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THE FORMATION OF KIZILBAŞ COMMUNITIES
IN ANATOLIA
AND
OTTOMAN RESPONSES, 1450s-1630s

Abstract

The development of Kızılbaş Islam in Anatolia and the early modern Ottoman bureaucracy's role in the persecution of Kızılbaş communities have been the subject of sustained scholarly interest. While scholarship from the 1960s through the 1980s explained Ottoman policies against the Kızılbaş in the context of mere security concerns, revisionist historians, who have dominated the field since the 1990s, have approached the topic from new, yet problematic, angles. Not only have the new approaches reduced the relationship between the Ottomans and the Kızılbaş to a policy of persecution, but they also have presented the state's creation of a Sunni "orthodox" identity for its subjects as a reason for these repressive policies. In contrast to these one-dimensional explanations for the Ottoman central authority's "never-ending struggle against rebellious heretics," I argue that a more complex relationship between İstanbul and its Kızılbaş subjects led to wildly varying Ottoman state policies, ranging from financial support for the Safaviyya order and the Kızılbaş subjects of the empire to execution of the same populations. A more precise examination of primary sources, focused mainly on Ottoman imperial decrees (or *mühimmes*), reveals three main dynamics that explain this complexity: the Ottomans' relationship with the Safavids and the issues of Kızılbaş tax evasion and conversion.

Introduction

The first of two distinct groups of revisionists who since the 1990s have challenged the attribution of early modern Ottoman policies against the Kızılbaş to mere

security concerns,¹ can be rightfully called “the followers of the Köprülü-Ocak tradition.”² Focused solely on the Ottoman state-building process, a key component of which was the creation of an orthodox Sunni religious identity for the Muslim subjects of the empire, these historians have assumed that the Seljuk and early Ottoman authorities adhered to a homogeneous Sunni Islam, even though they endorsed the existence of a “low” or “folk” Islam that accommodated pre-Islamic conceptions beneath a Sufi façade.³ Accordingly, these scholars have argued that in the sixteenth century the Shi’ite Safavids emerged as a political power from the East and attracted the loyalty of certain discontented elements among the Ottoman Muslim population, inaugurating an unbroken period of confrontation between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, and between the Ottomans and their Kızılbaş subjects. This approach, however, not only reinforces an essentialist stance concerning the relationship between the Ottomans and the Safavids and between the Ottomans and their Kızılbaş subjects, by depicting a clear-cut bifurcation between “high” and “low” Islam, but it also overlooks the geographic and ethnic diversity of the Kızılbaş populations in the region.

The second wave of revisionist historians, in their attempt to criticize the compartmentalization of the “Köprülü-Ocak tradition,” have focused on the

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¹ For further details on the classical scholarship, see Franz Babinger and Fuad Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, trans. Ragıp Hulusi (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2000); Cemal Bardakçı, *Alevilik Bektaşilik Ahilik* (Ankara: Publisher information is not available, 1970, reprinted in 2012 by Postiga Yayınları); Claude Cahen, “Le Probleme du Shi’isme dans l’Asie mineure turque preottomane,” in *Le Shi’isme Imamite: Colloque de Strasbourg* (6-9 Mai 1968), ed. R. Brunschvig and T. Fahd, 115-129 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970); Faruk Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü (Şah İsmail ile Halifeleri ve Anadolu Türkleri)*, (Ankara: Güven Matbaası, 1976); Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Babailer İsyanı* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1980); Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict (906-962/1500-1555)*, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1983).

² Derin Terzioğlu, “Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization,” in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London&New York: Routledge, 2011), 87.

³ For examples, see Sayın Dalkıran, “İran Safavi Devletini’nin Kuruluşuna Şii İnançların Etkisi,” *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 18 (2002): 55-102; Ahmed Yaşar Ocak, “Islam in the Ottoman Empire: A Sociological Framework for a New Interpretation,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* v. 9, nos. 1&2 (2003): 183-197; idem, “Babailer İsyanından Kızılbaşlığa: Anadolu’da İslam Heteredoksisinin Doğuş ve Gelişim Tarihine Kısa Bir Bakış,” *Bellekten* 64/239 (2000): 129-159. Ocak, for instance, erroneously indicates that it was in the early fifteenth century that the Ottomans began the process of creating a centrally institutionalized religious state that embraced the doctrines of orthodox Islam. Terzioğlu’s recent article successfully delves into the question of Ottoman sunnization and problematic approaches on the topic. Derin Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnization: A Historiographical Discussion,” in *Turcica* 44 (2012-2013): 301-338.

formation of Kızılbaş communities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as an umbrella movement against the Ottoman central authority, which, according to them, positioned itself as the champion of Sunni Islam.⁴ This approach, albeit providing a new direction, not only reduces the relationship between the Ottomans and the Kızılbaş to one of oppression and persecution, but also neglects the fact that not only frontier regions, but also inner parts of the two empires witnessed various degrees of polarization.⁵ Furthermore, it presents the Ottoman state's adoption of an uncompromising Sunni identity for its subjects (beginning in the early fifteenth century) as a reason for the repressive policies, rather than as a result of the Kızılbaş threat.

In contrast to the revisionist scholars' one-dimensional explanations for the Ottoman central authority's "never-ending struggle against rebellious heretics," my close examination of primary sources, especially Ottoman imperial decrees (or *mühimmes*), reveals three main dynamics that led to wildly varying state policies: the Ottomans' relationship with the Safavids and the issues of Kızılbaş tax evasion and conversion.

Ottoman relations with Kızılbaş subjects corresponded to periods of peace and war with the neighboring Safavid Empire.⁶ Since the spiritual leaders of the Kızılbaş were also the political leaders of the Safavids (i.e., Shahs), the Ottomans did not see their Kızılbaş subjects as merely a distinct religious group, but also viewed them as supporters of a rival political movement that, at times, posed serious threats to their legitimacy in various regions of their empire. Similarly, when there was peace between the two empires, the political threat posed by the Safavids diminished,

⁴ For further details, see Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, Interview with Alişan Akpınar, "Dirok, Episode 65," IMC TV, September 3, 2012, retrieved from dailymotion.com on August 14, 2014. Karakaya-Stump's emphasis on the uniformity of the Kızılbaş movement as an almost centrally organized opposition ("a coalition movement" in her own words) against the Ottoman central authority reinforces the idea of well-defined religious fronts (i.e., Kızılbaş Anatolians and the Sunni Ottoman central authority against them).

⁵ For further details, see Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Qizilbash, 'Heresy,' and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia during the Sixteenth Century," *Anatolia Moderna* 7 (1997): 1-15; eadem "Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Porous Frontiers and Hybrid Identities," in *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 81-100. This polarization, in fact, dates back to Şeyh Cüneyd's reign in the early fourteenth century, when the Safaviyya order's meticulously planned activities caused tension between the order and the Ottoman central and local authorities; it did not, as Zarinebaf-Shahr asserts, emerge only after the Safavids emerged as a political actor in the region in 1501. Stefan Winter provides useful counter-examples to this approach. "The Kızılbaş of Syria and Ottoman Shiism," in *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 171-183.

⁶ The main periods of war between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires were 1532-1555, 1578-1590, and 1623-1639, and the main peace agreements signed between the two political actors were the Amasya Peace Treaty (1555), İstanbul (Constantinople) Peace Treaty (1590), and Kasr-ı Şirin (Zuhab) Peace Treaty (1639).

leading to a more tolerant approach from İstanbul towards its Kızılbaş subjects.⁷ At the same time, some of these subjects wished to show their spiritual devotion to the Safavid shahs by sending financial support to the center of the order (Ardabil) or the capital of the state, and because the Ottoman central authority deemed them an economic threat to Ottoman stability, it suppressed them at a relatively higher rate than it did those who did not send financial support. Moreover, the Ottoman central authority perceived conversion to Kızılbaş Islam, which primarily was a response to intense Safavid propaganda conducted in Ottoman Anatolia and Iraq, to be a threat to its geo-political legitimacy and thus devoted considerable attention to finding and punishing those converts, as opposed to those in Anatolia and other parts of the empire who were Kızılbaş by birth.

In this article, therefore, I challenge the generally accepted argument that the Ottoman- Safavid/Kızılbaş conflict had its roots in religious antagonism. While religion played a significant role in determining the nature of the relationships between the Ottomans and the Safavids, and between the Ottomans and the Kızılbaş subjects of the empire, the concern that determined the Ottoman state's policies against the Kızılbaş was its geo-political and financial legitimacy in the region, rather than the confessional identities of individual subjects for the period studied in this article. The Ottomans consequently carried out a more oppressive approach towards their Kızılbaş subjects when İstanbul viewed them as a threat to local and regional stability.

This study reflects on developments and debates that originated in the areas of the empire most densely inhabited by Kızılbaş subjects and in the regions most acutely affected by the ongoing tension between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Although the main focus of the article is on central and eastern/southeastern Anatolia, specific examples are also drawn from the frontier regions of Ottoman Iraq (i.e., Şehrizol or modern-day Kirkuk, Basra, and Baghdad) due to their geographical proximity to Safavid Iran and/or the density of Safavid propaganda activities there during the period studied.

⁷ Even when the Ottomans and Safavids were at war, the Ottoman authorities dealt with “trouble-making” Kızılbaş individuals in multifaceted ways, executing those identified as agents (*halife*) of the Safavids or as converts but subjecting others to surveillance, banishment, and a variety of lesser forms of punishment. For further examples, see *Mühimme Defterleri* (hereafter MD), Vol. 30, No. 92 (28-Muharrem-985/17-Nisan-1577) and MD, Vol. 30, No. 488, (11-Ramazan-985/22-Kasım-1577) “*Bozok beyi Çerkes beye... Kızılbaşlıkla müttehem olan kimesnelerşer ile teftiş olunup sabit olursa idam ediliüp ... şer ile sabit olmayup lakin müttehem olduklarına kanaat gelürse Kıbrıs’a sürülmeleri...*”

Periodization

Generally accepted periodizations⁸ do not suffice for understanding the relationship between the Ottoman central authority and its Kızılbaş subjects.⁹ For instance, the first confrontation between the Ottomans and those subjects does not date back to 1501, the year Shah Ismail declared Shi'ite Islam the official religion of the Safavid state, but to the 1450s, when Şeyh Cüneyd (r. 1447-1460) transformed the order into a major geopolitical threat to the Ottoman Empire by politicizing and militarizing the Safaviyya Sufi order that he led and utilizing diverse methods of propaganda in various Anatolian towns to find loyal subjects for his movement.

