AN ACEM STATESMAN IN THE OTTOMAN COURT: İDRİS-İ BİDLİSÎ
AND THE MAKING OF THE OTTOMAN POLICY ON IRAN

Thesis Submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
History

by

EBRU SÖNMEZ

Boğaziçi University
2006
An Acem Statesman in the Ottoman Court: İdris-i Bidişî and the Making of the Ottoman Policy on Iran

The thesis of Ebru Sönmez is approved by:

Assist. Prof. Derin Terzioğlu
(Committee Chairperson)

Prof. Selçuk Esenbel

Assist. Prof. Çiğdem Kafesçioglu

April 2006
To PEJA
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The thesis, which took an unusually long time, would not have been possible without the support of numerous individuals. First and foremost, I would like to express my indebtedness to my advisor, Assist. Prof. Derin Terzioğlu, who patiently read drafts of my chapters and provided valuable and illuminating comments and criticism during the writing process of this thesis. I am very grateful to her for her unbounded technical and editorial guidance. I also want to express my special gratitude to Prof. Selçuk Esenbel and Assist. Prof. Cigdem Kafesçioglu, who generously agreed to serve on my dissertation committee despite their intensive schedules. Their thoughtful comments and constructive criticism significantly improved the final version of my thesis. In addition, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Assist. Prof. Yücel Terzi Başoğlu for his generous and critical input at the end of the thesis.

My deep gratitude goes also to my friends and those scholars who offered support in acquiring very crucial source materials for the thesis. First of all, I would like to express my thanks to Kumiko Saito from University of Tokyo who provided me with a copy of the Sharafnâme. I am also indebted to Tarik Muhammad Nour for his assistance in acquiring critical articles from the British Library in London. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the help of the scholars who kindly helped me obtain source material: Orhan Basaran of Atatürk University in Erzurum generously sent me a copy of his dissertation on the Epilogue to the Hasht Behesht, and Mustafa Kara of Uludağ University in Bursa, who showed great interest to my study, generously provided, when necessary, secondary sources throughout the writing process of this thesis. I must also
thank Angela Roome for her care and diligence in proofreading and editing the whole text in a short period of time. Of course, my special thanks go to the staff of the Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, the Süleymaniye Library, the libraries of Boğaziçi and İstanbul Universities, the Topkapı Palace library, Topkapı Palace Archives, and the library of the İslam Arastırmaları Merkezi, all of whom granted me access to the materials in their care and provided invaluable support during my research.

The main driving force and a source of support and endless energy has been Yıldız Yılmaz. I am grateful to her for her more than generous technical help, for reviving me in the most chaotic stages of this study with her smiling, rosy face and for hosting me in her delightful home. Her husband, Ogün Karakoç, also uncomplainingly provided shuttle service between İSAM Beylerbeyi and Küplüce during this process. I thank him for his patience.

My heartfelt thanks go to all the women of my family, particularly, Gülsen Sönmez, Neşe Sönmez and Cemre, all of who reminded me of the vital things in life whenever I could not control my emotions in the writing process of this thesis. Last, but not least, my deepest gratitude is to my father, Mehmet Ali Sönmez, who has diligently watched over me since my childhood. Without his personal support, and his confidence in me, I would not have completed this project.
ABSTRACT

An Acem Statesman in the Ottoman Court: İdris-i Bidlîsî and the Making of the
Ottoman Policy on Iran

by

Ebru Sönmez

This thesis is an attempt to explore key aspects of the religious and political rift that took place between the Ottoman lands and Safavi Iran in the early sixteenth century and the roles played by Kurdish notables in that process through a study of the life, the religio-political writings and diplomatic activities of İdris-i Bidlîsî (1450 ?-1520). A bureaucrat, a scholar, a historian as well as diplomat, Bidlîsî is examined in this study principally as an enormously influential figure behind the Ottoman policies on its immediate eastern neighbors. Specifically, Chapter One, which is biographical in approach, discusses the formation of Bidlîsî as a learned man of western Iran and an Akkoyunlu bureaucrat, and the ways in which this formation aided and in some cases hampered his later career as a man of letters and a political strategist in the Ottoman court. Chapter Two, which may be considered the crux of this study, demonstrates how Bidlîsî’s dual position as an envoy of Sultan Selim and as a Kurdish notable enabled him to forge an alliance between the Kurds in the western Safavi borderlands and the Ottoman state as well as to guarantee a special status for the Kurdish notables whose lands were incorporated into the Ottoman realms. Focusing on Bidlîsî’s religio-political writings, the last chapter analyzes his contributions to the attempts among the Ottoman ulema to
formulate a sound basis for Ottoman legitimacy while delegitimating the Safavis as heretics.

The sources utilized in this study comprise various published and unpublished primary sources, including Bidlisi’s own writings such as the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*, the epilogue to the *Hasht Behesht* and *Selimshahnâme* as well as other contemporary or near-contemporary chronicles such as the *Sharafnâme*, and archival sources such as the cadastral registers of the newly conquered lands in the east and the letters of key political figures involved in the Ottoman-Safavi conflict, including Bidlisi’s own letters in form of military reports.
ÖZET

Osmanlı Sarayında Asemli bir Devlet Adamı: İdris-i Bidlisî ve
Osmanlı’nın İran Politikasının Oluşumu

Ebru Sönmez

Bu tez, on altıncı yüzyılın başlarında Osmanlı ve Safavi İran arasındaki siyasi ve dini çelişmenin en önemli yönlerini ve bu çelişmede Kürt ileri gelenlerinin oynadığı rolleri İdris-i Bidlisî’nin (1450?-1520) hayatı, dini-siyanter eserleri ve siyasi aktiviteleri aracılığıyla incelemeyi amaçlayan bir girişimidir. Bir bürokrat, alim, tarihçi ve aynı zamanda diplomat olan İdris-i Bidlisî, bu çalışmada Osmanlı’nın doğu siyasetinin oluşmasındaki en etkin şahs olarak inceleniyor. Tezin ilk bölümünde, Bidlisî’nin İran’ın batısında yetiştirilmiş bir alim ve bir Akkoyunlu bürokrat olarak formasyonu ve bu formasyonun, bir entellektüel ve siyasi stratejist olarak Osmanlı sarayında devam eden kariyerinde nasıl bir avantaja ve bazı durumlarda da dezavantaja dönüştüğü biyografik bir yaklaşımla tartışırlar. Bu çalışmanın merkezi olarak değerlendirilebilecek ikinci bölümü, Sultan Selim’ın elçisi ve bir Kürt ileri gelen olarak Bidlisî’nin, Osmanlılar ile Kürt ileri gelenleri arasında nasıl ittifak sağladığını ve Kürtlerle Osmanlı idaresi içerisinde özel bir statü verilmesini nasıl başardığını onun bu ikili pozisyonunun bir sonucu olarak incelemeye çalışıyor. Son bölüm, bir taraftan Safavilerin İslami inanış biçimlerini sapkınlık olarak değerlendirdirip reddederken, aynı zamanda Osmanlı meşruyeti için sağlam bir zemin oluşturuya çalışan Osmanlı ulemasının görüşlerine Bidlisî’nin katıldığını, onun dini-siyanter çalışmalarına odaklanarak analiz eder.

Bu çalışmada kullanılan kaynaklar, Bidlisî’nin Kânûn-i Shahenshâhi, Hasht Behesht Khâtime’si (Epilogue) ve Selimshahnâme gibi kendi çalışmalarını da dahil olmak üzere yayınlanmış ve yayınlanmamış birincil kaynakları ve bu çalışmaların
çağdaşı ya da Sharafnâme gibi yakın çağdaşı olan kronikleri içerir. Bununla birlikte, doğuda yeni fethedilmiş toprakların tapu tahrirleri, Osmanlı-Safavi çekişmesine dahil olan önemli siyasi şahsların mektupları ve Bıdîsi'nin askeri rapor niteliğindeki mektupları, bu çalışmanın arşiv kaynaklarını oluşturur.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................iv

Abstract.........................................................................................................................vi

Özet.................................................................................................................................viii

Table of Contents..........................................................................................................x

Notes on Transliterations...............................................................................................xiii

## Introduction................................................................................................................1

### Chapter One: The Life of İdris-i Bidlîsî .................................................................12

I. Bidlîsî in Tabriz.......................................................................................................13

II. An Acem Bureaucrat at the Ottoman Court.........................................................21

III. The War Years.......................................................................................................34

IV. The Last Years.......................................................................................................40

### Chapter Two: Practicing Diplomacy on Behalf of the Ottomans: The role of İdris-i Bidlîsî in the Ottoman Incorporation of Western Safavi Territories..........................42

I. The Kings of Acem: The Presentation by Bidlîş in about the Kurds..................44
   i- Locating Kurdistan..................................................................................................44
   ii- Genealogical Legitimacy.......................................................................................51
   iii- Marital Kinsmen..................................................................................................55
   iv- Kurdish Religious Affiliations............................................................................59
   v- Political Associations with Neighbors in the Early Sixteenth Century..............63

II. Organizing the Kurds on the Side of the Ottoman Sultan.................................69
i- Playing the Tribes and Members of the Same Family off Against One Another .......................................................................................................................70

ii- The Two Captive Kurdish Leaders Back in Power ........................................74

iii- The Kurds in the Iraqeyn ..............................................................................79

iv- The Unification of the Kurdish-Ottoman Forces .........................................82

