⁴²³ *zillullah* (the shadow of God upon Earth),⁴²⁴ and *el müeyyed min indillah* (God-supported). The divine-right of the ruler, i.e. the concept that the state had been divinely sanctioned for the order of the universe, was not exclusive to the Safavids or Ottomans.⁴²⁵ Spiritual authority was a Western medieval phenomenon that helped polities to legitimize their rule especially in the absence of genealogical legitimacy.⁴²⁶ Although Ottoman historians implied that what the Sultan says is the manifestation of God himself, Ottoman Sultans were never referred explicitly as God.⁴²⁷ Ismail presented a different case, however, at least in the eyes of Ottoman historians. He was not only accepted as reincarnation of Ali but also God's manifestation in human form (*tecellî*).⁴²⁸ The Ottoman scholars criticize Ismail's being a God-like stance as a sign of heresy. In their critique, they refer with sarcasm to the battle of Çaldıran which Ismail lost against Selim. How could a demi-God lose a battle against a mortal?⁴²⁹ The importance attached by the Qizilbash to their Shah is presented by Kemalpaşazâde in the way that Ottoman

⁴²² İdris, p. 132.

⁴²³ Celalzâde, p. 264; Lütî, p. 149.

⁴²⁴ Lütî, p. 199, p. 275.

⁴²⁵ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 163.

⁴²⁶ Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah," p. 161.

⁴²⁷ Sâdeddin, p. 173.

⁴²⁸ Irene Melikoff, "Le probleme qizilbaş," *Turcica* 6 (1975): pp. 49-67.

⁴²⁹ This is why after the battle the religious discourse of the Safavid state became more based on Twelver Shi'a and less on Mahdi.

soldiers were cheering the name of God, the Qizilbash were yelling “Shah.” The implication of this statement is that the Shah’s name was more important than the name of God.⁴³⁰ Moreover, as far as Lütfi was concerned, because he foresaw that he would lose the battle of Çaldıran, Ismail told his soldiers that the Twelve Imams (rather than God) would come and save them.⁴³¹

Religion in Safavid Iran was closely associated with the religious figure of the Shah: He was Godhead heir to the crown. An Italian merchant, who visited Safavid Iran, explained the religious atmosphere in Persia as one in which:

The name of God is forgotten. . . and only that of Ismail remembered; if someone falls when riding or is dismounted, he appeals to no other God but Shiac, using the name in two ways, first as God Shiac, secondly as prophet; while the Mussulmans say “laylla, laylla Mahamet resurala,” the Persians say “Laylla ylla Ismael veliala”; besides this everyone, and particularly his soldiers, consider him immortal, but I have heard that Ismael was not pleased with being called either a God nor a Prophet.⁴³²

Although the Italian merchant says that Ismail was not happy to be considered equal or identical to God, a careful examination of his poetry he wrote under the pen name *Hatayi* or “sinner” displays the opposite view. Ismail’s poetry shows that he regarded himself as the avatar of God.⁴³³ In one poem, Ismail wrote of himself: “I am very God, very God, very God! Come now, O blind man who has lost the path, behold the Truth. I am that Agens Absolutus of whom they speak.”⁴³⁴ Acceptance of this quasi-divine character of the Shah Ismail made his religious propaganda widely circulated in Anatolia because of the fact that heterodox Turcoman faith possessed beliefs such

⁴³⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 110.

⁴³¹ Lütfi, p. 205.

⁴³² A Narrative of Italian Travels in Persia, edited and translated by Charles grey (London: Hakluyt Society, 1873), p. 115.

⁴³³ Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Yeniçağlar*, p. 123.

⁴³⁴ Vladimir Minorsky, “The Poetry of Shah Ismail I,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. X, no. 4, 1942, p. 1047a.

as *tenâsih* (reincarnation) and *hülul* (incarnation). Presenting Shah Ismail in such ways was thus important as Anatolian vernacular Islam attached more importance to divine figures than earthly figures such as Bey or Sultan.⁴³⁵

Interestingly, Ottoman historians mostly refrained from using the word “Shi’a” for the religion of the Qizilbash in spite of the fact that Shah Ismail announced Twelver Shi’a as the state religion. Some scholars such as Ebussuud even attempt at differentiating the Qizilbash religion and Shi’a. He posited that the Safavids were not adherents of Shi’a, but received a bit from every heresy.