The chronological scope of this study ends with the reign of the Safavid shah Abbas I (r.1587-1629), whose era marked a significant policy change on the part of the Safavid monarchy towards its own Kızılbaş identity. Although Kızılbaş emirs remained preeminent within the Safavid state over the following decades, the gradual incorporation of non-Kızılbaş Georgian and Circassian *ghulams* (slave soldiers) and Persian bureaucrats into the system intensified rivalries among different groups of political and military actors.¹⁰ After the 1630s conversion to and from Kızılbaş Islam lost its political meaning for both the Ottoman and Safavid central authorities with the declining political relevance of Kızılbaş tribal leaders in the Safavid court.¹¹ As Safavid Shi'ite Islam diverged from Anatolian Kızılbaş Islam, due to the religious policies introduced by Shah Abbas and his immediate followers, the Kızılbaş population of Anatolia ceased to play a significant role as a buffer between the two empires, and Safavid and Ottoman propaganda activities in central and southeastern Anatolia decreased significantly.¹² Within the following

⁸ These include the year 1501 for the emergence of the Safavids as a state and 1514 for the cessation of the Safavid-backed Kızılbaş threat to the Ottoman central authority after Shah Ismail's humiliating defeat at the Battle of Çaldıran.

⁹ On new approaches to the periodization of early modern history, see Jane Hathaway, "Problems of Periodization in Ottoman History: The Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Centuries," in *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 25-31 and Jack Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern World,'" *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 249-284.

¹⁰ Andrew J. Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire* (London: I. B., Tauris, 2006), 46.

¹¹ Trade between the Ottomans and Safavids was equally important in shaping the relationship between the Safavid court and the Kızılbaş emirs, as well as that between the Ottomans and the Kızılbaş. Rudi Matthee, for instance, cogently argues that the Treaty of Zuhab, signed in 1639, ended a century and a half of intermittent Safavid-Ottoman hostility and enabled the Anatolian overland trade route, which was no longer threatened by warfare and commercial boycotts. Moreover, improving maritime contacts between the two empires, as well as the abolishing of restrictions on travel and trade across the Ottoman borders, caused the Kızılbaş emirs of the Safavid court to lose leverage. Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran: Silk for Silver, 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 75-85.

¹² For further details, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002);

decades, this led to the marginalization of the Kızılbaş population across Anatolia, transforming a once openly militant population into a closed and isolated mystical movement in “the sea of Ottoman Sunnism.”¹³

Main Sources and Terminology

The complexity of the relationship between the Ottomans and their Kızılbaş subjects becomes evident upon a more meticulous examination of previously studied Ottoman imperial decrees (*mühimmes*). Because the often-cited academic studies of these documents¹⁴ have followed a rather simplistic approach based on word searching rather than analyzing the actual context of a particular order, they have found orders focused on locating, exiling, punishing, and/or executing a specific Kızılbaş individual or group. I, however, argue that the *mühimmes*' general lack of specific references to confessional and political identities and/or the possible secondary meanings of words used in the *mühimmes* have led these studies to identify many orders as having punitive content against the Kızılbaş. This, in turn, has reinforced the idea of a continual persecution as the main stance of the Ottoman central authority against its Kızılbaş subjects. In contrast, among the forty-three volumes of *mühimme* registers for the period from 1553 to 1631 that I have examined,¹⁵ around seven thousand orders detail the distribution of certain *timar*

eadem, “The Safavid Synthesis: From Qizilbash Islam to Imamite Shi’ism,” *Iranian Studies* 27 (1994): 135-161; Rula Judi Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004). Babayan argues that the tension between the spiritual landscape of Kızılbaş Islam and that of the newly adopted imperial religion, Imami Shi’ism, intensified in the seventeenth century, even though it had existed from the very beginning of Safavid rule. With the gradual establishment of Twelver Shi’ite dogma, Kızılbaş belief became increasingly marginalized and was finally condemned as heresy in the Safavid court. While Safavid efforts for conversion continued to take place in Anatolia in the following decades, *mühimme* orders after the 1630s reveal a significant decline in mentioning these efforts. This can be explained by two possible scenarios, both of which support the main argument of this article: (1) Either the number of the *halifes* sent by the Safavid central authority declined, or (2) the Ottoman central authority began to pay less attention to these conversion activities conducted by the Safavid *halifes*.

¹³ According to Marcus Dressler, as millenarian expectations ceased, the political activism of the Kızılbaş was replaced by Twelver Shi’ite “quietism.” Marcus Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy: Competing Claims for Authority and Legitimacy in the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict,” in *Legitimizing the Order: The Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power*, ed. Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 151-173.

¹⁴ Colin Imber, “The Persecution of the Ottoman Shi’ites according to the Mühimme Defterleri, 1565-1585,” *Der Islam* 56 (Jan. 1, 1979): 245-273; Ahmet Hezarfen and Cemal Şener, eds., *Osmanlı Arşivinde Mühimme ve İrade Defterlerinde Aleviler-Bektaşiler* (İstanbul: Karacaahmet Sultan Derneği Yayınları, 2002); Baki Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1995).

¹⁵ *Mühimme* registers are located at the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (BOA hereafter), and the first volume dates back to 1553-1554. As an exception, however, a register including copies of decisions made by the Ottoman *divan*, or imperial council, in 1501 is also preserved

and/or *gediks* (concessions from the central authority) or the promotions granted a certain individual, but only about forty mention the religious background of the given subject, either Sunni or Kızılbaş.¹⁶ While it is possible to argue that the individuals whose confessional identity was not stated were “Sunni,” there are strong indicators that at least some of them were either Kızılbaş or overt sympathizers of the Safavids. For instance, subjects named Şah Kulu (subject to the shah), Şah Verdi (a subject to whom the shah granted “something”), Abdişah (subject of the shah), and Şahsever (admirer of the shah)¹⁷ either received land from the central authority or were promoted to a higher position of power.¹⁸ Considering that these orders were sent to heavily Kızılbaş-populated regions of the empire (such as Sivas, Çorum, Amasya, Tokat, and Yozgat) and that the naming of one’s son was an indicator of political and religious affiliation in early modern Ottoman Anatolia, where last names were not used until the beginning of the twentieth century, there is a high probability of encountering a Kızılbaş in these official orders without any reference to his/her confessional identity.

Furthermore, an assumption underlying the earlier studies, that every Kızılbaş found in the primary documents was an actual Ottoman subject, has reinforced the notion of unmitigated Ottoman hostility towards Kızılbaş subjects, but Ottoman *mühimmes*, as well as *fermans* and *sicils*, also use the term Kızılbaş for the Safavid state and its leaders and for the Safavid soldiers, missionaries (*halifes*), and spies it dispatched to Anatolia.¹⁹

Not limited to the *mühimmes*, this study is based on other Ottoman archival materials and Safavid sources, including *emir ve fermanlar* (imperial decrees), *fetvalar* (legal opinions), polemical literature, and poems.²⁰ Particularly for the period predating the first available volume of *mühimme* records (1553-1554), Ottoman and Safavid narrative chronicles, as well as the accounts of European

in the BOA. The whole collection has been published by İlhan Şahin and Feridun Emecen as *Osmanlılarda Dîvân- Burokrasi- Ahkâm. II. Beyazıt Dönemine Ait 906-1501 Tarihli Ahkâm Defteri* (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 1994). For the period between the 1550s and 1630s, there are 82 volumes, and I was able to examine 43 volumes, which had around 30,000 orders.

¹⁶ Among those few, two examples are MD, Vol. 2, No. 1841 (24-Safer-964/December-26-1556): “...Kızılbaş Behram nam Erzurum kuluna tımar tevcihi...” and MD, Vol. 1, No. 1632, (17-Safer-962/January-11-1555).

¹⁷ Not included here are the names Ali, Hasan, Hüseyin, and Haydar as they were Islamic figures revered by both the Sunnis and Kızılbaş, but undoubtedly some of them would fall into this same category.

¹⁸ Examples can be found in MD, Vol. 1, No. 464 (11-Zilkade-961/October-8-1554) “...Şahkulu oğlu Şahveli’ye hünkar gediğinden verile...” as well as in MD, Volumes 11, 13, and 14.

¹⁹ MD, Vol. 1, Nos. 70, 86, and 409 (961-962/1553-1554); MD, Vol. 10, No. 279 (979/1571); MD, Vol. 12, Nos. 822, 832, and 833; and BOA, Hatt-ı Hümayun Tasnifi (HHT hereafter), File No. 1654, Document no.4 (1014/1605); HHT, File No. 1446, Document no. 21, (1015/1606).

²⁰ There is a significant lack of Safavid archival sources for the period studied.

travelers and merchants, provide a vast wealth of information on the relationship between the Ottoman central authority and the Kızılbaş communities.²¹

The term “Kızılbaş” (literally, “red head”) appears in both Ottoman and Safavid primary sources. The use of a red headdress as an identifying marker among the Safavids dates to the leadership of Şeyh Haydar (r. 1460-1488), who was Shah Ismail I’s father. Narratives indicate that he asked his followers to wear a distinctive twelve-gored crimson headpiece displaying the order’s adherence to the twelve Imams and to himself as their spiritual leader.²² This twelve-folded piece of felt, called a *tac*, formed a sort of stiff baton around which the turban was wound.²³ Primary sources also refer to Kızılbaş Ottomans as “*zındıka*,” “*zındık*,” “*mulhid*,” “*Işık/Işık ağası*,” “*binemaz*,” “*bednemaz*,” “*harici*,” and “*rafizi*.” While “*Harici*” (Kharijite) was a blanket term for someone who did not follow normative Sunni Islam, particularly if that person was engaged in a military struggle with the Ottomans, the term “*Rafizi*” referred to a heterogeneous but interconnected group of Shi’ite religious leaders and their followers.²⁴

Ottoman sources make a clear distinction between Kızılbaş-born subjects of the empire and Kızılbaş converts, especially after the second half of the sixteenth century. Phrases such as *rafz-u ilhad ile mute’aref olmak* (to become famous by turning godless or impious), *dönmek* (to convert), *Kızılbaş olmak* (to turn Kızılbaş),

²¹ In addition to Ottoman and Safavid primary sources, documents held by various Kızılbaş families, under the name *buyruk*, provide invaluable firsthand data. Recent studies by Rıza Yıldırım, Doğan Kaplan, and Ayfer Karakaya-Stump transmit these narratives while examining the circumstances in which they were written. Doğan Kaplan, *Yazılı Kaynaklara Göre Alevilik* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2012); Ayfer Karakaya-Stump, “Documents and Buyruk Manuscripts in the Private Archives of Alevi Dede Families: An Overview,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37 no.3 (2010): 273-286; eadem, “Alevi Dede Ailelerine Ait Buyruk Mecmuaları,” in *Eski Türk Edebiyatı Çalışmaları VII, Mecmua: Osmanlı Edebiyatının Kırkambarı*, ed. Hatice Aynur et al. (İstanbul: Mas Matbaacılık, 2012), 361-379; Rıza Yıldırım, “Turcomans between Two Empires: The Origins of the Qızılbaş Identity in Anatolia, 1447-1514,” (PhD dissertation, Bilkent University, 2008).

²² Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 9.

²³ Ismail I also emphasized the importance of wearing it in his *divan* (collection of poems): “Whoever recognizes the Twelve Imams/It is proper for [him] to wear the red/crimson *tac*” (Translated by the author). Cited in İbrahim Arslanoğlu trans., *Şah İsmail Hatayî: Divan, Dehname, Nasihatname ve Anadolu Hatayîleri* (İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 1992), 115.

²⁴ For instance, Sheikh Mahmud Hüdayî (d.1628), in his treatise *Tezakir-i Hüdayî*, informs the Ottoman sultan Murad III (r.1574-1595) concerning the Rafizi population of his realm: “In various villages called Docaler, they [the Rafizis] never hesitate to plot mischief (*fesat çıkardı*). They are the same as the Kızılbaş Sharia and sunna never exist among them.” (Translated by the author). Cited in Ahmet Refik, *Onaltıncı Asırda Rafizilik ve Bektaşilik (Onaltıncı Yüzyılda Osmanlılar’ın Aleviler Hakkında Düzenledikleri 54 Ferman)*, (İstanbul: Ufuk Matbaası, 1994), 17-19. According to Ocak, the main explanations for this generalization were either the authorities’ lack of knowledge of different interpretations of Islam, or the lack of organization and institutionalization of these orders that culminated in generalizations by the same authorities. Ocak, *Babailer İsyani*, 42.

ehl-i fesad olmak (to become a mischief-causing person), and *kızıl tac giymek* (to wear a crimson *tac*) were used to emphasize that a subject was a convert.

Formation of Kızılbaş Communities and the Ottoman Response

Ottomanist scholarship often pits the Ottomans and the Safavids against each other. In fact, the Safaviyya movement was not a threat to the Ottomans when it was solely a Sufi order reaching various populations in Anatolia during the fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth centuries. Furthermore, Ottoman coercive measures against the Kızılbaş followers of the order did not follow a straightforward path even after the order had become a political and military entity in the 1450s. Instead, I claim that the central authority's tolerance level for its Kızılbaş subjects fluctuated according to various social, political, and economic dynamics, such as İstanbul's relationships with the headquarters of the order (later the capital of the state) and with other political actors in the region, the geographical location of the Kızılbaş communities, tax revenues, political and religious legitimacy, and banditry.²⁵

A change of policy toward suppression or tolerance of the Kızılbaş did not necessarily signify a change in the overall Ottoman view of the larger Kızılbaş community. To verify this point, I have examined the intricate combinations of policies followed by the Ottoman central authority during a given period and in a given geographical space. Pragmatically driven, consistent policies of the central authority, rather than "exceptions to" or "aberrations in" the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and its Kızılbaş subjects,²⁶ these policies often symbolized differences between the central authority and the provincial administrations in "handling" the issues of heresy and sympathy towards the Safavids among the Anatolian population. The existence of an official decree ordering the persecution of a certain Kızılbaş individual or group in a given locale, for instance, does not always mean that the order was carried out.

Periods of Support, Tolerance, and Indifference

The exact date of the establishment of the Safaviyya order and the circumstances surrounding its foundation are difficult to pinpoint. The available information indicates that the order was founded in Ardabil, in Iranian Azerbaijan, by Şeyh Safi

²⁵ For instance, in the mid-sixteenth century, when the Ottoman and Safavid Empires were at war, the famous Ottoman *şeyhülislam* (chief jurisconsult) Ebussuud Efendi refused to recognize the Kızılbaş as a part of the Muslim community, but after the two empires signed a peace treaty in 1590, this exclusionary view no longer prevailed. See Ertuğrul Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislam Ebussuud Efendi Fetvaları Işığında 16. Asır Türk Hayatı* (İstanbul: Enderun, 1972).

²⁶ The tolerance vs. persecution dichotomy has been the center of several recent studies of non-Muslim subjects of the empire, as well. Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-40 illustrates how historians are tackling this issue for Jews and Christians under Ottoman rule.

al-Din Ardabili (b. 1252) at the end of the thirteenth century,²⁷ when he replaced Şeyh Zahid-i Gilani, of whom he was a follower and son-in-law, as the head of the Zahidiye Sufi order.²⁸ Documents also show that from its inception, the Safaviyya order attracted followers from the semi-nomadic and nomadic Turcoman and Kurdish tribes of Anatolia.²⁹ Specifically, Franz Babinger claims that the southern parts of the peninsula, particularly the Teke and Hamideli regions, “became Safavid” in a short time as a result of the efforts of Şeyh Sadreddin (d. 1391/1392), Safi-al-Din’s son.³⁰

Followers of the *tariqa* were not limited to those regions, however.³¹ According to primary accounts, the regions of Amasya, Tokat, and Sivas also hosted early converts of the Safaviyya, as did the eastern regions, due to their geographical proximity to the center of the order in the following decades.³² During the leadership of Hoca Ali (1392-1429), Safi al-Din Ardabili’s grandson, the order’s reputation in Anatolia grew considerably, for it was believed the Turcoman warriors who were

²⁷ Bekir Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi Münasebetleri* (İstanbul: İstanbul Fetih Cemiyeti, 1993), 2-3.

²⁸ Saim Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, (Ankara : Vadi Yayınları, 2002), 18. Modern scholars had unanimously accepted Safi al-Din as a Sunni leader. Minorsky writes, for example, “The early shaykhs were strictly orthodox and their religious authority could not be called in question and opposed.” V. Minorsky, “Shaykh Bâli-Efendi on the Safavids,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20, no.1 (1957): 439; idem, *Tadhkirat al-Mulūk: A Manual of Safavid Administration* (London: E. J. W. Memorial Series, 1943 and reprinted in 1980), 125; Walther Hinz, *Uzun Hasan ve Şeyh Cüneyd 15. yüzyılda İran' in Milli Bir Devlet Haline Yükselişi* trans. Tevfik Bıyıklıoğlu, *Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları* IV 2. Ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992), 15; Jean Aubin, “Études Safavides I, Sah Ismail et les notables de l’Iraq persan,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 2, no.1 (1959): 9.

²⁹ Newman, *Safavid Iran*, 2-3; Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, 18, 131. Baki Öz argues that sixty percent of the Anatolian population was Alevi/Kızılbaş in the thirteenth century, and in the two following centuries, the ratio was even higher. Baki Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 1995), 121. Öz, however, does not delve into what he means by Alevi/Kızılbaş for this specific period. Considering that the Safaviyya order emerged as a mainstream Sunni *tariqa* in Ardabil and, in this form, spread into Anatolia before the second half of the fifteenth century, and that red batons did not emerge as the main symbol of the order until the late fifteenth century, labeling the majority of Anatolians as Kızılbaş in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is anachronistic.

³⁰ Babinger and Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, 20. Babinger gives Timur’s *vakfname* (written in 1399) as his main source for this claim but does not delve into any further detail considering how Şeyh Sadreddin was able to spread the influence of his *tariqa* into a large territory in a short time.

³¹ *Mühimme* records from the following centuries also indicate the existence of settled Kızılbaş populations in several Balkan regions such as Varna, Filibe, and Tatar Pazarı in Bulgaria and Dimetoka in Greece. In one example, the Divan-ı Hümayun asks the *kadı* of Filibe in 1573 to find the Kızılbaş in his town and send them to İstanbul. MD, Vol. 21, No.502 (21-Zilkade-980/March-25-1573).

³² Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 6-9. Sümer refers to “old Iranian authors” such as Şeyhi Hüseyin’s *Silsiletü'n-nesebi's-Şafeviyye* and Rıza Kulu Han’s *Ravzatü's-şafâ-yı Nâsırı*.

taken captive by Timur following his rout of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I at the Battle of Ankara (1402)³³ were released in Ardabil at the request of the head of the Safaviyya order.³⁴ According to Bekir Kütükoğlu, almost all of these captives became followers of the *tariqa* and stayed in the vicinity of Ardabil under the name “Rumlu” (meaning the ones who came from Rum, i.e., Anatolia).³⁵ Several historians, citing Eskendar Beg Monshi’s 1629 account, have argued that some of the captives became voluntary propagators of the *tariqa* and worked hard to spread the doctrines of the order in Anatolia as a way of showing their gratitude.³⁶

A considerable part of the central and eastern Anatolian population became followers of the *tariqa* through Ismail I’s grandfather Cüneyd (d. 1460) and his disciples. Although whether he was Shi’ite or not is still an issue of debate among historians, his travels to Anatolia between 1448 and 1459 unquestionably resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of the order’s followers. A passage in the chronicle of the fifteenth-century Ottoman historian Aşıkpaşazade indicates that even though the main reason for Cüneyd’s relocation to Anatolia was the outcome of a power struggle for leadership of the *tariqa* with his uncle Şeyh Cafer, he assiduously attempted to convert the local population to the order. It is significant that Aşıkpaşazade does not mention Shi’ism when he complains about Cüneyd and his deviation from “the true path of his ancestors.”³⁷ He instead notes that the

³³ The Battle of Ankara on the field of Çubuk near Ankara, between the forces of the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I and the Turco-Mongol forces of Timur, ruler of the Timurid Empire, was a major victory for Timur and led to a period of crisis for the Ottoman Empire, known as the Interregnum. See Justin Marozzi, *Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World* (London: HarperCollins, 2004) and Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 15-16, 86, 172.