III. Organizing the Administration of the Eastern Ottoman Frontiers .............89

i- Administrative Arrangements ........................................................................89

ii- The Emergence of Semi-autonomous and Autonomous Principalities: Eyâlet-i Diyarbakar and Cema’ât-i Kurdân .................................................................92

Chapter Three: İdris-i Bidlîşî’s Views on Religio-Political Authority ...........104

I. Muslim Concepts of Political Authority During the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries .................................................................................................................106

i- The Regional Caliphate ................................................................................106

ii- From Sufi Order to Polity: The Messianic Claims of the Safavi sheikh/shah ......................................................................................................................110

II. Sultan Selim Versus Shah İsma’îl: Bidlîşî’s Definition of the Caliphate-Sultanate Contrasted with the two Leaders’ Mode of Governing ..................................112

i- The Contribution of Bidlîşî to Ottoman Political Literature .....................112

ii- Bidlîşî’s Concept of the Caliphate-Sultanate ..............................................115

iii- Redefining the Criteria for the Genealogy of the Caliph ............................120

III. The Religious and Ethical Duties of the Caliph-Sultan ...............................124

i- The Union of Religion and State/Sultanate ..................................................124

ii- Jihad as a Religious Duty of the Caliph- Sultan ..........................................129
iii- The Practice of Justice………………………………………………………………………132

IV. Towards a New Formulation of the Universal Caliphate-Sultanate………………135

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………………………138

Appendix…………………………………………………………………………………………143

Map 1: Western boundary of the Safavi State around 1512………………………………143

Map 2: The Conquests of Selim I (1512-1520)………………………………………………144

Map 3: The Location of the Kurdish tribes in the Ottomans and Safavi Lands in the
sixteenth century and the semi autonomous and autonomous Kurdish principalities in the
Ottoman provincial administration in 1518…………………………………………………145

Map 4: The Ottoman State in the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566)………………146

Bibliography……………………………………………………………………………………147
NOTES ON TRANSLITERATIONS

For the transliteration of Arabic and Persian names, technical terms and book titles the present study follows the system employed in *Encyclopedia of Islam* Second edition (Leiden, 1979). The Ottoman-Turkish personal names and book titles have been transliterated according to the system used in *Türkiye Diyanet İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1988). Terms familiar to western scholars, such as Sunni, Shi’i, ulema, pasha, shah, sultan, khan, Sufi, sheikh and dervish have been given in their Anglicized form without diacriticals if they are not used in a passage quoted from the original texts. In transcriptions of the Arabic, Ottoman and Persian text into Latin script, the phonetic spelling of each has been retained. I have given the names of places in their modern Turkish form and spelling, or in their common Anglicized form, such as İstanbul, Bitlis, Hakkari - but Rumelia not Rumeli, Cairo not Kahire.
INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the contributions of the Muslim scholar and statesman İdris-i Bidlîşî (d.1520) to the solution of military, political as well as intellectual problems encountered by the Ottomans in their conflicts with the rival state of the Safavis in the early sixteenth century. A respected sufi and scholar, a notable with connections to prestigious Kurdish families in Mesopotamia, and for many years, a bureaucrat at the Akkoyunlu court, Bidlîşî was in many ways a perfect representative of the cultural and political world of Iran/Acem in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, after the destruction of the Akkoyunlu state by the newly established Safavi state, he, like many others among the Akkoyunlu elite, was compelled to make a break with his native land and enter the service of the Ottoman sultans. It was in this later phase of his life that, as a diplomat, scholar and historian, he made major contributions to the Ottoman political and ideological struggle against the Safavis.

Geographically speaking, in the early modern period, the region that was interchangeably called Acem or Iran did not correspond to the boundaries of modern Iran¹. Rather, it was understood to include Iraq-i Acem, comprising Tabriz, Isfahan, Hemedan and Tahran, and Iraq-i Arab, covering Mesopotamia. Even of the prevailing language of urban elites was Persian, the region was also home to many other languages and cultures. While Persians, Tajiks, Turcomans, Arabs and Kurds constituted the Muslim groups who lived in this geography, the non-Muslim groups included Armenians, Jews and Nestorians as well as small numbers of Buddhists and Zoroastrians. Generally

¹ On the configuration of Iran and Iranian national identity in the modern period, see Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography (New York, 2001), pp. 96-112.
speaking, Sufism was popular among Muslim groups and many Aćemî cities were known as centers of Sufi orders. Politically, the Turcoman states, the Akkoyunlus and Karakoyunlus, the Uzbeks and Mughals struggled with each other for control of the regions of Azerbaijan and Mezapotamia which fell within the borders of Iran/Acem in the fifteenth century. The Safavi state as a new political power in Iran and the Ottoman state as a state born in former Byzantine territories or “the lands of Rum” also joined the struggle for the same territories at the turn of the sixteenth century.

The transformation of the Safavi dynasty from a Sufi order into a state with a Shi‘i ideology was a development of tremendous import for early modern Iran. Its impact was also felt deeply in the “lands of Rum,” where the Safavi sheikhs had long had devoted disciples, and where they came to be seen as saviors by some of the very groups that were disgruntled with Ottoman rule. By the time Sultan Selim seized the Ottoman throne in 1512, the two states found themselves in the midst of a full-blown military, religious as well as political conflict. Also involved in this conflict were the Kurdish notables, who lived in the borderlands between these states and whose allegiance and support was sought by both of these powers.

As Mazzaoui states, the military and ideological conflict between the Ottomans and Safavis was instrumental in creating new political and religious boundaries between the western and the eastern Muslim worlds. Significantly, these boundaries were drawn not only on the battlefield, but also through complex diplomatic negotiations, religious polemics and political debates. These complex efforts required the participation of a wide range of individuals from among the elites and literati, who helped shape and

---

articulate the policies of these states from a wide variety of perspectives. Hence a proper understanding of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict also requires a careful analysis of the positions taken and roles played by these individuals.

Without doubt one of the most influential architects of the Ottoman imperial policy on Iran was the Iranian-born scholar and statesmen, İdris-i Bidlîsî. During his time of service with the Ottoman sultans, Bayezid II (r. 1481-1512) and Selim I (r. 1512-1520), Bidlîsî served as an intermediary between the Rumi and Acem worlds and from this position he had a hand in the construction of the Ottoman imperial policy on Iran. Through the use of his professional and intellectual experiences acquired during service at the Akkoyunlu court, he became involved in the cultural projects of the Ottoman sultans. As a notable of Kurdish origin, who had connections with the prestigious Kurdish families, which were potential political powers in Iran, he occupied a critical position in the Ottoman-Safavi military struggle during the reign of Sultan Selim. As a diplomat, he sought and succeeded to establish an alliance between the Ottoman state and Kurdish notables. As a scholar, he participated in the religio-political debates on Muslim rulership, which were fueled by the Ottoman-Safavi ideological conflict as well as by Ottoman expansionist policies towards eastern and southern Muslim lands.

For all these reasons, a study of the life and writings of Bidlîsî offers a unique vantage point from which to examine key aspects of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict in the early sixteenth century. Remarkably, however, no study to date has examined in detail

---

the complex roles played by Bidlîsî in this conflict. Bidlîsî is best known to Ottomanists as the author of the chronicle entitled Hasht Behesht, even though no one has yet analyzed its content or its place in Persian or Ottoman historiography. Recent noteworthy monographs on the topic include the studies by Mehmed Bayrakdar, who gives a brief overview of the life of Bidlîsî, and an introduction to his works\(^4\), and by Hicabi Kırlangıç and Orhan Başaran, who introduce original sources giving biographical information on Bidlîsî in their studies devoted to translations of the works of Bidlîsî, Selimshahnâme\(^5\) and Epilogue to Hasht Behest (Khatima of Hasht Behesht)\(^6\), respectively. Besides these, Nazmi Sevgen has translated and published some reports documenting Bidlîsî’s activities during the conflicts between the Safavis and Ottoman-Kurdish forces in the Archive of the Topkapı Palace Museum\(^7\). Apart from the translations of Bidlîsî’s works, Selimshahnâme, the Epilogue to Hasht Behest and Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî, by Hicabi Kırlangıç, Orhan Başaran, and Hasan Tavakkoli\(^8\) respectively, there is no study which analyzes the works of Bidlîsî, with the exception of the recently completed Ph.D.dissertation by Hüseyin Yılmaz. In this study, Yılmaz gives considerable place to Bidlîsî’s religio-political treatise, the Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî, which he examines in the context of the Ottoman political writings during the reign of Süleyman (1520-1566)\(^9\). Even though I was able to have access to this study near the completion of the present


\(^7\) These documents, together with translations and facsimiles, have been issued in three serial parts in Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi. See Nazmi Sevgen, “Kürüler”, Belgelerle Türk Tarihi Dergisi, 1/6 (1968), p. 57, 2/7 (1968), pp. 58-59, 2/8 (1968), pp.48-49.

\(^8\) Hasan Tavakkoli, İdrîs Bidlîsî’nin Kanun-i Şahenşahî’nin Tenkidli Neşri ve Türkçeye Tercümesi, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (İstanbul University, 1974).

study, I nevertheless benefited from its comprehensive thematic approach to the Ottoman political writings of this period in contextualizing Bidlisi’s religio-political writings.