Ottoman histories also mention exaggerated claims concerning the religion of the Qizilbash. İdris says that they were Zoroastrians:

Worshipping the fire that they learnt from the Mugs (The title of the leaders of Zoroastrians), the red crown of the Qizilbash appeared like a fire. They wore this crown according to the religion of Zoroastrianism. Just like they throw Abraham into the fire, Shah Ismail scattered the fire over the world. As he deserved to be thrown into the fire, the sultan of religion punished him.⁴³⁶

In this passage, İdris implies that the red headdress worn by the Qizilbash represented their Zoroastrian beliefs, as red is the color of fire. This accusation of İdris, however, was probably a metaphor as there is no other sign of such an accusation in other sources.

The religious imagery of the Qizilbash in the Ottoman histories is the same as in the fatwa collections and anti-Qizilbash polemical literature. Yet Ottoman historians directly copy the fatwas of the grand muftis. Even when they do not, they still share the argument that Qizilbash religion had strayed from the pure path of

⁴³⁵ Nilgün Dalkesen, *15. ve 16. Yüzyıllarda Safevi Propagandası ve Etkileri* (Hacettepe Üniversitesi: M.A. Thesis, 1999), p. 39.

⁴³⁶ İdris, p. 177.

Islam, which meant they cannot be counted Muslim. Both in fatwas and Ottoman histories, Qizilbash religion is presented as the antithesis of Sunni Islam, in terms of religious practices. As is can be seen from abovementioned religious imagery, however, the historiographical propaganda barely considered the Qizilbash as Shi'ites. As Colin Imber rightly noted, this would discriminate against those who never involved in the anti-Ottoman activities and were not adherents of Ismail.⁴³⁷ Instead, the Ottoman chroniclers preferred terms meaning heretics and infidels.

4.3.6 Adjudication: Ratifying the Persecution

Some passages in Ottoman narratives devoted to the endorsement of the Qizilbash persecution combine all the imagery mentioned. Employing religious discourses, the historians occasionally give their own solutions, while at other times they recount the fatwas of muftis. The claims of justification of the war against the Qizilbash are mostly derived from religion despite the fact that there were also political and economic aspects of the Ottoman-Qizilbash conflict.

Ottoman historians deemed the Qizilbash religion more dangerous than the religions of non-Muslims. The Qizilbash religion was something that might affect the masses, and so was considered a threat that could damage the core of Islam. The “infidelity” of non-Muslims had nothing to do with Islam. Fighting infidels was a common religious duty for a Muslim. Islamic law permits three types of war:

⁴³⁷ Colin Imber, “Ideals and Legitimation in Early Ottoman History,” *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*, ed. Metin Kunt and Christine Woodhead (London-New York: Longman, 1995), p. 147.

fighting apostates (*mürted*), fighting brigands (*eşkıyâ* or *haydût*) and fighting rebels (*bâgî*).⁴³⁸ It seems that, in the eyes of Ottoman historians, all of these causes were valid for the Qizilbash case. Accordingly, Ottoman chroniclers interpreted elimination of the spreading effect of the Qizilbash “heresy” as a top priority. Related discourse also provided justification for fighting against the heretics at all costs, as they were thought to embody the three legal reasons for warfare.

In the Ottoman Empire, only certain muftis were entitled to issue a fatwa on specific issues of Islamic law. Thus, when the historians mentioned religious adjudication concerning the Qizilbash, they mostly applied these fatwas. For example, Celalzâde used the fatwas of muftis to justify war against the Qizilbash as follows:

They pursue a worse and more heretical path than the infidels. The infidel’s sin is only the acts of attributing partners to God (*şirk*), and dirtying the clean water of religion. They oppose against the Quran and the Prophet. They want to spread the teachings of Bible. They damage and despise the religion of the Prophet. Inasmuch as that community (the Qizilbash) is not likely to give up the way of heresy, vowing not to do it again, then they are worse and more deviant at all points than the sinful infidels, who will go to hell.⁴³⁹

Kemalpaşazâde uses similar arguments to declare that killing heretics in their tracks was more valuable than killing the true infidels.⁴⁴⁰ Kemalpaşazâde had himself served as Şeyhülislam for eight years (1526-1534) and his fatwas, together with those of Hamza and Ebussuud (d. 1574) became references the Ottoman sultans in their acts against the Qizilbash. For example, Ebussuud answered the question, “Are

⁴³⁸ Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Rebellion and Violence in Islamic Law*, p. 32.