³⁴ While some historians argue that the total number of prisoners taken by Timur to Ardabil was more than 30,000, others do not even consider this story to be factual but assert that it was simply circulated by the Safavids for propaganda. See Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 6-7 and Babinger and Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, 20.

³⁵ Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İran Siyasi Münasebetleri*, 2-3. Considering the intensity of Safavid propaganda carried out in Anatolia in the following century, it is, instead, more likely that the story about Timur and the captives was fabricated and circulated in order to create a spiritual connection and continuity between the later Kızılbaş population and both the early followers of the order and the center of the *tariqa*. Official Safavid historian Eskendar Beg Monshi exemplified this attempt, mentioning more than once the gratitude that the captives of Timur had for the Safaviyya order and their devotion to spreading the teachings of the order among their fellow Anatolians.

³⁶ Babinger and Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, 22-27; Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 4: *Modern Times (1500-1924)*, (Bethesda, MD: Iran Books, 1997, originally published in 1902), 46; Hinz, *Uzun Hasan ve Şeyh Cüneyd*, 8-9; Michel M. Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safavids: Shi’ism, Sufism, and the Ghulat* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1972), 54; Savory, *Iran under the Safavids*, 13. For the original account, see Eskandar Beg Monshi, *History of Shah ‘Abbas the Great (Tārīk-e ‘Ālamārā-ye ‘Abbāsī)*, trans. Roger M. Savory (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 27-28.

³⁷ Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, in *Osmanlı Tarihleri*, ed. Nihal Atsız (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1949), 249.

Safaviyya *şeyhs* before Cüneyd were all “saintly, rightly-guided spiritual masters,” but that Cüneyd used the prestige of his family, which was thought to be imbued with divinity, to accumulate Anatolians so as to pursue his worldly desires.³⁸

As many Anatolians followed the Safaviyya order in the late fifteenth century, the Ottoman sultans showed their respect by sending an annual payment, the *çerağ akçesi*, to the *şeyh* and provided other types of financial and logistical support for the order’s activities. According to Babinger, by the 1450s Ottoman financial support was so regular that when, for the first time, it was delayed, Şeyh Cüneyd complained to Murad II.³⁹ Although we can speculate that either sympathy for the order or the desire to co-opt it was a primary motivation for the Ottomans’ support in the years before Cüneyd transformed the order into a political and military movement, Aşıkpaşazade asserts that the Ottoman sultans Osman and his son Orhan began the practice of financially helping descendants of the Prophet Muhammad as a reflection of their reverence for the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*) and may have extended this aid to the Safaviyya *şeyhs*, who claimed to be the descendants of Muhammad.⁴⁰

The last Ottoman official record indicating financial support (*cülus atiyyesi* in specific terms) for the center of the Safaviyya order (*Erdebili zaviyesi*) dates to the reign of Ahmed I in 1604.⁴¹ This date is important because it corresponds with a period of political peace between the two empires that began in 1590 with the İstanbul (Constantinople) Peace Treaty and also shows that the central Ottoman authorities sent financial support to the order even after it became a militarized state in 1501, contradicting the line of thought that there was an uncompromising hostility towards the order and its followers after it became a military entity.

Financial support was not the only way İstanbul showed favor to its Kızılbaş populations, as various sultans began patronizing foreign intellectuals and artists as a means of embellishing their court in the sixteenth century. Even after Shah Ismail had set himself up as an independent sovereign in 1501, a group called *Cemaat-ı Aceman*, or the Iranian Community, produced poetry and paintings at the Ottoman court in İstanbul. Indeed, from the 1520s to the 1550s, Iranian masters dominated the *nakkāshane* both stylistically and numerically.⁴² Although not every member of

³⁸ Ibid., 249-252. After traveling to Konya, which was under the control of the Karamanids, Cüneyd visited the Varsak Turcomans in the Taurus Mountains in southern Anatolia and later went to İskenderun, Trabzon, and Diyarbakır. As a result of the claim about Cüneyd’s family, the peasant and nomad populations eagerly joined the newly emerging order. Faruk Sümer, “Çukurova Tarihine Dair Araştırmalar,” in *Tarih Araştırmaları* 1 (1963): 70-98; idem, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 7-10.

³⁹ Babinger and Köprülü, *Anadolu’da İslamiyet*, 19.

⁴⁰ Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevarih-i Al-i Osman*, 230-233.

⁴¹ BOA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi, I. Ahmed, File no. 1, Document no. 6, (29-Zilhicce-1012/1-May-1604).

⁴² For further details, see Sinem Erdoğan, “The Nakkāshane,” *Tarih* 1 (2009): 37-69; and for a useful overview of the Ottoman Nakkāshane, see Serpil Bağcı and Zeren Tanındı, “The Ottomans, from Mehmed II to Murad III: Art of The Ottoman Court,” in *Turks: A Journey of*

the *cemaat* was Kızılbaş,⁴³ primary accounts show the existence of Kızılbaş individuals or overt Safavid sympathizers in the *nakkashane*, or court atelier, and elsewhere. A *mühimme* order from 1557, for instance, describes a *nakkaş* from Yukarı Canib (i.e., the Safavid state) called Şah Kulu (the subject of the shah), an important name given to children of families who supported the Safavid shah.⁴⁴ As an example that goes beyond the *nakkashane*, Fuzuli (d. 1562), a known Shi'ite poet from Baghdad, stayed there under Ottoman patronage after Süleyman I captured the city from the Safavids in 1534. According to contemporary accounts, İbrahim Pasha, Süleyman I's grand vizier, granted Fuzuli an annual allowance from the allocated budget for the city.⁴⁵ These examples provide further evidence that the Ottoman approach to the Kızılbaş was multivalent and therefore cannot be explained merely by Ottoman definitions of "heresy."⁴⁶

Peace treaties signed between the two empires in the sixteenth century also signify a shift from more oppressive policies toward relative leniency to Kızılbaş subjects in the Ottoman Empire. For instance, the Peace of Amasya, signed in 1555 and lasting until 1576, altered the negative approach that the Ottoman court had taken against the Anatolian and Iraqi Kızılbaş population over the previous two decades. As Ottoman sovereignty was recognized in Iraq, including the provinces of Baghdad and Kurdistan, the decrease in Safavid power in the region led to increased tolerance towards the Kızılbaş. The thirteen volumes of *mühimmes* that cover this period contain a relatively low number of orders asking local authorities to persecute Kızılbaş individuals or communities compared to the volumes that cover periods of war. The orders from those thirteen volumes, moreover, focused on individuals who had "turned Kızılbaş," who were in a some type of relationship with the Safavid authorities, who paid taxes to the Safavid shah, or who tried to migrate to Safavid Iran, showing the importance of the individuals to the Ottomans was their political, not their confessional, identities.⁴⁷

a Thousand Years, ed. David Roxburgh (London: Royal Academy of Arts; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005).

⁴³ The majority of the Iranian population only became Shi'ite near the end of the sixteenth century.

⁴⁴ MD, Vol. 2, No. 1970 (Rebiülahir-979/February-1571).

⁴⁵ Cl. Huart, "Fuzûlî," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al. Brill Online, 2014.

⁴⁶ Leslie Peirce, in her well-known book, provides strong evidence that supports the multi-dimensional nature of the Ottoman approach to its non-Sunni subjects. For further details, see *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003). For further examples of non-Anatolian empathy toward Shi'ism and the diversified reaction of the Ottoman central authority, see Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1788* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Karen Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Province of Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

⁴⁷ Among many similar orders, an order from 978/1570 warns the governor of Diyarbekir to find and execute the Kızılbaş population in the Siverek region who were allegedly sending money (*nizur*) to the Safavid shah or who were in contact with the Safavid court. According to the same order, however, the governor did not have to report the "regular" Kızılbaş, who

Periods of Watchfulness and Caution

Under the leadership of Şeyh Cüneyd and Şeyh Haydar (d. 1488), the Safaviyya order had transformed itself from a religious order into a political and ideological movement. The activities of these leaders thus created a decisive break between the Safaviyya's original manifestation of itself as a traditional Sufi order and its new identity as a military movement with a vernacular tradition of Islam practiced by the Kızılbaş as its backbone.⁴⁸ Because a synthesis of Sufism, Alid loyalty, and *ghuluww*, or extreme Shi'ite,⁴⁹ beliefs bound the Kızılbaş to their Safavid *pirs*, or Sufi guides, the Safavids not only intensified conversion propaganda among the Anatolians, but also began recruiting Turcoman and Kurdish tribesmen for the military units of the order.⁵⁰ At the same time, the centralizing policies of the Ottoman Empire in southern and eastern Anatolia, an area inhabited mostly by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, created an environment ripe for the Safavid religious and political propaganda.⁵¹

Even with its new identity, the Safaviyya order still was not a real "threat" to the Ottoman central authority. As primary accounts indicate, Safaviyya leaders continued to receive their annual payment, the *çerağ akçesi*, from the Ottoman sultans in the 1460s while Cüneyd was the leader of the order. The Ottoman authorities were, however, aware of the changing goals and nature of the movement. Even after receiving Cüneyd at his court, Aşıkpaşazade reports, Murad II (r. 1421-1444, 1446-1451) declared that "there cannot be two sultans on one throne" and asked Cüneyd and his disciples to leave Ottoman territory.⁵²

The year 1492, in this context, represents a turning point in the relationship between İstanbul and the Safaviyya order. The Ottoman authorities interpreted an assassination attempt that year against Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512), organized by a *mezcup derviş* ("crazy dervish"), as a Safavid-supported plot. They, therefore, cut off the *çerağ akçesi* to the order's center in Ardabil and implemented a policy of

were not involved in any of the two "crimes" listed above ("...*töhmeleri sicil olanların haklarından gelinip olmayanların ahvali arza muhtaç olmağın...*"). MD, Vol. 14 No. 311 (14-Safer-978/18-July-1570). For another example, see Ali Emiri Tasnifi, I. Süleyman, File No. 4, Document No.: 237, (964/1556); MD, Vol. 4, No. 1175 (20-Zilkade-967/August-12-1560).