Studies dealing with the relationship between the Ottomans and the Kurds in the early modern period make only brief mention of Bidlisi. Among them, the study of Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Sheikh and State*\(^\text{10}\), the first to give a political and social history of the Kurds, and the essays of Baki Tezcan\(^\text{11}\) and Hakan Özoğlu briefly touched up on Ottoman-Kurdish relationships as seen in the Ottoman administrative organizations in the eastern provinces in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries\(^\text{12}\). Even though their central theme is not Bidlisi’s diplomatic activities, they have given the present study a perspective from which to examine the relationship between the imperial state and the Kurdish tribal groups and the changes in the administrative positions of the Kurdish tribal leaders during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

While all these studies have contributed to our understanding of Bidlisi’s life and activities, this study aims to treat Bidlisi, his works and accomplishments from a different approach and following a different method from all the aforementioned studies. More specifically, the present study combines the methods and concerns of political and diplomatic history with the methods and concerns of intellectual history. Hence the principal narrative sources utilized in this study are examined not only for what they narrate but also for how they narrate, and what the meaning and intention of their narrations are. Recently, the study by Gabriel Piterberg, approaching Ottoman

---


\(^\text{11}\) Baki Tezcan, “The Development of the Use of ‘Kurdistan’ as a Geographical Description and the Incorporation of This Region into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century” in *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilization*, editor-in-chief Kemal Çiçek, 4 vols (Ankara, 2000), at vol. 3, pp. 540-553.

historiography through western theories on narrative by means of comparative criticism, suggests the valuable idea of considering texts as a “contextual and intended instance of discourse” 13. Through a textual analysis of several seventeenth-century chronicles narrating the military revolt that ended in the deposition and murder of Osman II (r.1681-1622), Piterberg demonstrates that each of the principal narrative representations found in Ottoman chronicles reflects the viewpoint of a particular socio-political group with which that chronicler was associated. Parallel to this, our study is also interested in considering the texts of Bidlîşî as representing a particular point of view, that is of an Acem bureaucrat who tried to adjust to a new court, a sufi-oriented scholar who claimed the right to speak about state affairs in the name of God, and a diplomat who sought to mediate between the Ottomans and the local powers. Bidlîşî’s historical narratives also tell us about his perception of himself as well as of the political figures around him. They give us an idea about the author’s interpretation of the major political developments of the period and of the key players in these developments, namely, the Ottoman sultan, Safavi shah and the Kurdish notables.

The political and religious views of Bidlîşî are manifested best in his Selimshahnâme 14 and Kânün-i Shahenshâhî 15. Bidlîşî left his Selimshahnâme unfinished and did not make a fair copy, and his son, Ebu al-Fadl (d.1563-64), after revising and

---

13 Gabriel Piterberg, An Ottoman Tragedy History and Historiography at Play (California, 2003), pp. 51-68. Even though I do not examine the historical narratives of Bidlîşî in the context of the Ottoman historiography of the early sixteenth century, Piterberg’s method influenced my perspective on and my readings of Bidlîşî’s writings as well as other chronicles relevant to my study. I would like to note here another more recent study that has exemplified best the fact that “the chronicle is inevitably an expression of the author’s politics”: Dana Sajdi, Peripheral Visions: The Worlds and Worldviews of Commoner Chroniclers in the 18th Century Ottoman Levant, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (Colombia University, 2002).

14 Bidlîşî, Selimshahnâme [hereafter referred to as SN], The Topkapı Palace Library /Emanet, nr. 1423.

15 Bidlîşî, Kânün-i Shahenshâhî [hereafter referred to as KS], Süleymaniye Library /Esad Efendi, nr. 1888/2.
editing his father’s work, presented it to Sultan Selim II almost half a century later\textsuperscript{16}. However, the autobiographical references in the text indicate that the work belonged entirely to Bidlîsî and that his son wrote only the dedication\textsuperscript{17}. As Ahmet Uğur argues in his study of the \textit{Selimnâme} literature, the purpose and motivation of the authors of the \textit{Selimnâmes}, histories of the political career of Selim beginning with his struggle for the throne, was to create an example of a heroic figure from the Ottoman dynasty At the same time, however, each \textit{Selimnâme} reflected the viewpoint of its author\textsuperscript{18}. Likewise the \textit{Selimshahnâmé}, which is based primarily on Bidlîsî’s own observations, is not only an account of a series of events but also an interpretive history about the political and military developments during the Ottoman-Safavi conflict and the rule of Sultan Selim as well as of Shah Ïsma‘il.

Moreover, the \textit{Selimshahnâmé} is unique among works of the same genre in its description of the events that took place during the second stage of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict in which the Kurds were involved. This was the period in which Bidlîsî was appointed as a diplomat and charged with organizing the tribal groups living on the western borders of the Safavi lands who were in favor of an Ottoman state\textsuperscript{19}. Significantly, Bidlîsî describes the events and represents the main actors in the events, namely the Kurdish notables, from the viewpoint of a mediator who had both imperial and local entanglements. Hence the importance of the work for understanding Bidlîsî’s political agenda, intentions and strategies during his diplomatic activities.

\textsuperscript{16} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, fol. 48a.
\textsuperscript{17} Baki Tezcan, “The Use of Kurdistan”, fn. 24, p. 550.
\textsuperscript{18} Ahmet Uğur, \textit{The Reign of Sultan Selim I In The Light Of The Selim-Nâme Literature} (Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin, 1985), pp. 1, 8.
\textsuperscript{19} Even though another \textit{Selimnâme} written by Şükri-i Bidlîsî also gives space to the military developments in the east, he was not involved in this development. Furthermore, it is doubtful that he witnessed the events.
The *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* is a political work written towards the end of the reign of Sultan Selim. By that time, the Ottoman armies had won a major victory against the Mamluks, incorporating a vast chunk of the Arabic speaking lands from Aleppo to the Hijaz and Cairo into their empire. Moreover, political tension between the Ottoman and Safavi state was once again escalating to culminate in yet another war in the reign of Süleyman. Both of these developments must have been in the mind of Bidlîsî, when he penned this important work. More specifically, the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* responded to the need to revise and idealize the Ottoman imperial image as the universal and absolute leader of Muslim world. In the present work, the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* is examined to understand Bidlîsî’s conceptualization of the offices of the sultanate and caliphate, which provided the theoretical basis of his arguments for the superiority of Sultan Selim over Shah Isma’îl, which he presented in the *Selimshahnâme*.

For information about the life of Bidlîsî, the present study also uses the epilogue to his *magnum opus*, the *Hasht Behesht*\(^{20}\), which consists of eight volumes and contains eight thousand couplets. It is interesting that this work did not create the positive reaction expected by Bidlîsî and it was for this reason that Bidlîsî left İstanbul for Mecca. In the epilogue to the *Hasht Behesht*, which he wrote in Mecca, Bidlîsî describes himself and his career and his promotions during the process of writing the *Hasht Behesht*, and afterwards he dedicates it to Sultan Bayezid. This information allows us to see a cross-section of his life between 1510 and 1512.

It should be noted that Bidlîsî wrote all the works discussed above in Persian. The Persian philologists, Hicabi Kırlangıç, Hasan Tavakkoli and Orhan Başaran respectively,  

---

\(^{20}\) İdris-i Bidlîsî, *Hasht Behesht Khâtima* [hereafter referred to as *HB*], Sûleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr. 2197.
translated the *Selimshahnâme*, the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* and the epilogue to the *Hasht Behesht* into Turkish. Our study did not neglect these translations. Rather the works of Bidlîsî were read both in translation and also in the original texts, preserved in the Süleymaniye Library and in Topkapı Palace Library, in order to expedite this study.

Apart from Bidlîsî’s own works, the *Sharafnâme*21, a local history written in 1596 by Şeref, the Kurdish governor of the province of Bitlis, provides us with invaluable information about the Kurdish social, cultural, political and religious life, and Kurdish involvement in political developments between the Ottoman and Safavi states. Even though the *Sharafnâme* was written almost half a century later than the *Selimshahnâme*, it shares with that text a common concern: to legitimate for an Ottoman imperial audience the political existence of the Kurdish tribes in Iran. Therefore, this work is used in parallel with the *Selimshahnâme* throughout the present study. In addition, Ottoman chronicles such as *Tacü’t-Tevârih* by Hoca Saadeddin (d.1599)22 and secondary studies on the religious treatises written by Kemalpașazâde (1468-1534) and Ebussu‘ud (1490-1574)23 are used to provide glimpses of the wider religio-political discussions of the time and to reveal the place of Bidlîsî in those discussions.

The present study also makes use of archival materials. The military reports of Bidlîsî, covering the years between 1514 and 1516, constitute the most important sources, providing us with information about his diplomatic visits to the western borders of the Safavi state as well as with crucial insight into his perspective as a mediator with both

---

21 Scheref, *Scheref-Nameh* [hereafter referred to as *Sharafnâme*], ed. by V. Veliaminof-Zernof 2 vols. (St.-Petersburg, 1860), vol. II.
imperial and local entanglements. In addition, the letters sent to Sultan Selim by Bıyıklı Mehmet Pasha, the Ottoman official commanding the Ottoman-Kurdish armies in Diyarbakır, are utilized as reports written from a more straightforwardly imperial perspective. Finally, the present study also makes use of the cadastral registers of the newly conquered eastern provinces of the Ottoman state, which have been published by Mehdi İlhan.  