⁴³⁹ Celalzâde, p. 357.

⁴⁴⁰ Kemalpaşazâde, p. 96.

those killed by the Qizilbash martyrs?” by saying “Yes, what a great gazâ and what a great martyrdom!”⁴⁴¹

İdris first lists possible threats and damage to the Ottoman Empire, and concludes that the Qizilbash threat was the most urgent one. Recounting the same fatwas of the abovementioned muftis, İdris explains the reasons for their persecution as a way to protect “the property and people, and saving the people in Islamic lands from their cruelty, and the certainty of their political and religious enmity towards the dynasty standing in the post of Islamic caliphate.”⁴⁴² I should remind that what İdris means to say here is exactly the issue of territorialism in Hanafi School of law. He accuses the Qizilbash of breaking the tacit contract between the state and the subjects. Thus, by referring to this contract, unlike the other historians, İdris offers non-religious factors to justify the war and persecution. He continues, noting that all the scholars and muftis agree that it was *vacib* (necessary) to kill the Qizilbash.⁴⁴³ Yet there was no agreement in the 16th century historiography concerning the type of such religious duty, namely whether it is *vacib* or *farz* (obligatory). For example, Kemalpaşazâde says that it is *farzı’l-‘ayn*, an individual religious obligation, to be performed by every Muslim.⁴⁴⁴ In the earliest attempt to define Qizilbash heresy in 1514, Hamza declared that it was incumbent *vacib*.⁴⁴⁵

İdris explains why this is so using a metaphoric way of expression, attempting to justify such acts because a similar decision had been made following Prophet’s death. İdris examines both scriptural and factual proofs respectively:

⁴⁴¹ Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislam Ebussud Efendi Fetvaları Işığında 16. Asır Türk Hayatı*, p. 109.

⁴⁴² İdris, p. 117.

⁴⁴³ İdris, p. 117.

⁴⁴⁴ Ahmet Uğur, *İbn Kemal*, p. 74.

⁴⁴⁵ İsmail Safa Üstün, *Heresy and Legitimacy*, p. 39.

Getting rid of this cruel and sinful community is more important than fighting with the infidels, the French and the Tatars. This is because in the law of pious sultans and in the tradition of *şeriat şiarlı sultan* (the sultan acting according to Islamic law), following the morals and manners of the four initial caliphs and pursuing the styles of the pathfinder *imams* is the rightest ways to follow. All of the four caliphs report that after the passing away of the Prophet, they found it truer and more appropriate to attack first *Müseyleme-i Kezzab*, the fake Prophet, and his troops by asking for advice from Ebubekir, Ömer, Osman and Ali. Actually, upon the death of the Prophet, it has been decided to capture Damascus and to fight with the real infidels and the Kaisers of Rum. But they now backdated the fight with those who claim to be the new Prophet.⁴⁴⁶

Then he explains the factual proof as follows:

With the agreement of the muftis, it is more important to get rid of the civil and religious enemy, than to get rid of the foreign enemy. For informed members of the army, to get rid of the opponents is the one of two seeds. That is because healing one single disease from the body of earthman is easier than healing a more complicated disease going around people.⁴⁴⁷

As can be seen from the second passage, according to İdris, killing Qizilbash was militarily reasonable and necessary. If it were not considered urgent, their heresy might have spread over the huge masses of Anatolia. Now, both the muftis and the commanders were in an agreement about the urgent elimination of the Qizilbash.