⁴⁸ Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*.

⁴⁹ *Ghulat* (extremist), a term of disapproval for individuals accused of exaggeration (*ghuluww*) in religion, historically was applied to a group of Shi'ite Muslims whose doctrines were regarded as exaggerated in reverence for the imams and sometimes to Ismai'ilis. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ghulat," by Marshall G. S. Hodgson.

⁵⁰ Several Turcoman tribes (mostly Varsak Turcomans) in the Tarsus and Adana regions moved to Safavid Iran after becoming "Kızılbaş," a development noted in the *mühimme* records in red ink due to its significance for the central authority. Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 50; idem, "Çukurova Tarihine Dair Araştırmalar," in *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1963): 33-56; Abisaab, *Converting Persia*, 9.

⁵¹ Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Rebels and Renegades on Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands," 81-100.

⁵² Aşıkpaşazade, *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, 249; Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu'da Alevilik*, 17, 68; Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 12, 25.

caution and persecution against the followers of the order. The *kadı* of Edirne, in response to a decree sent from İstanbul immediately after the assassination attempt, executed most of the followers of Osman Baba, who was supposedly a Kızılbaş leader, and forced the rest of the community to move to different parts of Anatolia.⁵³

A sixteenth-century chronicler, Fazlullah b. Ruzbihan, claims that Sultan Bayezid II was particularly afraid of Sheikh Haydar's activities and his exponentially growing body of supporters after the aforementioned assassination plot, even though Bayezid had a massive army under his command.⁵⁴ As a precaution, Bayezid II ordered his commanders to expel any Kızılbaş they might find among their troops.⁵⁵ He also made a distinction between the Kızılbaş and the similarly Ali-revering Bektāşis as another strategy to reduce Kızılbaş numbers and strength. He not only depicted himself as a Bektāşi, but also patronized both the writing down of oral traditions about the founder of the order, Hacı Bektaş (d. ca. 1271), and the renovation of his lodge in central Anatolia.⁵⁶ Bayezid II, by endorsing the formalization and restructuring of the Bektāşi order, hoped to redirect any possible anti-Ottoman politico-religious movement into an institutional setting backed and controlled by the central authority.⁵⁷

The year 1510 marks another critical moment in the Ottomans' response to their Kızılbaş subjects as the policy of caution and alertness was replaced by a

⁵³ Sadeddin, *Tâcü't-Tevârih*, III, 274, cited in Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri*, 122.

⁵⁴ Faḍlallāh Ibn-Ruzbihān _Hungī, *Tārīḫ-i 'ālamārā-i Amīnī*, (Istanbul [ca. 1970]) trans. V. Minorsky as *Persia in AD 1478-1490* (London, The Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Iceland: 1957), 69; Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 12-13.

⁵⁵ Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 80.

⁵⁶ Traditional scholarship has argued that Bektāşi dervishes were initially the "agents" of İstanbul dispatched as missionaries to "properly" Islamize central Anatolia and the Balkans, but they were themselves soon after absorbed into the syncretistic beliefs of the same population. See Irène Mélikoff, "Le Probleme Kızılbaş," *Turcica* 6 (1975): 49-67. This argument has, however, been rightfully criticized by recent historians for attributing an exaggerated agency to the state and ignoring the diversity of both Bektāşis and Kızılbaş in terms of geographic and ethnic background. See, Terzioğlu, "Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization," 93. In addition, the fact that some Bektāşi Janissaries turned Kızılbaş in the sixteenth century indicates that state control over this elite military corps was not as absolute as has been generally assumed. See Zeynep Yürekli, *Architecture and Hagiography in the Ottoman Empire: The Politics of Bektashi Shrines in the Classical Age* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012).

⁵⁷ Tijana Kristić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change and Communal Politics in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 47-48. As another Sufi order originating in Azerbaijan in the late fourteenth century, the Halvetis also sought followers from Anatolian towns. Due to the lack of a strong central core, in contrast to the Safaviyya order in Ardabil, the Halvetis were never a major threat to the Ottoman central authority, even though the order's influence was quite widespread in the empire. For further details concerning the Halveti order and its relationship with the Ottoman central authority, see John J. Curry, *Transforming Muslim Mystical Thought in the Ottoman Empire: The Rise of the Halveti Order, 1350-1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

policy of surveillance. The internal dynamics of the Ottoman dynasty—above all the conflict between Bayezid II and his son Selim—the pro-Safavid Shah Kulu Rebellion in Anatolia in 1511, and Shah Ismail's increasing charisma as a result of his military victories in eastern Iran and Central Asia deepened the political threat posed by the Safavids. According to the anonymous *Haniwaldanus* chronicle, the number of Safavid supporters in Anatolia was so high that the Ottoman princes Korkut and Ahmed declared their sympathy for the order in hope of gaining support for their struggles for the throne.⁵⁸

An increased focus on Kızılbaş tax evasion, beginning with the reign of Bayezid II, marked a shift back to a policy of surveillance that extended into the reigns of his son Selim I and his immediate successors. Some Kızılbaş subjects within the Ottoman Empire paid a tax, called *nezir*, to the Safavid authorities as a sign of sympathy and a source of support for Safavid charitable activities. Primary documents show that İstanbul was concerned about possible revenue losses, its subjects' loyalties, and the presence of brigandage, rather than its subjects' confessional identities, particularly during the period covered in this article. Because the Ottoman central authority measured its own legitimacy in terms of tax-paying, land-cultivating, and battle-ready subjects, it struggled against the Safavids to secure its sources of revenue and manpower. In an attempt to differentiate between tax-evading and law-abiding Kızılbaş subjects, the Ottoman sultans, beginning with Selim I, made various distinctions between not only the Kızılbaş and Shi'ite populations but also tax-paying and tax-evading Kızılbaş populations. As Stefan Winter notes in the case of Kızılbaş families in Syria, Ottoman policy makers labeled Shi'ites as Kızılbaş as a legal device in order to justify official violence over more ordinary situations such as brigandage and tax evasion, not on account of heretical beliefs.⁵⁹ Furthermore, for Anatolian and Iraqi provinces, if a Kızılbaş individual or group remained peaceful and remitted their taxes, they were labeled only Kızılbaş in the sources, whereas if they rebelled and/or refused to remit their taxes, they had additional names, such as *mülhid*, *rafîzi*, *ehl-i fesad*, *binemaz* (someone who does not practice the daily prayer requirement of Islam) or *bed mezhep* (an adherent of a false sect).⁶⁰

In the eyes of the Ottoman authorities, Kızılbaş subjects who paid taxes to the Safavid shahs and increasingly sought to migrate to Safavid Iran represented the loss of a critical part of the empire's revenue-producing work force. As a consequence, seventeen of the thirty-three orders, which are found in the *mühimmes* for 1570 and 1571 and mention Kızılbaş individuals or groups, detail various sultans' orders to

⁵⁸ Richard Franz Kreutel, *Haniwaldanus Anonimine Göre Sultan Bayezid-i Veli (1481-1512)*, trans. Necdet Öztürk (İstanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1997), originally published in German as Richard Franz Kreutel, *Der fromme Sultan Bayezid: Die Geschichte seiner Herrschaft (1481-1512) nach den altosmanischen Chroniken des Oruç und des Anonymus Hanivaldanus*, by Kâtip Oruç (Vienna: Verlag Styria, 1978).

⁵⁹ For further examples of Ottoman financial support for various Kızılbaş subjects, see Stefan Winter, "The Kızılbaş of Syria," 171-183; Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri*, 147.

⁶⁰ MD, Vol. 14, No. 311 (14-Safer-978/July-18-1570); MD, Vol. 14, No. 488 (12-Ramazan-978/February-7-1571).

local authorities to catch anyone providing financial support to either the shah's court or to the center of the order in Ardabil. In addition, the local authorities were also held responsible for confiscating on behalf of İstanbul the money and any type of valuables that those "tax evaders" had been sending to the Safavid shah.⁶¹

The concern for tax evasion and loss of manpower can also be seen in the correspondence between Shah Ismail I and Sultan Bayezid II. When Ismail I asked Bayezid II to let the followers of the Safavid order visit the order's center in Ardabil, the sultan responded that the Anatolian Kızılbaş could not be allowed to leave the Ottoman realm because they would not come back. Later, Bayezid offered to allow his subjects to travel to Ardabil only if they made a commitment not to settle permanently in Safavid Iran.⁶² On the other hand, relative tolerance had been shown toward the "heretical" practices of particular Kızılbaş communities as long as the sultan could rely on local notables and tribal and religious leaders to guarantee the communities' taxes.⁶³

Periods of Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda, Conversion and Confessionalization

Scholars of both early modern Europe and the Middle East regard the practice of conversion⁶⁴ as a process of institutional, legal, and procedural innovation that

⁶¹ An account from 1570, in which İstanbul asks the governor of Baghdad to find those Kızılbaş who were allegedly sending money to Yukarı Canib as alms, presents a good example. In it, the Ottoman central authority also asks the governor to inquire about the nature of the communication between its Ottoman Kızılbaş subjects and the Safavid Kızılbaş who came to the Ottoman realm to collect alms. "... Yukarı Canibden varanlara ne makule kimesneler ihtilat edip ve ne söyleşirler nuzur (nesir) ve sadakat gibi nesne götürürler mi götürürler ne asıl kimesnelerdir ve Yukarı Canib adamları ne asıl kimesnelere mektuplar ve armağan götürmüşlerdir ve bilcümle cemi ahvallarına vakıf ve muttali olup sıhhati ile defter eyleyip sana teslim eyledikten sonra sen dahi tehir eylemeyüp Südde-i Saadetime gönderesün." MD, Vol. 14, No. 376 (9-Ramazan-978/4-February-1571). Another decree from November 1593 informs the Ottoman governor of Rum, Mehmed Pasha, that Şeyh Haydar, who was the head of the Kızılbaş in the Amasya, Çorum, and Bozok regions, gathered people around him and collected money and soldiers for the shah's army. MD, Vol. 71, No. 239 (12-Şevval-1001/July-11-1593).