By utilizing all these sources, this study aims first of all to draw a detailed portrait of Bidlîsî as an Iranian emigree in the Ottoman court, a transmitter of Iranian cultural and political traditions to the Ottoman realms and one of the architects of the Ottoman imperial policy on Iran at the height of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict in the early sixteenth century. In a more general sense, this thesis also aspires to shed new light on at least two key aspects of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict. One concerns the importance of negotiation and bargaining alongside military strategy and confrontation in the Ottoman expansion to the east in general and in Ottoman-Kurdish relations in particular. The other concerns the religious and political discussions that were prompted by the Ottoman-Safavi conflict and the redefinition of the concept of Muslim rulership in these discussions in the early sixteenth century.

This thesis is organized in three chapters. The first chapter presents an account of the life of Bidlîsî within the cultural and political context of the early sixteenth century. Central themes include his religious, intellectual and political formation in Iran, his migration to the Ottoman lands following the overthrow of the Akkoyunlus by the Safavis and his attempts to adjust to the vicissitudes of the Ottoman court in the reign of Bayezid I, and following the accession to the throne of Selim I, his intense efforts to

---

forge a military and political alliance between the Ottomans and the Kurdish notables in the eastern borderlands.

The second chapter, then, examines in detail the roles played by Bidlîsî as an intermediary between the Ottoman imperial state and Kurdish notables. Specifically, this chapter tries to answer the following questions: A) How did Bidlîsî represent the Kurds to the Ottoman imperial government? What kinds of strategies did he employ to present them as credible and indeed indispensable partners? B) What were the results of his mediation between the Kurds and the Ottomans? C) What kind of administrative policy was introduced in the lands where the Kurds lived after their incorporation into the Ottoman state? All in all, this chapter attempts to demonstrate both the decisive roles played by Bidlîsî in the Ottoman expansion to the east and the interplay of local and imperial dynamics in the political history common to the Kurds, the Ottomans and the Safavis in the early sixteenth century.

The last chapter examines the contribution of Bidlîsî to the Ottoman religio-political discussions that were fueled by the Ottoman-Safavi rivalry. An introductory section lays the groundwork by considering the concepts of political rulership that prevailed in fifteenth-century Iran and the Ottoman state, and the new departure taken by Shah Ismail upon his rise to power at the turn of the sixteenth century. Next comes a discussion of Bidlîsî’s views on the nature of political rulership, and his efforts to bolster the image of the Ottoman sultan with reference to a reconstituted concept of the universal caliph, while denigrating the Safavi shah as a heretic and a tyrant.
CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE OF İDRİS-İ BİDLİSİ

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the political balance changed in the Middle East with the emergence of a new power, the Safavi state. By 1501, the Safavi leader Shah İsmail had mobilized a vast number of Turcoman tribes who saw him as their religious (and now, also political) leader, clashed with two powerful dynasties in Iran and Transoxiana - the Akkoyunlus and the Timurids, and put an end to the Akkoyunlu state. In addition to these political changes, the adoption of Shi’ism by the Safavi ruler also affected the lives of the people of the region, marginalizing some and forcing others to leave their native lands.

The life of Bidlîsî also bears the traces of these changes. Even though it is not entirely clear whether religious differences with the Safavis were the main factor that prompted Bidlîsî to leave Iran, it is certain that the new conditions compelled him to look for a protector other than Shah İsmail, the founder of the Safavi State. Bidlîsî’s move from the lands of Iran to “the lands of the Rum,” and for a brief time, to Cairo, constitutes the most important turning point in his life. With this move, Bidlîsî not only started an uncertain search for a new patron, but also had to adjust to and prove himself in a significantly different cultural and political environment. In order to understand this rupture in his life, this chapter first examines the social and intellectual formation of Bidlîsî by outlining the cultural milieu of fifteenth-century Tabriz in which he grew up. Then it details his experiences as he struggled to obtain a high rank at the Ottoman court.

I. Bidlîsî in Tabriz

In the fifteenth century, the eastern Islamic lands had a rich religio-cultural make-up, and were home to a variety of sectarian and popular Sufi orders. In the middle of the fifteenth century, Bidlîsî was born in the village of Suliqan in Rayy, which was close to Tabriz, the capital of the Akkoyunlu State, and the center of a mystical order – the Nurbakhshî- the most active center of that time. But, as his surname indicates, Bidlîsî’s family originally came from the province of Bitlis, which in the fifteenth century was another important cultural and political center.

His father, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî (d.1495), was a respected and learned mystic who had lived in Bitlis. Husâm al-din Bidlîsî had close connections with the leading Kurdish families in Bitlis. In addition, he had served as divan secretary at the court of the Akkoyunlu sultan, Uzun Hasan (d.1478). Much more than a statesman his position in the Akkoyunlu court might have been established on the pattern of a religio-political patronage. Like other Muslim rulers of that time, Uzun Hasan too, protected religious scholars, dervishes and mystical leaders, and enlisted them as his closest companions. Uzun Hasan’s close relations with these groups as their spiritual leader and protector provided him with political benefits, because the dervishes acted as mediators and negotiators between the Akkoyunlu state and the tribes, over whom the dervishes exerted a strong influence. Most likely, Uzun Hasan aimed to control the religious leaders by keeping them in proximity in order to prevent their mystical power from turning into a military power to be used against the state. It is difficult to know the exact nature of the

---

relationship between the Akkoyunlu sultans and the Bidlîsî family in this regard because of a scarcity of information. Still, the esteem in which Husâm al-din Bidlîsî was held among powerful Kurdish tribes brings to mind the possibility that Husâm al-din Bidlîsî, as a respected Sufi, functioned as a mediator between the Kurdish tribes and Uzun Hasan, like other dervishes surrounding Uzun Hasan. It is also probable that his political importance facilitated his advancement as a bureaucrat in the Akkoyunlu bureaucracy.

Biographical notes in the *Sharafnâme* put emphasis on Husâm al-din Bidlîsî’s identity as a highly respected Sufi rather than as a bureaucrat. Even though Husâm al-din Bidlîsî was a disciple of Muhammed Nurbakhsh (d. 1464), a Sufi who had at one point claimed to be the Mahdi, his spiritual reputation does not seem to have stemmed from his being a leader or follower of any of the messianic movements that emerged from within Sufi circles in Iran and Transoxiana in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Without giving any details, Bidlîsî confirms his father’s association with Nurbakhsh and, in his own works, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî also identifies himself as a Nurbahshî. On the other hand, the *Kitâb al-Nusûs* that Husâm al-din Bidlîsî wrote on Sufi philosophy suggests that he did not follow or approve of Nurbakhsh’s messianic claims. Considering that Nurbakhsh himself did not continue his messianic claims after he settled

---

29 *Sharafnâme*, p. 342.
32 In the light of this book, it can be consider that the father of Bidlîsî had tendency to Nurbakhsh not because the latter claimed to be Mahdi, but because he held the philosophy of *ishrakîyya* of Suhrawardî. For the Husâm al-din Bidlîsî’s attempts to understand the existence of God see Çakmakhoğlu, *Ibid.*
in Rayy, Bashir’s assumption that Husâm al-din Bidlîsî was part of the group that regarded Nurbakhsh as a great mystic but not as the Mahdi seems reasonable\textsuperscript{33}.

Husâm al-din Bidlîsî’s concern for Sufism and his powerful connections from birth with the Sufi orders can be considered to have shaped İdris-i Bidlîsî’s identity in Tabriz society. The record of his birth, made by Muhammed Nurbakhsh’s son, Fayd Allâh Nurbakhsh, implies that İdris-i Bidlîsî was born as a member of the Nurbakhshî order\textsuperscript{34}, even though he was later attracted to the Khalwatî sheikh, İbrahim Gûlşenî. It is more than likely that, like his father, Bidlîsî was not a steadfast follower of any Sufi sheikh, but rather entertained a general sympathy for men of wisdom\textsuperscript{35}, and probably completed the training (seyrûsûlûk) of many religious orders such as Safi and Gûlshenî, besides Nurbakhshî.

As the \textit{Kitâb al-Nusûs} makes clear, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî’s mystical views encompassed various expressions of Sufism such as the doctrinal Sufism developed by Ibn Arabî, Koranic commentaries from a Sufi perspective, and the expression of divine love with which Suhrawardî was associated\textsuperscript{36}. Like many Muslims in the fifteenth century, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî also had strong Alid loyalty. The main reason behind the devotion of Husâm al-din Bidlîsî to Ali b. Abu Tâlib (d.661) was the latter’s influence among the mystics. It was believed that Ali b. Abu Tâlib had written an esoteric commentary on the Koran entitled \textit{Khutba al-Bayân}\textsuperscript{37}. The Koranic commentaries by many Iranian Sufis drew inspiration from this esoteric commentary, and likely used it to

\textsuperscript{33} Bashir, \textit{Messianic Hopes}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{34} For this record see, Orhan Başaran, “İdris Bitlisi hakkında Bazı Yeni Bilgiler”, p. 203; Bidlîsî, \textit{Mecmuâ}, fol. 189.
\textsuperscript{35} For Bidlîsî’s similar utterances see Bidlîsî, \textit{Mîr‘at al-Ushşâk}, Süleymaniye Library /Esad Efendi, nr. 1888/4, ff. 153a, 154b.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 5-6.
justify their interpretation of Koranic verses from a mystical point of view. As a Sufi, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî also wrote a gloss on Ali’s *Khutba al-Bayân*.