According to İdris, religious sedition could be eliminated with the proofs of the Quran. Civil sedition could be removed by the sword of heroism. It was the agreement of religious scholars that when these two seditions came together, as in the case of the Qizilbash, it would be of top priority to fight against them.⁴⁴⁸ İdris says that their biggest sin was to insistently deny Islam. The scriptural proof was a

⁴⁴⁶ İdris, p. 123.

⁴⁴⁷ İdris, p. 123.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 124.

verse from the Quran: “And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed from the soundness of the way.”⁴⁴⁹

İdris-i Bitlîsî also explained the necessity of fighting the Qizilbash. As is known, he played a prominent role in delivering Kurdish support to the Ottoman struggle against the Qizilbash. Following the battle of Çaldıran, the Ottoman army and Kurds fought together to take back the eastern provinces. However, as they waited in the castle of Diyarbekir, a disagreement between the Kurdish lords and the Ottoman beys emerged. The Ottoman beys preferred to stay in the castle and the Kurdish beys insisted on continuing the war. At this point in his narrative, İdris lists six drawbacks to delaying the battle as demanded by the Ottoman beys. First, it was an opposition to the divine order as it appeared in the verse: “Strive in the cause of God.”⁴⁵⁰ Second, it was in conflict with the command of the Sultan, and thus to the order of God in the Quran: “Obey those in authority among you.”⁴⁵¹ Third, avoidance of fighting while soldiers were waiting may be perceived as negligent and timid. Fourth, the Ottoman sultans could not have fallen behind their ancestors’ braveness in warfare. Fifth, the Sultan seemed primed for the duty of removing the Qizilbash. Finally, waiting there with nothing would increase prices and then lead to scarcity.

As discussed above, many Ottoman scholar-historians agreed on the persecution of the Qizilbash was religiously permissible. Ebussuud’s fatwa, however, reminds us that there were some concerns about Shah Ismail’s claim to be a descendant of the Prophet that is there could be some hesitation in killing them. In his answer to a question whether it would still be legal to kill them if he was the

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 130; The Quran, 2:108.

⁴⁵⁰ The Quran, 9:41.

⁴⁵¹ The Quran, 4:59.

descendant of the Prophet, Ebussuud attempts to prove that Ismail was not a descendant of the Prophet.

This perception of the Qizilbash issue is also depicted in the letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. Busbecq wonders in his correspondence with Rüstem Paşa (d. 1561), the Grand Vizier of Süleyman I, “What right have they (Ottomans and Safavids) to wage war against one another, when they are bound by religious ties?” In his reply, Rüstem Paşa says “I assure you that we abhor the Persians and regard them as more unholy than we regard you Christians.”⁴⁵²

In the adjudication about the Qizilbash, there were some *mübah* (permissible) things as well. For example, Sâdeddin states that plundering their slaves and odalisques was permissible.⁴⁵³ According to the fatwa of Kemalpaşazâde, it was not licit to marry their men or women. He continues as such:

“Their country was *darü’l-harb* (the abode of war or non-Muslims). All of their children were bastards. Whatever animals they slaughtered were not halal and couldn’t be eaten. If someone wore the *börk* (the red headdress) special to his or her *iman* (faith) was doubted: It was clearly a sign of heresy and denial.⁴⁵⁴ Plundering their properties, women and children were halal. If a man gave up this deviant way and became Muslim, he becomes free. If he did not, what he deserved was the sword.”⁴⁵⁵

As suggested by Sâdeddin’s account, the legality of Selim’s marrying Ismail’s wife to Tacizâde Cafer Çelebi was still an issue in the later 16th century when Sâdeddin wrote his work. Sâdeddin explores the question in this way:

He made this decision by conferring with the scholars. Why not? Also, they have no religious marriage contract. Their marriage is *mut’ah* marriage [temporary or short term]. They often live together without a marriage contract.

⁴⁵² Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*, p. 121.

⁴⁵³ Sâdeddin, p. 169.

⁴⁵⁴ Ahmet Uğur, *İbn Kemal*, p. 73.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 74.