⁶² Feridun Bey, *Mecmua-i münşeat-i selâtin*, (İstanbul, 1274 1275, [1858]) 328-329. Shah Ismail's second request, sent in 1502-1503, was, however, not accepted by the sultan. Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemî Çelebi, *Solakzade Tarihi*, ed. Vahid Çabuk (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989), 429; Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 26.

⁶³ A letter preserved in the Topkapı Palace archives shows that among the first of Lebanon's tribal leaders to pledge loyalty to Selim I on his conquests of the region in 1516 was the Kızılbaş family of Baalbek. Winter, "The Kızılbaş of Syria," 172.

⁶⁴ Although the term "conversion" has profound mystical connotations in western scholarship, its connotations differ in non-western contexts. As K. F. Morrison cogently claims, the word "should be more properly a subject, rather than a tool of analysis." K. F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), xiv. For

transforms the social sphere.⁶⁵ Applying this approach to the conversion of Ottoman subjects from/to Kızılbaş Islam in sixteenth-century Anatolia provides an opportunity to challenge Orientalist notions of definitive religious and cultural boundaries in the early modern Middle East by pointing out the complexity of identity formation in inter-confessional and inter-imperial contact zones such as central, southern, and southeastern Anatolia as well as frontier regions of Ottoman Iraq.⁶⁶ For the purposes of this article, conversions among the Kızılbaş communities are defined as the manifestations of the combinations of religious, socio-cultural, political, and financial acts as a reaction to a political or religious authority, to a norm, or to the status quo (to either reinforce it or to challenge it), rather than as acts driven solely by religious concerns.⁶⁷

The “religious dichotomy” between Ottoman Sunnism and Safavid Shi’ism was a product of the Ottoman-Safavid political rivalry rather than its cause,⁶⁸ and it was the politicization of the Safavid movement, not the Shi’ite character of the Safaviyya order, that focused the attention of Ottoman authorities on Safavid propaganda activities in Anatolia and frontier regions of Iraq. It is, therefore, important to distinguish the real meaning(s) of conversion from one side to another in this particular period and locality.⁶⁹ Since political and religious loyalties were

further details on the debate over conversion, see Talal Asad, “Comments on Conversion,” in *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, ed. Peter van der Veer (New York&London: Routledge, 1996), 263-273.

⁶⁵ For further details on the politicized nature of conversion in Europe before the seventeenth century, see Peter van der Veer’s introduction to van der Veer, ed., *Conversion to Modernities*, 1-22.

⁶⁶ Recent scholarship on religion in the early modern Ottoman Empire, notably the studies of Tijana Kristić and Derin Terzioğlu, has successfully explored whether the concepts of conversion and confessionalization are relevant to that society. Kristić, “Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no.1 (2009): 16, 63; Terzioğlu, “Sufis in the Age of State-Building and Confessionalization,” 86-99 and “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization,” 301-338.

⁶⁷ There are, however, possible problems associated with using the term conversion. We cannot know how the Kızılbaş converts really thought and felt before or after their decisions, and the usage of the term may unintentionally refer to certain dominant cultural codes and symbols. These issues can be minimized by consulting an extensive range of primary sources and by deducing the specific meanings of conversion for specific regions, periods and groups of people, as opposed to generalizations or essentialist approaches. Emphasizing the multi-layered and often ambiguous nature of the religious identities developed by both sides is also vital to avoid assumptions of clear-cut religious and cultural boundaries between the “Sunni” Ottomans and “Shi’ite” Safavids, as well as between the “orthodox” Ottomans and their “heterodox” Kızılbaş subjects.

⁶⁸ Marcus Dressler. “Inventing Orthodoxy,” 151-173.

⁶⁹ Keith Luria states that “loyalty to a monarch was not another worldly concern or obligation imposed by custom, law or social interest. Just as true religious feelings of the conscience were to be above such matters, so too was political fidelity. It came from the heart.” Keith Luria, “The Politics of Protestant Conversion to Catholicism in Seventeenth-Century,” in

closely linked in Eurasia before the seventeenth century, “turning” Kızılbaş or Sunni in Ottoman Anatolia between the 1450s and 1630s meant publicly switching allegiance from the Ottoman sultan to the Safavid *şeyh/shah* or vice versa.⁷⁰ Public affirmations of conversion—Sunni to Kızılbaş in Iran and Kızılbaş to Sunni in Anatolia—included welcoming converts at the imperial court and bestowing land-revenue rights, clothing, and other gifts. Michele Membré, as noted by Zarinebah-Shahr, describes a conversion ceremony that took place in the Safavid court during his visit to Iran in 1539:

The next day they came from Anatolia, that is, from the province of Arzinjan, Turcoman of Ali with their families and animals, about 800 households in number, who had come for the shah's sake. Thus there were of those Turcoman, horsemen, with their arms and lances, to the number of 600, who were stationed over against court of the said Sophy, at a distance, riding round and round; all together they kept crying, “Allah, Allah” until the shah came forth from his parchments, at the entrance. Then he ordered the greatest of their chiefs to be summoned, and one by one, they came and kissed the foot of the said shah. Thus they all came. The shah gave each one cloth for clothing and his cap, which they call *taj*. Then the said Turcomans gave presents to the shah, each, according to his means, so many animals; some gave horses, some leathers and some camels. Then the shah ordered them to three parts of his lands, that is he sent one part to the province of Khurasan, another part to the province of Shirvan, and the other part to the province of Iraq.⁷¹

The Ottoman central authority similarly sought to reshape the behavior of its subjects by redistributing posts and benefits and granting privileged status to Safavid subjects who “turned” Sunni and moved to the Ottoman realm. Official posts and titles were also given to the members of the Safavid shah's family upon their conversion to Sunni Islam.⁷² An official decree from Ahmed I (r. 1603-1617), for

Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity, ed. Peter van der Veer (New York&London: Routledge, 1996), 23-46.

⁷⁰ An official decree from 1519, for instance, lists the names of Kızılbaş Ottomans who served in the shah's army in his campaign to Georgia. Topkapı Sarayı Maliye Arşivi Defterleri, Document no.5720 (926/1519) cited in Rıza Yıldırım, “Turcomans between Two Empires,” 560-562.

⁷¹ Michele Membré, *Relazione di Persia* (1542), trans. and ed. A.H. Morton as *Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia* (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1999), 18 also cited in Zarinebah-Shahr, “Qizilbash ‘Heresy’ and Rebellion in Ottoman Anatolia,” 7-8.

⁷² BOA, Ali Emiri Tasnifi, I. Ahmed, File no. 7, Document no. 678 (1025/1616). Recently, Hülya Canbakal has further analyzed the Ottoman registers of *seyyids*, or descendants of the Prophet, and has suggested a link between the central authority's attempts to regulate the allotment the status of seyyidhood and its policies of containment of the Kızılbaş, for whom

instance, grants the post of *kapıcıbaşı*, or chief doorkeeper, to a musician from the shah's court upon his conversion to Sunni Islam. Murad III (r. 1574-1595) led several staged conversions of Kızılbaş Iranians to Sunni Islam in the official circumcision ceremonies organized for his sons in 1582. The miniatures of the *Şehname-i Murad-i Salis* and the anonymous *Surname-i Hümayun*, written for this occasion, depict the public conversion of many Kızılbaş to Sunni Islam during the festival. In one of the paintings, a member of the Ottoman ulema is depicted throwing off his Kızılbaş turban in an attempt to gain the favor of the sultan, who was observing the scene from the balcony of the Ibrahim Pasha Palace.⁷³

In a contrary manner, converts to Kızılbaş Islam in Anatolia were exiled, imprisoned, or executed by the Ottomans.⁷⁴ After the order transformed into a political threat on the eastern border of the empire and began to use its Anatolian disciples against the Ottoman central authority, almost immediately the Ottomans adopted varying methods to counter the semi-organized religious propaganda activities. At the outset, they declared that any type of activity backed by the Safavids was sinful and that any person who converted to Shi'ite/Kızılbaş Islam would be considered a *rafzi*, or apostate, and his/her property would be confiscated.⁷⁵ In addition, the notions of *gaza* and *cihad* (holy war) were widened to include the struggle against the Safavids.⁷⁶

At the request of Selim I before the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514, Ottoman religious scholars and officials wrote about the "awful" acts of Shah Ismail and his followers. Accordingly, the *Selimname* of the famous Ottoman statesman Celalzade Mustafa (d. 1567) claimed that Shah Ismail had turned mosques into taverns and had legalized drinking alcohol and committing adultery in the territories he invaded with his heretic soldiers.⁷⁷ In his *Tevârih-i Al-i Osman*, Kemalpaşazade (d. 1534), who

descent from the Prophet was particularly important. Hülya Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town: 'Ayntab in the 17th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1-19, 61-90.

⁷³ For further details on Murad III's circumcision ceremony, see Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Rebels and Renegades," and Terzioğlu, "The Imperial Festival of 1582: An Interpretation," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 84-100. According to "Ali" [the narrator of the festivities in *Surname-i Hümayun*] the Safavid convert was a *hanzade*, the son of a prince, who was rewarded with an office following his conversion to Sunni Islam. *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁴ I call the Safavids' efforts to spread Shi'ite Islam in Anatolian and Iraqi towns semi-organized state propaganda due to their meticulous planning to replace Sunnism with Shi'ism and to transform the latter from a sectarian devotion into a source of political loyalty. In other words, these conversions were not the spontaneous and unorganized acts of enthusiastic individuals. As Said Arjomand has argued, these efforts "constituted the single most momentous series of 'religiously relevant' political acts of the Safavid rulers." Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 107.

⁷⁵ An official order sent to Mosul asks the governor of the province to sell, without an auction, the property of one Mehmed, who had turned Kızılbaş. BOA, İbnülemin Tasnifi Maliye, File no. 11, Document no. 952 (1042/1632).

⁷⁶ Ocak, *Alevi ve Bektaşî İnançlarının İslam Öncesi Temelleri*, 99-100.