Still, it would be wrong to conclude simply on the basis of his inclination towards Ibn Arabî’s philosophy, and his Alid loyalty, that Husâm al-din Bidlîsî believed in Twelver Shi’ism, as Bashir has suggested. In fact, in the fifteenth century, Ali was greatly revered by both Sunni and Shi’i Sufis. Their Alid loyalty has sometimes led Sufis to be misidentified as Shi’i, as has also been the case with some Sufi-oriented scholars such as Jalâl al-din Dawânî (d. 1502) who was a companion of Husâm al-din Bidlîsî. These views probably also reflect the efforts of later Shi’i scholars to identify the Iranian Sufis of the early fifteenth century as Shi’i. In reality, Imami Shi’ism and its missionary activities were not yet widespread in the Iran of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Rather at that time, Tabriz, like the rest of Iran was predominantly Sunni.

Besides, a common point between Sufism and Alid loyalty was the conceptualization of the perfect man (*insan-i kâmil*) as seen in the character of Ali. Consequently, Husâm al-din Bidlîsî’s love for Ali stemmed from Ali’s interest in esoteric knowledge, and seems different from that of a Shi’i devotee. On the other hand, it is difficult to declare that Husâm al-din Bidlîsî was an ardent adherent of any Sufi groups. Rather, he was part of a vast Sufi network consisting of different orders including Nurbakhshî, Gûlshenî and Nakshibandî, and he participated in the meetings of the

---

42 Ibid., p. 3.
43 Babayan, *Mystics*, p. xi
founders and disciples of these orders, such as İbrahim Gülşenî (d.1534) and Mulla Jâmî (d.1492)\textsuperscript{44}.

The multifaceted affiliations of his father would play an important role in forming Bidlîsî’s character during his early life. In fact, Bidlîsî’s father was also his first tutor. In his translation and commentary on forty famous hadiths, Bidlîsî mentions his father’s role in transmitting to him the prophetic traditions with the words: “I heard from my sheikh” or “I heard from my master” \textsuperscript{45}. Probably under the influence of his father, as well as of general trends in theological and mystical studies in the eastern Muslim lands in the fifteenth century, Bidlîsî adopted what Harun Anay has called the “eclectic” views of Dawânî. According to Anay, Dawânî formulated his teachings on tefsîr and hadiths by drawing upon such diverse sources of influence as the ishrâkkiyyûn (illumination) philosophy of Suhrawardî (d.1191), the philosophy of Ibn Sina (d.1037) and Tûsî (d.1277-8), the kelam and logic of Bayzâwî (d.1286), Icî (d.1459-60), Taftazânî (d.1390) and Jurjânî (d.1413), and eventually the Sufism of Ibn Arabî\textsuperscript{46}. Like Dawânî and his father, Bidlîsî, too, interpreted hadiths and Koranic verses in a mystical vein, and supported his Sufîesque conclusions with hadiths and Koranic verses. \textit{Mir’ât al-Ushshâk}, \textit{Tarjuma wa Tafsîr-i Hadis-i Arba’în} and \textit{Hakk al- Mubîn fî Sharh-i Hakk al -Yakîn} are some mystical and religious treatises of Bidlîsî in which such eclectic views can be detected.

Bidlîsî wrote most of his works in Persian, but he also wrote several treatises on religious and social matters and politics in Arabic. It seems that he had mastered Arabic

\textsuperscript{44} Muhyî Gülşenî, \textit{Menâkıb-ı İbrahim Gülşenî}, ed. by Tahsin Yazıcı (Ankara, 1982), pp. 40, 126; also see, Çakmaklioğlu, Hüsameddin Bitlisî, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{45} Bidlîsî, \textit{Tarjuma wa Tafsîr-i Hadis-i Arba’în}, Süleymaniye Library/Fatih, nr. 791/1, fol. 3a.
since at least the age of sixteen, since at that age he copied out a work about astrology and arithmetic in that language\textsuperscript{47}. On the other hand, most probably Bidlîşî could not write well in Turkish. Bidlîşî owed his mastery of the Persian and Arabic languages, and particularly Persian, to the training he received at the Akkoyunlu court. It must be thanks to the connection of his father with the Akkoyunlu court that Bidlîşî was educated as a bureaucrat. He became \textit{divan} secretary at the Akkoyunlu court and he was promoted from this position to be the chancellor of the court (\textit{munshî-i mamâlik}).

It can be assumed that in his professional life, Bidlîşî combined his religious education with education in the arts of governance, literature and cosmology. Two of the religious scholars and chroniclers at the Akkoyunlu court who might have had an influence in shaping the identity of Bidlîşî as a statesman were Dawânî and Kadi Îsa Sawaji (d.1491). Both of these figures served at the Akkoyunlu court at the same time as Bidlîşî, and sought to centralize the Akkoyunlu government. Woods, who has examined this attempt at institutionalization during the reign of Uzun Hasan, considers Kadi Îsa Sawaji to be the main implementer of the administrative reforms, and Dawânî to be the principal ideologue for the monarchical claims of the Akkoyunlu rulers\textsuperscript{48}. As we shall see in Chapter Three, the political teachings of Dawânî, based on the ethical principles of the caliph/sultan derived from Persian, Hellenic and Muslim sources, had a great effect on Bidlîşî’s understanding of political authority, while those of Kadi Îsa Sawaji influenced the statesmanlike attitude of Bidlîşî in administrative affairs.

Even though Woods defines the office of chancellor as a high ranking position in the Akkoyunlu bureaucracy, there is little evidence that Bidlîşî had political influence at

\textsuperscript{47} Başaran, \textit{Heşt Bihişt}, pp. 15-16.
the court. Besides, it is unclear by what means Bidlîsî pursued his interest in political philosophy. In his treatises, he simply defines himself as a counselor who had gained the favor of Yakub Khan⁴⁹. Still, Bidlîsî displayed his vast knowledge of the art of governance in the political treatises he penned as well as in his political actions after he quit the Iranian lands⁵⁰.

Patron-client relationships were an important asset in climbing the steps of bureaucracy in Iran in the late fourteenth century. As Bidlîsî’s numerous poems indicate, his close relationship with various political and religious figures at the Akkoyunlu court must also be examined in the context of patronage relations. Most of his poems that have been passed down to us were dedicated to the Akkoyunlu sultans, Yakub Khan, Sultan Halil, Göde Ahmed, or to religious scholars and Sufi sheikhs like Kadi İsa Sawaji and İbrahim Gülşenî who had influence in the Akkoyunlu palace⁵¹. It is clear that the writing of such poetry was an effective tool in establishing personal relationships and in participating in different cultural networks. Bidlîsî’s efforts to praise the important figures surrounding him may be regarded as a necessary act to obtain an influential position and to communicate with political figures. Likewise, he asked his sheikh, İbrahim Gülşenî, to intercede between him and the Akkoyunlu sultan in expressing his dissatisfaction to his protector⁵².

The writings of Bidlîsî reveal the scope of his intellectual concerns. In addition to the political treatises in which he deals with the affairs of government and law, he also

⁴⁹ See Bidlîsî, Risâla-iKhazâniyya, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr. 1881/7; also see Abdüsselam Uygur, “Bidlîsî’nin Tespit Edilebilen İlk Telîf Eseri-Risâle-i Hazâniya-’nın Türkçe Tercümesi”, (Unpublished article).
⁵⁰ Some examples of his political treatises are Mir’ât a-Jamâl, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr. 1881/1, Risâla fi’l-Khilâfa wa Adâb al –Salâtîn, İstanbul University Library, nr. F 1228, and Kânûn-i Shâhenshâhî.
⁵¹ For his poetries see Bidlîsî, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr. 1888/1,3,6, ff. 2a-7a, 137b.
⁵² Gülşenî, Menâkib-i İbrahim Gülşenî, p. 355.
composed a treatise on the “philosophy of nature” in which he discussed the effects of climate on human character, as well as a medical treatise on the plague, which was the most fatal disease in Tabriz and its environs at the time. While as an intellectual, he must have felt bound to address a medical problem that affected large numbers of people, a second motivation might have been the accusations directed at him for having left the city during the plague epidemic. Writing after his career as an Akkoyunlu bureaucrat had come to an end, Bidlîsî would emphasize his responsibilities towards the people by referring to himself as an advisor to sultans, a poor dervish who wept for the love of God, or a messenger (dâʿî) of Islam, in order to redefine and consolidate his position in the eyes of whoever would pay attention to his sayings.