It is a widespread rumor that especially the impertinent Shah Ismail was getting everyone's home and harassing their privates disgustingly. Yet Ismail liked and married that woman (Ismaïl's wife) when she was the wife of one of his commanders.⁴⁵⁶

Sâdeddin attempted to justify an act of Selim by emphasizing that the Qizilbash marriage contract was not legal in religious law. So, their wives could be married to anyone.

The result of these adjudications was the immediate persecution of the Qizilbash. The edicts, ordering this persecution wherever the Qizilbash were found, were sent to the provinces.⁴⁵⁷ İdris states that the number of the persecuted exceeded 40,000 and adds that whoever deviated on his or her path from God would be killed by the sword of God.⁴⁵⁸

4.4. Conclusion

By focusing on the Ottoman social, cultural and religious perceptions of the Qizilbash in the 16th century Ottoman historiography, I have shown that those perceptions, as a product of Ottoman early modern literary culture, had a political purpose. They legitimized acts of the past, established the position of the Qizilbash within the Empire, and justified its foreign policy towards Iran in later relations. In doing so, the lifestyles, cultures and religions came under harshest criticism of the Ottoman historians, rather than the political threat they posed. This allowed the scholars to define their own identity by defining the Qizilbash identity. In addition to describing detailed passages concerning facets of the Qizilbash imagery, I have also

⁴⁵⁶ Sâdeddin, p. 213.

⁴⁵⁷ İdris, p. 122.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 135.

discussed ways the historians narrated the battle of Çaldıran by drawing comparisons between two armies, and how they perceived Selim's occupation of Tabriz, which lasted only eight days, as transition from hell into paradise glorified by the coming of the Ottoman sultan. By investigating these two events, I have argued that 16th century Ottoman historians did not only narrate the recent past, but also justified the act of war against the Qizilbash, which was still a possibility and, sometimes, an actual threat for the Ottoman dynasty during the 16th century as they wrote their works.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Starting with the mid-15th century, the Ottoman began to evolve from a tribal organization into a bureaucratic state. Centralization consolidated the power of central authority. With the growing needs of a geographically large and socially diverse state, it was no longer only a regional power, but an empire with new identities, such as the successor of the Byzantine Empire and the center of the Islamic caliphate.

The developments, however, were implemented at the expense of the Turcoman nomadic tribes, known as the Qizilbash since the end of the 15th century. Those heterodox Turcomans had played a fundamental role in the initial period of the Empire. Owing to their nomadic lifestyle, their position became degraded socially and economically. Furthermore, in the early 16th century serious natural disasters also contributed to a deteriorating level of subsistence for the Qizilbash. With the late 15th century rise of the Safavid house in Iran, the presence of the Qizilbash began to challenge the Ottoman political authority through their religious and political links to those Safavid leaders. Upon their migrations to Iran, they became the main human source of the Safavid army, as well as the state.

I argue that the Qizilbash threat that challenged the Ottoman political authority in the early 16th century became central to the Ottoman historical writing as early as circa 1514, when Selim pursued anti-Qizilbash policies. My thesis considered the pejorative views of the Qizilbash Ottoman historical narratives created as a response to this threat. Hence, my main argument is that, by casting the Qizilbash as the Other, and with the circulation and revision to the sources throughout Ottoman history, the boundaries of Ottoman self-identity became shaped as well. Relying on these well-shaped identities, and bolstered by the conquest of the Holy lands in Arabia, the Ottomans assumed the duty of representatives and protectors of Sunni orthodox Islam; the Qizilbash was presented as “heretics” cursed by God and deviants from the true faith. I have also argued that this anti-Qizilbash discourse justified acts of war, as it incorporated many reasons why Selim should waged a war against them. This justification became a core and basis in Ottoman relations with the Qizilbash in later periods.

In this study, I have used a sampling of chronicles and war diaries written in the 16th century, as well as another special genre: corpus of Selimnâme literature. This literature first emerged in the final years of Selim’s reign but most of the works were written during the reign of Süleyman (1520–1566). In a sense, this increasingly historiographical activity aimed to shape and edit the near past and also to project the future despite the limitedness of its audience. Its appearance was a phenomenon of the age of Süleyman, who wanted to clear his father’s name, an age when the imperial image of the Ottoman Empire was consolidated to a significant extent. Süleyman’s reign was marked by the projection of the self-identity. Editing the recent past, which was incorporated with his father’s hostility toward the Qizilbash,

not only produced an official history of the reign of Selim, but also legitimized Süleyman's own rule as his lineage could be cleared from any illegitimate acts.