⁷⁷ Celalzade Mustafa, *Selimname* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 272-273.

served the Ottomans as official historian and *şeyhülislam* from 1516-1534, went further and compared Shah Ismail to the pharaohs of Egypt.⁷⁸

Ottoman religious and political authorities likewise attacked the Safavid claims of descent from the Prophet Muhammad. The “baselessness” of this claim, Kemalpaşazade asserted, was obvious from Shah Ismail I’s attacks on the tombs of Prophetic descendants revered by Twelver Shi’ites, notably the tomb of Ali al-Ridā, the eighth Shi’ite Imam, in Mashhad.⁷⁹ Even if the Safavid shahs were descended from the Prophet, he continued, the Qur’anic story of the curse of Noah’s son Ham reveals that descent from a prophet does not guarantee salvation.⁸⁰ Therefore, using the name of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, according to Kemalpaşazade, was the only way the followers of Ismail were able to convert “ignorant” people to the “heretic” Kızılbaş sect.⁸¹

After the second half of the sixteenth century, Safavid propaganda intensified to the point that the Ottoman central authority switched its emphasis from lifelong practitioners of Kızılbaş Islam to those who “turned” Kızılbaş.⁸² İstanbul repeatedly asked local authorities not only to find the converts and punish them but also to find the mediators who had facilitated the conversions and send them to the capital.⁸³ This was a difficult task. The facilitators were known as *halifes*, meticulously selected from the local Turcoman or, in some cases, Kurdish tribes of Anatolia and Iraq. They worked to increase the number of followers of the shah, to encourage followers to migrate to Safavid Iran, to collect money and soldiers for the newly established state, and, most important, to instigate rebellions against the Ottoman authorities.⁸⁴

Ottoman primary sources, particularly after the second quarter of the sixteenth century, contain a plethora of warnings to local authorities about these *halifes* and their influence among the Anatolian and Iraqi populations.⁸⁵ A decree sent to the governor of Rum, Mehmed Pasha, in November 1593 asks him to catch the *halifes*

⁷⁸ Ibn-i Kemal, *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*, IX. Defter (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997), 71-72.

⁷⁹ İbn-i Kemal, “Fetava-yı Kemal Paşazade der Hakk-ı Kızılbaş,” *Mecmua, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi*, MS Esad Efendi 3548, fol. 46a, cited in Ahmet Uğur “Kemal Paşazade ve Şah İsmail,” *Erciyes Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4 (1987): 13-27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; Qur’an 11:11-43.

⁸¹ Ibn-i Kemal, *Tevarih-i Ali Osman*. IX. Defter, nr. 2447, vr. 123b-125b, cited in Dalkıran, “İran Safavi Devletini’nin Kuruluşuna Şii İnançların Etkisi,” 72.

⁸² MD, Vol. 12, No.1 (Zilkade-978/April-1571).

⁸³ A particular order from 1570 mentions a ceremony in which an Ottoman subject wears the Safavid *tac* to become a Kızılbaş. İstanbul, as response, asks the governor of Bagdad to inquire the validity of the event and inform the capital about it. MD, Vol 9, No. 230, (22-Şevval-977/29-March-1470).

⁸⁴ Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, 40, 131-132. The *halifes* dated to the time of Sheikh Haydar and their number peaked during the reign of Ismail I. Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 12, 82.

⁸⁵ For an example, see Peçevi İbrahim Efendi, *Peçevi Tarihi* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), 92; MD, Vol. 14, No. 264, (11-Safer-979/4-July-1571); No. 859, (14-Cumadelula-978/14-October-1570).

appointed to the regions of Çorum, Kastamonu, and Sivas by the Safavid shah. According to the decree, these *halifes* contributed to the Celali Rebellions by encouraging people to revolt against the Ottoman authorities, who were occupied with the Long War against the Habsburgs.⁸⁶ The decree also mentions that in a raid organized by local authorities to arrest the *halifes*, one of them was caught with several letters from the shah, the shah's seal, a pair of *paşmak* (slippers), boots and a cloak.⁸⁷ Years earlier (1568), a decree sent to the governor of the Divriği district (*sancak*), Mehmed Bey, stated that one of three *halifes* who were collecting money and goods for the Safavid shah was caught and executed, but the other two were able to escape to Safavid Iran.⁸⁸

A decree sent to the *kadı* (judge) and *bey* of Çorum in September 1585 shows that the *halifes* were able to collect thousands of soldiers for the shah's army. It states that Halife Haydar, who had previously left the region, had reappeared with 40,000 followers who were willing to revolt against the Ottoman authorities.⁸⁹ Such decrees, issued over a seventy-year period, indicate the significance of the *halifes* for both the Safavid shahs and Ottoman sultans. Although by 1593 Shah Abbas was in power and Safavid territorial authority had reached its greatest extent, the Safavid court continued sending *halifes* to various Ottoman territories to recruit followers for the order and subjects for the empire.

Conversions in Anatolia and Iraq during this period, between the 1450s and 1630s, illustrate both the connections between religious and political identities and the Ottoman attitude toward Kızılbaş subjects who responded to the Safavid propaganda. As the Safaviyya order transformed itself into a military and political movement under the leadership of Cüneyd in the 1450s, it began to emphasize recruiting soldiers as well as followers. For the Safavids, then, converting Kızılbaş not only attracted followers for Shia Islam, but also strengthened their political legitimacy in the region.⁹⁰

Periods of Oppression, Persecution, and "Inquisition," and the "Sunnitization" of the Empire

During the early modern period, the Ottomans, were quite tolerant of "heterodox" religious practices and beliefs but not of those who promulgated their beliefs

⁸⁶ MD, Vol. 71, No. 239 (12-Şevval-1001/July-11-1593). A record dated 977/1570 warns the governor of Baghdad about a *halife* to whom a local Ahmed went to wear the crimson *taj*. MD, Vol. 9, No. 230 (22-Şevval-977/March-29-1570).

⁸⁷ Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu'da Alevilik*, 45.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ MD, Vol. 58, No. 683 (14-Ramazan-993/August-09-1585).

⁹⁰ According to Feridun Bey, who was the chancellor at the court of Murad III (r. 1574-1595), because the Safavids were hated by the locals, who saw them as strangers, the leaders of the order had begun recruiting followers from Anatolia. Feridun Bey, *Mecmua-i münşeat-i selâtin*, 584-598.

publicly and challenged Ottoman authority.⁹¹ Official documents, therefore, justify oppression, persecution, and even “inquisition” against the Kızılbaş by accusing them of denying Ottoman sovereignty, of not serving in the army and/or not paying required taxes, of allegiance to the Safavid shahs, or of “turning” Kızılbaş, especially during the major campaigns against Safavid Iran in 1532, 1555, and 1578-1590.

Ottoman surveillance and punitive action against suspected Anatolian supporters of the Safavids began in the reign of Bayezid II (r.1481-1512). Despite his being considered a “kinder, gentler” ruler than his son Selim I, instances of *sürgün* (forced migration) of Anatolian Kızılbaş and execution of Safavid sympathizers began under Bayezid’s rule and increased after the assassination attempt against him by a Safavid sympathizer in 1483.⁹² Although widespread persecution of the Anatolian Kızılbaş populations did not begin until 1512, Bayezid II’s reign laid the foundation for future sultans.

Selim I, on the other hand, is widely regarded as the symbol of Ottoman persecution against the Kızılbaş. The Nur Ali Halife incident and the Şah Kulu rebellion, which exemplified the power of politically driven Kızılbaş personalities, gave rise to the first attempts to articulate and enforce Sunni orthodoxy in the Ottoman domains and to persecute dissenters beyond individual cases.⁹³ The tension between the Ottoman and Safavid courts peaked when Murad, the son of Sultan Selim’s brother Ahmed, “turned” Kızılbaş and donned a crimson *tac* in an ostentatious ceremony. After Ahmed dispatched soldiers to Karaman, where Murad lived, Murad took refuge in the court of Shah Ismail I, who had just completed the conquest of Iran and was rapidly expanding the Safavid Empire,⁹⁴ a grave concern for the Ottomans since more people across Anatolia were becoming Kızılbaş.⁹⁵ In a report that he presented to Selim I, Ali b. Abdullah, whose identity is unclear, claimed that most of the people of Anatolia had become “infidels of Ardabil.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Dressler, “Inventing Orthodoxy,” 151-173; Josef Matuz, “Vom Übertritt osmanischer Soldaten zu den Safawiden,” in *Die islamische Welt zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Festschrift* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Dt. Morgenlaend. Ges., 1979), 402-415.

⁹² *Haniwaldanus Chronicle*, 45.

⁹³ Tijana Kristić, *Contested Conversions to Islam*, 12.

⁹⁴ Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 34-35; Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri*, 174; *Unknown British Chronicle*, 243a-243b, cited in Sarwar, *History of Shah Ismail Safawi*, 73.

⁹⁵ The changing relationship between the two empires found voice in official correspondence, as well. In a letter to Selim in July 1514, Shah Ismail declared, “In the reign of your father [Bayezid II], whose abode is in paradise, may God illuminate his proofs, the impertinence of ‘Alu’u’d-Dawla Dhu’l-Qadr compelled us to pass through Turkish territory; nevertheless, friendship and harmony continued to subsist on both sides, so much so that we expressed our regard for you when you were governor of Trabzon.” Feridun Bey, *Mecmua-i münşeat-i selâtin*, 347.

⁹⁶ “... and when I arrived [in Anatolia] most of the Anatolians became the infidels of Ardabil” (“...*Rum memleketinin halkının çoğu Erdebil olup kafir oldu.*”) (Translation by the author), cited in Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1969), 28.