Bidlîsî served Yakub Khan as chancellor until his death in 1490. After this time the Akkoyunlu princes started fighting each other for supreme power and as a result each of them sat on the throne for a short period. This led to political instability in the Akkoyunlu administration. When the Akkoyunlu state was further undermined and eventually annexed by the Safavi State, some of the elite of the Akkoyunlu court took up positions at the Safavi court, while others refused to continue their career under the Safavis. It seems that the end of the Akkoyunlu state created a chaotic situation between different groups at the Akkoyunlu court. In this connection, the intensity of the

55 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 105a-b.
56 Bidlîsî, HB, fol. 557a; Başaran, Heşt Bihişt, pp. 198-199.
57 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 103b-104a, 129b, 133b.
58 For the details of rapid disintegration in the Akkoyunlu state after the death of Yakub Khan see Woods, The Aqquyunlu Clan, pp. 160-178.
migrations from Persia to other Muslim states, such as Egypt, Transoxiana and the Ottoman State, suggests the uneasiness and indecision of the Akkoyunlu elite\textsuperscript{60}.

II. An Acem Bureaucrat at the Ottoman Court

Bidlîsî was probably in his fifties when in 1500 he decided to leave the Akkoyunlu court. Until that time, he had witnessed both the prestigious years of the Akkoyunlu state in the reigns of Uzun Hasan and Yakub Khan, and the disintegration of that state at the beginning of the sixteenth century. As someone who had been reared in the Iranian cultural tradition and who had served the Akkoyunlu state for a long time, Bidlîsî must have been fully immersed in the specific ways of the Akkoyunlus in a wide variety of fields from administration to law and from religion to language. Moreover, he was no longer a young man who could quickly adjust to a new political culture and become involved in the networks of a different royal household. All these factors must have left him in a state of indecision and anxiety when he left his high ranking career and familiar milieu behind him. He confessed as much when he wrote, “my first place of exile was Rum”\textsuperscript{61}.

As a bureaucrat reared in the Acem political and cultural tradition, Bidlîsî could have continued his career and used his professional experience at the court of Shah Îsma‘îl, whose state was considered to be the successor to the Akkoyunlu state. Woods claims that Bidlîsî considered the rise of Safavi state as a divine instrument to punish the

\textsuperscript{60} Other Akkoyunlu elites who migrated from the Iranian lands included Şükri Bidlîsî, poet, who went to Istanbul in 1500, İbrahim Gülşeni who went to Cairo in 1502 and Fadl Allâh Isfakhânî who migrated to Transoxiana in 1508.

\textsuperscript{61} Bidlîsî, \textit{HB}, fol.555b; Başaran, \textit{Heşt Bihişt}, p. 181.
tyrannical tribal leaders of the Akkoyunlu. But, it seems that, unlike many in Sufi circles, Bidlîsî declined to take up service under Shah Ḩūṣayn. Instead he preferred to pursue his career at the Ottoman court.

Apparently, sectarian differences did not play a significant role in Bidlîsî’s choice. A story that suggests the ambiguity of Bidlîsî’s sectarian affiliations is recounted in the *Sharafnâme*. According to this, when Shah Ḩūṣayn heard the Bidlîsî’s words indicating Shah Ḩūṣayn as the follower of the false sect, the Twelver Imams, (*madhab-i nā hakk*), the latter asked Bidlîsî whether he utilized such a phrase. Bidlîsî conceded that he had indeed written it. However, he added that this phrase should be read according to the Arabic rather than the Persian genitive structure. In other words, he had meant to say that “our sect is true (*madhabnâ hakkun*)” 63. Upon Bidlîsî’s these sayings, Shah Ḩūṣayn applauded Bidlîsî’s mastery of rhetoric and invited Bidlîsî to work in his court. Bidlîsî responded this invitation with a poem in which he celebrated the companionship between their ancestors as well as between him and Shah Ḩūṣayn in the mystical path 64.

It is important to point out that while this story does not actually brand Bidlîsî as the follower of the Safavi shah, it does suggest that he did not degrade his mystical link with the Shah Ḩūṣayn and his ancestors, at least not directly. Probably, Şeref cited this story as he heard it from Ebu al-Fadl, who had a close relationship with Bidlîsî’s son, to account for rumors that Bidlîsî had belonged to the sect of Shah Ḩūṣayn. As the *Sharafnâme* indicated and also as we shall see in the last chapter of this study, Bidlîsî gave high credit to the sheikhs of the Safi order, as did his father, and must have regarded Shah Ḩūṣayn as heir to this order. Nevertheless Bidlîsî would reject the changes in the

---

63 *Sharafnâme*, p. 343.
64 *Sharafnâme*, pp. 343-344.
mystical thoughts of Shah İsma‘il, and the Safavi ideology, Shi’ism that was introduced in the process of transforming the Safi order into a political power. Therefore, the story might have tried to underline the fact that even though Bidlîsî and his father had close connection with the Safi sheikhs in the mystical path, he rejected the invitation of Shah İsma‘il because of the impossibility of any companionship between the two of them in political affairs.

Besides, in order to establish his state on the basis of Shi‘i doctrine, Shah İsma‘il had alienated many Sufi leaders who had Sunni tendency, such as İbrahim Gülşenî⁶⁵. All this had made the lands of Iran unsafe for mystics from different sects as well as for the learned elite affiliated with Sufism like Bidlîsî.

Before deciding to go to İstanbul, Bidlîsî considered going to Mecca on pilgrimage. But, someone advised him to visit İstanbul before Mecca⁶⁶. Had he at that time gone on that pilgrimage, Bidlîsî might possibly afterwards have wanted to go to Cairo, the capital of the Mamluk state, to request the patronage of the Mamluk sultan. Bidlîsî’s master, İbrahim Gülşenî had taken refuge with the Mamluk sultan after the political upheavals in the Akkoyunlu lands and Bidlîsî might at that time have wanted to join him⁶⁷. Even though he changed his mind and went to the Ottoman court, Cairo remained a viable option for him. When he clashed with the Ottoman bureaucrats in 1511, he would leave the Ottoman court under the pretext of going on pilgrimage, but would not return to İstanbul. Instead, he would stay on in Mecca, probably in order to go on to Cairo.

---

⁶⁵Arjomand, “Religious Extremism”, p. 3.
⁶⁶Bidlîsî, *HB*, fol. 555b
⁶⁷For the information about involuntary migration of İbrahim Gülşenî due to the oppressions of Kızılbaş see Gülşenî, *Menâkıb-i İbrahim Gülşenî*, pp. 246-255.
Bidlisî seems to have come to the Ottoman court without a prior invitation, but in the expectation that he would find a receptive audience there as a man of learning and culture. He spoke of his expectations, saying that because Bayezid II was the “kibla” of those in need, and because, at his court, men of knowledge were valued, he had gone to the land of this sultan in order to gain esteem. In the Hasht Behesht, in which he describes his first encounter with the Ottoman sultan, Bidlisî claims that it was Sultan Bayezid who asked him to stay at the Ottoman court, rather than him petitioning the sultan to allow him to do so. Nevertheless, Bidlisî had prepared himself to come into the presence of the sultan, and presented him with some gifts including a book, Mir’ât al-jamâl. According to Bidlisî, although the sultan had already heard about his scholarly fame, he still wanted to test Bidlisî’s knowledge, because he wanted to receive the worthiest scholars from every country. All these remarks from the epilogue to the Hasht Behesht inevitably reflect Bidlisî’s state of mind after ten years of struggle to gain esteem at the Ottoman court. However, there is little reason to doubt that Bidlisî was in dire need of proving his scholarly excellence at that time.

In fact, there was a great deal of ongoing social, cultural as well as diplomatic contact between the Ottoman state and the eastern Muslim lands. The rulers of these lands were in competition, not only for power but also for the prestige of providing patronage to the foremost scholars and mystics of the time. As one of the greatest rulers of this region, Sultan Bayezid, too, was greatly interested in Iranian men of letters such as Dawânî and Mulla Jâmî and corresponded with them probably in order to attract them to

---

68 Bidlisî, HB, fol. 555b.
69 Ibid.
the Ottoman palace. In this respect, the collapse of the Akkoyunlu State was greatly to the advantage of the Ottoman State, and made it possible for many poets, Sufis and bureaucrats from the lands of Acem to be employed at the Ottoman court. Sultan Bayezid also appreciated Bidlîsî’s professional experience. When the latter entered Ottoman service, the sultan appointed him as court secretary to the princes, and assigned him a salary from the revenues of the village of Dubniçe in Rumelia. Even though this position was an important advancement for a newcomer at the Ottoman court, Bidlîsî does not mention these years in his writings, probably because he did not find the position commensurate with the experience of someone such as himself who had previously served other sultans.

The crucial event in Bidlîsî’s account of these years is the sultan’s request that he write a history of the Ottoman dynasty. Accordingly, Sultan Bayezid wanted the Ottoman dynasty to be commemorated by a work of history written in an eloquent style (…murâd-i men hemîn zikr-i jemîl est…) and he thought that the only person who was capable of producing such a work was Bidlîsî (nedânam ze ehl-i ‘ilm ez dovr u nazdik, der ân hidmet kesi râ bâ to tashrîk). Even though it is impossible to know whether these words indeed belonged to the sultan or not, what is important here is what Bidlîsî understood about the art of historical writing. Taking into consideration the style of the epilogue of the Hasht Behesht, it may be suggested that Bidlîsî was immersed in the eastern Iranian tradition of historiography. In Quinn’s recent study on Persian historiography, the most pronounced features of the tradition are summarized as the use of ornate, elaborate phrases and

---

70 See the letters of Sultan Bayezid sent to Mulla Jâmî and Dawânî see Feridun Bey, Münşeâtü’Selâtîn, (İstanbul, 1858), 2 vols., at vol. I, pp. 361-363.
72 Bidlîsî, HB, fol. 555b; Başaran, Heşt Bihişt, p. 183.
numerous rhetorical embellishments\textsuperscript{73}. These features are also dominant in Bidlîsî’s *Hasht Behesht*, which gained fame for its eight thousand verses. Bidlîsî argued in the epilogue to the *Hasht Behesht* that history should be composed in such an ornate style because unless history is narrated in this ‘high style’, it will not be remembered till eternity. Bidlîsî also stated that his main purpose was not to simply provide a coherent account of events, but to reconfigure them in a narrative embellished with metaphors, similes, homonyms and anagrams\textsuperscript{74}.