In the third chapter, I examined the civil war between Bayezid and his sons through the eyes of Ottoman historians, with a special emphasis on the role of the Qizilbash problem in the struggle for the throne and also the image of the Qizilbash rebels who exploited the dynastic conflict in the empire. The period of civil war (1509–1513), was the best-documented era for the sources of my study. Therefore, I chose to analyze the Ottoman perception of the Qizilbash through a close analysis of this period. I described the Qizilbash threat as the most important determinant in the struggle to achieve the throne, and one that helped Selim to do so. In addition, the historians' narration of the civil war is a good example of the historiographical attempt at legitimization. Within the context of the Qizilbash issue, the Ottoman historians attempted to explain why Selim was the righteous candidate for the throne. He possessed the great skills of a sultan, and nobody could change the destiny of God.

As I have discussed in the third chapter, Selim's deposition of his father was a matter of rumor during and after the reign of Selim. Bayezid was the legitimate Sultan and the Sultans were to rule until their death in the Ottoman Empire. To abdicate a sultan was a dangerous step no one dared to take until Selim. Selim forced his father to abdicate the throne using the urgency of the Qizilbash threat. This was the only example of a sultan's enthronement by deposing his father throughout the whole Ottoman history. Selimnâmes even written during the reign of Selim explicitly acknowledge that Selim's action was considered unacceptable even during the reign of Selim. One of the main motivations of the Selimnâme authors was to reshape the

past with an attempt at justifying Selim's dangerous act, which was considered by some more against his father, a ruling sultan.

As seen, these works possessed a propagandist nature and a political purpose. As I argued in the introduction chapter of this study, they were politically motivated accounts whose authenticity should be questioned. Therefore, they should not be taken as a real record of events as they were not necessarily telling the truth because of their propagandist nature. This is why the purpose of this study was not to discuss how true the accounts of Ottoman historians when they narrated events. As I stated earlier, the political history of Selim's reign has been studied by modern historians to a certain extent. However, nobody was interested in the Qizilbash image in the Selimnâme literature. For this reason, I attempted to show the propagandist nature of the Selimnâmes and some other supporting sources, which reported about the Qizilbash events by defining the Qizilbash as an opposite image to the Ottoman self-identification.

With this aim, in the fourth chapter, I analyzed the social, cultural and religious aspects of the perception of the Qizilbash in 16th century Ottoman historiography. This was a pejorative image that helped shape Ottoman identity. Without doubt, being Ottoman was equal to being Muslim, at least against the external non-Muslim enemies. Before the 16th century, Ottoman sultans were largely holy warriors who fought infidels for the religion of Islam. Indeed, in the early period of Ottoman statehood, there was no need for any definition of the other except as the outside enemy. However, as a response to the increasing Qizilbash threat in the 16th century, a more Sunni-minded religious discourse developed. The political need to portray the Other (i.e., the Qizilbash) as infidels required a portrayal of the self as pious Sunni Muslim. As I have shown, the incorporation of the Islamic holy

lands (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem) was also effective in the consolidation of orthodoxy in the Ottoman Empire.

In this study, I also demonstrated that the Ottoman historians presented the Qizilbash threat as more serious than any other political or religious threat. Politically, it had the potential to spread throughout the empire, through hidden anti-Ottoman propaganda. Religiously, in contrast to non-Muslims the Qizilbash regarded themselves as part of Islam and thus could damage the core of “True Islam.” As Aslı Ergül has stated, non-Muslims could be accepted as minorities living under the umbrella of Islam with a *zimmi* status, and they would not be disturbed as long as they met the fiscal and social expectations of the state. But the official stance against the Qizilbash, who were considered as an internal threat to the safety and security of the state, solidified through the anti-Qizilbash discourse, which constitutes the bulk of this study.⁴⁵⁹