To address the changing dynamics in his realm, Selim I not only adopted a brutal policy of repression against his Kızılbaş subjects, executing thousands, but also declared war against the Safavids on the eastern border of his empire. In order to justify his actions, he requested *fetvas* from religious authorities labeling the Kızılbaş as “infidels.” According to one such *fetva* written by Mullah Hamza, the Kızılbaş and anyone else who helped the Safavids deserved “the keen sword of the sultan.”⁹⁷ In a treatise also requested by Selim I, Kemalpaşazade wrote that a Kızılbaş should not be spared even if he repented of his support for the Safavids because the Kızılbaş were “unreliable.” Kemalpaşazade added that the property of Kızılbaş subjects should be confiscated, since it legally belonged to the sultan, and that Kızılbaş marriages should be considered invalid by the Ottoman local authorities.⁹⁸

With the support of these religious authorities, Selim I left İstanbul to reclaim his authority in the Kızılbaş-majority towns throughout Anatolia. As he moved eastward, he arrested Kızılbaş religious leaders, confiscated properties belonging to the Kızılbaş, and executed a significant number of them. He also imprisoned Iranian merchants, accusing them of transporting weapons and people who knew how to use them to Safavid Iran. But there was an additional financial motivation behind Selim I’s suppression of the Iranian merchants. The city of Tabriz in Iranian Azerbaijan, the capital of the early Safavids, was the most important silk entrepôt in the eastern Mediterranean trade zone, and the Ottoman campaigns of the sixteenth century (including the Battle of Çaldıran) were intended to control Iran’s silk-producing regions (Shirvan, Ganja, and Gilan) as well as to suppress the Kızılbaş threat.⁹⁹ According to Feridun Bey, however, due to the importance of trade between the two empires, his son Süleyman and his grand vizier Ibrahim Pasha criticized Selim’s policy of intimidation toward local merchants. Süleyman ultimately released the merchants as soon as he acceded to the throne in 1520.¹⁰⁰

As a result, the reign of Selim I’s son, Suleyman I (1520-1566), initially appeared more tolerant than his father’s of various Muslim beliefs including Kızılbaş Islam. Over time, the Ottoman court’s counter-propaganda activities against the Safavids intensified to create a Sunni identity for the empire’s subjects and so increased punitive actions taken against the Kızılbaş.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the political and ideological need to portray the Safavids as “infidels” produced a concomitant need to portray the Ottoman sultans as pious, orthodox Muslims and

⁹⁷ Öz, *Alevilik ile İlgili Osmanlı Belgeleri*, 103.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 55; Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, 137-138.

⁹⁹ Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran*, 15-33.

¹⁰⁰ Cited in Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, 41.

¹⁰¹ A *ferman* of 1548 asks Ayas Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, to vanquish the increasing number of Kızılbaş in and around the province. BOA, Cevdet Adliye Tasnifi, File no. 30, Document No. 1823 (955/1548). Also see Elke Eberhard, *Osmanische Polemik gegen die Safawiden im 16. Jahrhundert nach arabischen Handschriften* (Freiburg: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1970), 155-162.

the Safavids' sympathizers in Anatolia as heretics.¹⁰² Süleyman I was thus depicted as the "upholder of Sunni orthodoxy,"¹⁰³ and a new criminal law code defined the boundaries of orthodoxy and public morality via an increase in heresy trials, the promotion of attending mosque services, and new fines for those who did not attend services regularly.¹⁰⁴ As the sultan now sought *fetvas* to justify brutal actions against his Kızılbaş subjects, *Şeyhülislam* Ebussuud Efendi issued several between 1537 and 1548 stating that those who called themselves Shi'ites or Kızılbaş, or who cursed the first three caliphs recognized by Sunnis, were "nothing but infidels,"¹⁰⁵ and their elimination was a "religious duty for pious Muslims."¹⁰⁶

Selim II (r. 1566-1574) continued the Ottoman sultans' efforts to weaken the reputation of the Safavid shahs among the Anatolian subjects of the empire, rejecting Shah Tahmasp's offer to distribute alms to the poor in Anatolian towns as a gesture of condolence for Suleyman's death.¹⁰⁷ He also ordered the governor of Baghdad to replace the Iranian rugs covering the tombs of Ali in Najaf and Hüseyin in Karbala with Anatolian ones.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, like his grandfather Selim I, he imprisoned Iranian merchants under the accusation of transporting weapons to Safavid Iran.¹⁰⁹

Not only accused of following of the Safaviyya order or supporting the Safavid state, the Kızılbaş subjects of the Ottoman Empire also were constantly blamed for fomenting unrest, disobedience, plunder, murder, forgery, adultery, and, incestuous relationships.¹¹⁰ After various official orders warned local Ottoman administrators about their alleged profane activities, such as drinking alcohol, cursing the first three

¹⁰² Colin Imber, "Ideals and Legitimation in Early Ottoman History," in *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age*, ed. M. Kunt and C. Woodhead (London: Longman, 1995), 148; Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar*, 101-103.

¹⁰³ Cornell Fleischer, "The Lawgiver as Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân," in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, ed. Gilles Veinstein (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 167, 168, 174.

¹⁰⁴ Kristić, *Contested Conversions*, 20. Also see Uriel Heyd and V. L. Ménage ed., *Studies in Old Ottoman Criminal Law*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 24-32, 93-131.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting the apparent dichotomy between the official discourse and its application in various locales. Winter argues that these "draconian policies" seem to have had little or no effect on actual day-to-day administration in the Syrian provinces of the empire. Winter, "The Kızılbaş of Syria," 173.

¹⁰⁷ Refik, *Onaltıncı Asırda Rafizilik ve Bektaşilik*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 85; Sümer, *Safevi Devletinin Kuruluşu*, 153.

¹⁰⁹ MD, Vol. 14, No. 946 (19-Recep-978/December-17-1570); MD, Vol. 14, No. 849 (5-Cumadelaire-978/November-4-1570).

¹¹⁰ MD, Vol. 3, No. 172 (10-Muharrem-967/12-October-1559); MD, Vol. 3, No. 562 (Recep-968/March-1561); MD, Vol. 9, No. 102 (9-Ramazan-977/15-February-1570); MD, Vol. 14, No. 264 (11-Safer-979/4-July-1571); MD, Vol. 16, No. 532 (979/1571); and MD, Vol. 17, No. 20 (25-Muharrem-979/18-June-1571). As an example, see Sheikh Mahmud Hüdâyi's (1541-1628) *Tezakir-i Hüdayi* that informs Sultan Murad III (r. 1574-1595) concerning the Kızılbaş population and their unruly behaviors in his realm, cited in Refik, *Onaltıncı Asırda Rafizilik ve Bektaşilik*, 17-19.

caliphs, refusing to perform the religious duties of daily prayer and fasting, and, most important, engaging in sexual relationships with first-degree family members,¹¹¹ neighbors and relatives began to denounce each other as “Kızılbaş heretics” to local officials,¹¹² demonstrating how the “culture of inquisition” emanating from İstanbul effectively delegitimized the group by associating it with both the religious and political “enemy.”

Conclusion: Cessation of the “Kızılbaş Threat”

A complex network of social, political, and economic interactions between the Ottoman Empire and the Safaviyya *tariqa* began as early as the fourteenth century, opening a long-term political and religious struggle in the region. As the order transformed itself into an ideological and military movement, its leaders shaped a strong political identity that coincided with the foundation of the Safavid Empire and forced the Ottoman central authority to confront the “Kızılbaş problem” along its eastern border but also in its inner regions. By the sixteenth century, the ever-growing Safaviyya *tariqa* had become a geopolitical power, leading both empires to utilize religion for their own purposes. In southern and eastern Anatolia, an area inhabited mostly by nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, the centralizing policies of the Ottoman Empire created an environment ripe for Safavid religious propaganda and a subsequent Ottoman response to the increase in “heretics” within the empire’s borders.

The present study has aimed to document the close connection between the transformation of the Safaviyya order into a “state” and change in the different levels of tolerance and oppression shown to the various Shi’ite subjects of the Ottoman Empire and to explore the significant role that this transformation played in shaping the religious landscapes of both empires. Citing specific examples from primary sources, it has examined both the methods of religious propaganda employed by the Safavid religious and political leaders in Anatolia and frontier regions of Iraq and the drastically varying policies of the Ottoman central authority, from financial support for the order to the execution of its followers. This examination concludes that the Ottoman state’s response toward its Kızılbaş population fluctuated according to its relationship with the Safaviyya order and eventually with the Safavid Empire, precluding a singular religious or political explanation for the policy shifts by both empires.

Differences between official language and actual practice are important to take into account when examining the Ottoman relationship with Kızılbaş subjects. For instance, while the long reign of Süleyman I is infamous for the *fetvas* obtained from

¹¹¹ MD, Vol. 9, No. 102 (29-Ramazan-977/7-March-1570); Savaş, *XVI. Asırda Anadolu’da Alevilik*, 36-44.

¹¹² MD, Vol. 14, No.1558 (28-Zilhicce-978/May-23-1571); MD, Vol. 21, No. 58 (13-Ramazan-980/17-January-1573).

high religious authorities justifying brutal actions against the Kızılbaş, actual practice may not reflect this negative attitude.¹¹³ Although Ebussuud issued several *fetvas* between 1537 and 1548 asserting that those who called themselves Shi'ites or Alevi and cursed the first three caliphs recognized by Sunnis deserved to be killed because they were "nothing but infidels,"¹¹⁴ official records indicate a more benevolent attitude. According to Leslie Peirce, in the case of a Kızılbaş woman in the province of Aintab who was accused of heresy and unchaste behavior, the decision to banish her from the city reflects Suleyman I's preference for the "long-term correction of his ordinary subjects" rather than "a desire to punish them severely."¹¹⁵

In addition, the adoption of staunchly Sunni and Twelver Shi'ite religious identities by the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, respectively, should not be evaluated as isolated developments. I argue that both empires profoundly affected each other's interpretation of Islam and, thus, their establishment of a state religion. Likewise, while we cannot underestimate the significance of spirituality, pragmatism was a central motivator, not only for political and religious authorities, but also for the population as a whole, who switched sides between the two political entities on multiple occasions.

The Ottomans' response to their Kızılbaş subjects in Anatolia and Iraq was determined by the level of geopolitical threat that the Safavids presented in the region. Their level of tolerance was relatively high both before the emergence of the Safavids as a military and political power and during the periods of peace with the Safavid state, but a policy of close surveillance and persecution dominated the relationship once the Safavid state had taken shape, especially during periods of war. The question of how the Safavids themselves changed over time in response to these varying Ottoman policies should be analyzed in another study to complete this complicated puzzle.

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¹¹³ Derin Terzioğlu rightfully underlines the dichotomy between the official language and the actual practice concerning the Kızılbaş population of the Ottoman state. See Terzioğlu, "Ottoman Sunnitization," 320-324.

¹¹⁴ Düzdağ, *Şeyhülislam Ebussuud Efendi Fetvaları*, 128.

¹¹⁵ Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab*, 272-273. For another example, see MD, Vol. 14, No. 890 (28-Recep-978/December-26-1570).

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