In the early sixteenth century, when the *Hasht Behesht* was written, there already existed a series of chronicles in the *Tevârîh-i Âl-i Osman* genre that detailed the history of the Ottoman state from its beginnings until the current time. Fleischer points out that although late sixteenth-century Ottoman literati continued to use the chronicles of historians of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries such as Āşıkpaşazâde and Neşrî as their sources, they also found the language of these chronicles to be simple and unadorned\textsuperscript{75}. Quite a few of these texts, which date, at least in their present form, from after the conquest of Constantinople, were found too naïve to match the imperial image and prestige of the Ottoman House\textsuperscript{76}. This suggests a reason for Sultan Bayezid’s commissioning a history of the Ottoman dynasty written in the tradition of Iranian historiography. When it fell to Bidlîsî to realize this project, he did so by crafting a richly textured narrative in Persian. This was a work designed not only to enhance the Ottoman dynastic image as the most prestigious sovereign in the Muslim world, but also to bring cultural legitimacy to its designs to enlarge its border towards Iran.

\textsuperscript{73} Sholeh Quinn, *Historical Writing During The Reign of Shah ʿAbbas* (The University of Utah Press, 2000), p. 23.

\textsuperscript{74} Bidlîsî, *HB*, fol. 556a; Başaran, *Hest Bihišt*, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{75} Fleischer, *Mustafa Ālı*, pp. 238-39.

While the stylistic elegance of Bidlîsî set a new standard in the writing of Ottoman dynastic history, it also caused some unease among the Ottoman courtiers. From Âşık Çelebi’s tezkire, a biographical dictionary devoted to the poets of Rum, we learn that what seemed to be a particular problem was that the *Hasht Behesht* was written in Persian. According to Âşık Çelebi, Müeyyedzâde, the kadiasker of Anatolia, recommended to the sultan that an Ottoman history should be written in Turkish and that his former student Kemalpaşazâde, who was müderris at the medrese of Taşlık in Edirne at that time, would be best able to do that. Upon this, Sultan Bayezid asked Kemalpaşazâde to compose an Ottoman dynastic history written in much the same style as Bidlîsî’s, but in Ottoman Turkish prose rather than in Persian verse.

In addition, some Ottoman courtiers took a critical view of the *Hasht Behesht* on account of its rhetorical embellishments. According to Bidlîsî, they claimed that the metaphorical and rhetorical flourishes used even to narrate a simple event rendered the text of the *Hasht Behesht* verbose and obscure. Besides, the references the *Hasht Behesht* made to the ancient kings of Iran in line with the conventions of Islamic Iranian historiography seemed to attract the reactions of the Ottoman courtiers. Fully immersed in the tradition of Iranian literature and historiography, in which the ancient kings of Iran such as Rüstem, Behram and Jamshid epitomized the ideal ruler, Bidlîsî frequently compared the Ottoman sultans with them in his work. But “the Ottoman readers”, Bidlîsî explains, “could not understand whether he praised the Ottoman sultans or their enemies, the Iranian kings ” because of the difficulty of his style. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Kemalpaşazâde issued a fetva, probably some years later after the

---

77 Tezkere of Âşık Çelebi, fol. 37a.
78 Bidlîsî, HB, fol. 555a.
appearance of the *Hasht Behesht*, concerning the religious permissibility of comparing
the Ottoman sultans with the infidel kings of the past⁷⁹.

In fact, the Ottomans who knew or could read Persian were not few in number,
likewise, they also made frequent reference to the ancient kings of Iran in their writings⁸⁰.
Therefore the main reason for the critique of Bidlîsî’s *Hasht Behesht* should not have
been on account of its rhetorical embellishments that were also used by the early Ottoman
chronicles. At the same time, some of the criticism seems to have stemmed from the
resentment felt by the Ottoman elite towards the newcomers, particularly the Acems, who
were promoted by the Ottoman sultans without climbing up the steps of bureaucracy⁸¹. It
is possible that as an émigré from Acem to the Ottoman lands Bidlîsî became a
convenient target for various individuals who had to through a long and difficult process
to occupy a position in the Ottoman court. In part, too, the criticisms reflected the
ambivalence felt by the Ottoman elites, who sought to forge an identity peculiar to the
Ottoman judicial and cultural practices⁸², towards the Iranian cultural tradition, even as
they engaged in a competitive dialogue with it. In this regard, the history of the Ottoman
House, which was written by Kemalpaşazâde in the same style with the work of Bidlîsî,
but in Turkish, is best exemplifies the efforts of men of letters to forge a distinctive
Ottoman imperial identity.

---

⁷⁹ Ertuğrul Ökten, *Ottoman Society and State in the Light of the fatwas of Ibn Kemal*, Unpublished Master
Thesis (Bilkent University, 1996), p. 66.

⁸⁰ For some examples see Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebû’l-Feth*, ed. by Mertol Tulum (İstanbul, 1977), pp. 175,
192, 195, 204.

⁸¹ Babinger mentioned that Sultan Mehmed II also gave considerable credit to the Acem elites, and this led
to complaint among Ottoman elite in the court. See, Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*,
ed. by William C.Hickman, trans. from the German by Ralph Manheim (Princeton University Press,

⁸² Gülru Necipoğlu stated that this identity took a firm shape best in the period of Sultan Süleyman. See,
39-40.
In spite of critiques, it can be concluded that Bidlîsî contributed to the construction of the identity peculiar to Ottomans in a way; he became the vanguard of the transformation in Ottoman historiography from simple to adorned narrative. Likewise the later official and individual historians such as Hoca Saadeddin and Mustafa Âli would praise Bidlîsî’s *Hasht Behesht* and try to adjust their histories to its style.\(^{83}\)

On the other hand, Bidlîsî’s reactions to the criticisms of his Ottoman readers reveal an Iranian bureaucrat’s perception of Ottoman literati. When Bidlîsî recounted the unfair criticism directed at him by the Ottoman courtiers, especially “the vizier”, Hadım Ali Pasha (d.1511), and “the kadi”, probably Müeyyedzâde, he hinted that it was the Acemîs who had a taste for art and literature by referring to his critics as “some Turks who were ignorant of the art of rhetoric” (*ba’zi Turkân râ ki ne ez meslek-i belâgat bûd*)\(^{84}\). The use of the word “Turk” in this connection represents a notable departure from Bidlîsî’s usual practice, which was to refer to the Ottoman military personnel, the ulema, or artists in his works as “Rumi” rather than as Turk or Turcoman. It seems that by labeling his critics among the Ottoman ulema as “some Turks who were ignorant of the art of rhetoric” Bidlîsî echoed a common perception of Turcomans among Iranian literati as people who had military prowess, but who lacked in artistic talent and education.\(^{85}\)

Bidlîsî was also clearly disappointed with the way his history was received by his patron Sultan Bayezid. According to Bidlîsî, on seeing the reactions of his courtiers, Sultan Bayezid did not pay him the amount he had promised earlier and did not promote

---

\(^{83}\) For the accepting of the Persian style by the Ottoman historians see Fleischer, *Mustafa Âli*, pp. 239-242, 248.

\(^{84}\) For his letter in which he expressed his critics towards the Ottoman sultan see the Topkapı Palace Archive [hereafter TSA], E. nr. 5675.

\(^{85}\) Even though, as Savory has shown, Turcomans were able to take on administrative office as well as artistic commissions at the Safavi court, the prejudices held by the notables outside Turcoman circles must have ossified, as in the case of Bidlîsî. Roger Savory, “The Qizilbash, Education, and The Arts”, *TURCICA*, 6 (1975), pp. 168-169.
him to any high position. In return, Bidlîsî did not complete the preface and epilogue of the *Hasht Behesht*, probably in order to protest the unfair treatment by the sultan. In this way, he also kept open the possibility of dedicating this monumental work to another ruler. Feeling he needed a break in his career at the Ottoman court in order to make a decision about his future, Bidlîsî wanted to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, but was prevented by Bayezid, probably because he had not yet completed his work. Nevertheless, Bidlîsî did not hold the sultan personally responsible for this, arguing that because the sultan was too old to fulfill his duties as sultan, he came under the influence of others, particularly his vizier Hadım Ali Pasha. In Bidlîsî’s opinion, it was Hadım Ali Pasha’s hostility and slander which were the main factors behind the sultan’s negative attitude toward him. By setting the sultan against him, Ali Pasha prevented Bidlîsî from visiting Mecca when he wished and obliged him to live at the Ottoman court like a prisoner for a while. Although in his writings, Bidlîsî asserts that he went through this distressing period with fortitude like a dervish, he also writes of having at the time cursed the Ottoman dynasty for his pains.  