Furthermore, I suggested that the Ottoman historians made a great effort to direct their hostility towards the Safavids, or the Qizilbash, by excluding the region of Iran from their criticism. In fact, the 16th century observed an increase in the intellectual and cultural exchange between Iranian and Ottoman lands, especially a result of the exile of Sunni scholars fleeing Safavid Iran. Persian influence on the Ottoman literature and historiography thus greatly increased as well. All of the historians refer to pre-Islamic Iranian mythical kings in their eulogy of the Ottoman sultans, as part of a literary tradition of their time. The Sufi culture, the early period of the Safeviyye included, was praised by Ottoman historians as well. But, according to them, the Safavid, or Qizilbash, rule in Iran ruined all of the beauties of this country.

⁴⁵⁹ Aslı Ergül, “Ottoman Identity,” p. 636.

The results of this identity discourse should be examined in terms of the position of Anatolian Turcomans and the Ottoman-Safavid relations in later centuries. With this well-defined anti-Qizilbash discourse, the persecution of Anatolian Turcomans continued throughout the 16th century. They were under pressure of the central authority. These persecutions can be observed from mühimme registers, published by historians such as Ahmed Refik, Colin Imber and Saim Savaş. As a result, those who were not persecuted developed strategies—including migration to Iran and conformation with the Bektashi, an urban religious order accepted by the Ottoman central authority. Also, abandoning the strict attitude of his father, Süleyman pursued a more balanced policy towards Iran. But the Ottoman perception of the Safavids has always remained as the hostile one generated in the 16th century.

Anti-Qizilbash polemical discourse caused another phenomenon that the position of Sunni religious orders such as the Halvetî and Nakshibendî consolidated. Prominent leaders of those orders fled from their former heartlands in Iran. Their migration to the Ottoman territories occurred because Safavid rulers were orchestrating anti-Sunni persecutions in their territories.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, the influence of Sunni orders spread over Anatolia. Along with Bektashi sect, which possessed a heterodox character, they were supported by the state through waqf lands. After Mehmed II's confiscation of the waqf lands belonging mostly to heterodox *tekkes* (dervish lodge), these regions were returned to the orthodoxy. However, it is certain that the quantities of land granted to Sunni orthodox *tekkes* increased during the consolidation of Sunni orthopraxy in the Ottoman Empire. The Bektashi order may

⁴⁶⁰ John Curry, *Transforming Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of the Şa'bânîyye Order in Kastamonu and Beyond* (The Ohio State University: PhD Dissertation, 2005), p. 31.

be considered as the most obvious exception to this. The intimate relationship between the state and the Bektashis can be traced to the Ottoman desire to isolate the Qizilbash as a rural, heterodox folk cult, while Bektashis were incorporated into the system as a canonical urban variety of heterodox Islam that conformed to the state. Another factor easing the institutionalization of the Bektashi sect is that it was embraced by the Janissary corps as their official order.⁴⁶¹

A final point concerns my analysis of the Ottoman discourse on the Qizilbash using the ways this discourse was reflected in the works of certain Ottoman historians. There is no doubt that such an approach neglects other parts of the story, for example the Qizilbash perception of the Ottoman administration and the sultan. Although we have more limited sources to answer this question, it is possible to develop an approximate answer. A quatrain reflecting this perception and the psychology of the Qizilbash was written by the Qizilbash poet Pir Ali:

Osmanlı yanına kalır mı sandın
Nice intikamlar alınsa gerek
Mehdi çıkar ise nic'olur halin
Heybetli küsleri çalınsa gerek.⁴⁶²

O Ottoman! Did you think that you would get away with what you did
Many revenges should be taken
What if Mahdi comes
Kettledrums should be played.

This and many other poems written by sympathizers of Qizilbash or Shah Ismail, like Pir Sultan Abdal, a 16th century poet who lived in Sivas, invite further research about the perception of Qizilbash towards the Ottomans.

⁴⁶¹ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 161.

⁴⁶² Abdülkâki Gölpinarlı and Pertev Naili Boratav, *Pir Sultan Abdal* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 1991), p. 16.

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