Fortunately for Bidlîsî, two developments took place in 1511: Hadım Ali Pasha was killed and the sons of Sultan Bayezid began to fight each other for the throne, even though their father was still alive. Bidlîsî interprets these happenings to be a consequence of his curses even though he had earlier said, “I never complain about my Sultan”. On the other hand, turning these developments to his advantage, he persuaded or, as he puts it, “tricked” the sultan into sending him to Mecca. But he started off with sadness because the *hajj* ceremonial proceedings were not organized in the way appropriate to a high

---

ranking bureaucrat. After completing his *hajj*, he wrote a letter to Sultan Bayezid in which he mentioned his complaints, worries, and disappointments. He asserted that in this letter that the revenues the sultan had bestowed upon him earlier had been seized, and furthermore, some Turks had presented the *Hasht Behesht* to the Uzbek sultans as if they themselves had written it. Bidlîsî did not hesitate to give an indirect ultimatum to the Ottoman sultan. Firstly, he pointed out that returning to Ottoman lands was impossible for him under these conditions and asked the sultan to send his family to him; otherwise, he wrote, he would curse the Ottoman house. Warning that “the meat of scholars is poison”, he implied that those who acted unjustly towards him would be punished by divine power.

When no answer was forthcoming from the Ottoman court, Bidlîsî decided to settle in Mecca, probably under the protection of the Mamluk sultan, Kansu Gavri, to whom he gives a particular place in the last volume of his *Hasht Behesht*. Here, Bidlîsî proudly depicts the Mamluk sultan’s attitude towards him. Accordingly, considering Bidlîsî to be a respected religious scholar, the sultan kept him safe and, thanks to his hospitality towards Bidlîsî, his esteem increased. Then the sultan honored him by elevating him to the rank of special servant. By glorifying the Mamluk sultan as a unique patron and emphasizing the esteem the sultan had for him, Bidlîsî may also have intended to emphasize his own scholarly significance which the Ottomans had ignored, or endeavored to highlight the injustice done to him by the Ottomans. In other words, he may be comparing the Ottoman sultan with the Mamluk sultan in terms of patronage.

---

88 TSA, nr. 5675.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
relationship, in which the latter was preferred to the former. But it seems that not even the attentions of Kansu Gavri could satisfy Bidlîsî’s expectations.

After the hajj season, Bidlîsî stayed in Mecca for a year, which he describes as a sad and lonely sojourn. At that time, Bidlîsî describes his feeling that his mission as a bureaucrat had come to an end and that he would continue his life only as a dervish in these words:

Because I had spent my life in vain, I decided to sit apart like those who live in seclusion, My soul through pain shall revive, staying close to those who are mature, …, I will put my trust in God so that I can save myself from the snare of ambition and greed92.

In these poetical phrases, Bidlîsî seems to submit to divine will and decide to live on, eliminating the worldly feelings that besmirch his soul. Bidlîsî might have been in a dilemma in which, on the one hand, he was unhappy because he had not gained the special attention of the sultans as he wished, while, on the other, he was aware that his sense of competition and the need to obtain a high rank in the patronage relationship system was damaging to his desire to be a person who followed the ways of God. However, it might not have been so much a dilemma as a feeling of resignation through which he sought to console himself and to endure the difficult conditions in his life. Therefore, in 1512, when Sultan Selim, the new Sultan of the Ottomans, ordered Bidlîsî to come back to İstanbul, he complied with the order without hesitation. Bidlîsî expressed his joy over this event that changed his fate as follows:

In Mecca people were excited because a messenger announced that Sultan Selim had become the khalifa of God. All were happy due to the beauty of this news. I heard about the glory of the Shah [Selim] from my nook. I prayed and thanked my Lord! I was happy because God had granted our wish… I had told myself that I was definitely forgotten at that [Ottoman] court. But I was not totally hopeless…

---

A messenger came from the invisible world and all his news was undoubtedly true and what [my] heart desired. With the order, the Shah’s secretary wrote the name of this poor, İdris. In the edict the sultan ordered this miserable person to return to the service of the court. I kissed it [the edict] with my eyes rather than my lips and put it to my forehead… I submitted to the order of the sultan without delay.93

Despite these words glorifying the new sultan, Bidlisi finished his work, *Hasht Behesht* with a complaint about the treatment he had been subjected to at the Ottoman court. Furthermore, leaving modesty aside, he asserted that by calling him back to the court, the sultan had indirectly apologized to him. Still “my sufferings were not important”, he wrote, “because, thanks to my God, Selim would be the doctor of my heart”.94

Probably the fluctuations in Bidlisi’s feelings motivated him to write down what happened to him. Likewise, the conclusion to the *Hasht Behesht* suggests that his feelings changed parallel to the changes in political trends and balance of power at the Ottoman court. Nevertheless, throughout the conclusion, he praises his work and defends his belief that the *Hasht Behesht* was a work unique among the Ottoman chronicles written until that time. Also through this complaint, he wanted to convey the message that he would not have returned to the Ottoman lands if the sultan had not motivated him.

The order from Sultan Selim had come at a time when Bidlisi thought himself to have been completely forgotten, ignored and dishonored. He was touched by this and was hopeful again of advancing in his career. In fact the new assignment Sultan Selim gave Bidlisi would be turning point of his life.

III. The War Years

After performing the hajj a year later, Bidlîsî left Mecca to enter the service of Sultan Selim. In the winter of 1513-14, Sultan Selim was preparing for war with the Safavis, and that spring he marched towards the east. Meanwhile, the Safavi governor of Diyarbakır, Muhammed Ustaclu, compelled all the inhabitants of the towns including Bitlis, Van, Hakkari and Muş, to go to Azerbaijan, and destroyed cultivated area in order to prevent the advance of the Ottoman forces. In August 1514, at the result of the crashing between the armies of the two states near Çaldıran (northeast of Lake Van); Shah İsmâ‘il defeated and Sultan Selim occupied Tabriz.\(^95\) According to Bidlîsî, he has been the close companion of Sultan Selim during the Ottoman-Safavi conflicts, and also before the sultan entered Tabriz, on his orders Bidlîsî, accompanied by the high ranking Ottoman commanders, Pîrî Çelebi and Dukakinoğlu Ahmed Pasha, was sent to Tabriz as the vanguard of the sultan’s forces. Bidlîsî explained the aim of the sultan in sending them away from the front as the following:

“…the sultan appointed this poorest one, Pîrî Çelebi, and Dukakinoğlu Ahmed Pasha to save Tabriz from looting and pillage. Considering [my] connections in the past and [my] outcomes of my activities, he ordered this poorest one to persuade the tyrannized people of Azerbaijan, Iran and Tabriz to accept the goodwill of the sultan, and to establish the shar’ia law and re-establish Islamic tradition…”\(^96\).

After the Ottoman representatives entered Tabriz, thanks to the efforts of Bidlîsî as messenger (dâ‘î), the city prepared to welcome the sultan. But shortly after the ceremony following the victory through which the Ottoman forces displayed their power,

\(^95\) Bruinessen, Agha, pp. 142-143.
\(^96\) Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 103b; Kirlangiç, Selim Şah-nâme, p. 195.
because of logistical problems the Ottoman army had to leave Tabriz for Amasya, the main military headquarters.

Bidlisî claims that the decision to leave was made after a series of discussions. However, Celâlzâde Mustafa, who wrote another Selimnâme, makes no mention of any such discussions; nor does he give the names of any of the participants. He just points out that the sultan intended to stay in Tabriz, but the janissaries wanted to return to Amasya. In contrast, according to Bidlisî, although he himself had argued in favor of the Ottoman army staying in Tabriz, others had misled the sultan by asserting that it was impossible for the army to remain in Azerbaijan during the winter and this had provided an advantage for the defeated Shah [Shah Îsma‘îl]. Bidlisî thought that the Ottoman army should have passed the winter in Azerbaijan to ensure ultimate victory in this area. He also stressed the fact that the Ottoman army would suffer both from cold and lack of food on the way to Amasya and, more importantly, Shah Îsma‘îl would recapture Tabriz after a short while.

Bidlisî accused the people who had recommended returning to Amasya contrary to his own advice, of being unwise, heedless and concerned for their own comfort. In this case, he could not maintain the moderate tone that was characteristic of his works in general and he represented himself as standing apart from the ranks of the dignitaries surrounding the sultan. Here, Bidlisî emphasizes the importance of the role of adviser and the practice of consultation (meshvere), but he also stresses the point that not everyone can give good advice:

97 Celâl-zâde Mustafa, Selim-nâme, ed. by Ahmet Uğur, Mustafa Çuhadar (İstanbul, 1997), p. 250.  
98 Bidlisî, SN, fol. 105b.
“Consult your friend in all of your troubles; accept only the advice of one who is virtuous. Do not consult one who has no ability to make a difference. One who makes mistakes has no judicious insight”\(^{99}\).

In using these phrases, he lays stress on his own foresight and indirectly represents himself as a virtuous and reliable counselor. In fact, the Ottoman army met with climatic problems and, further, as he had predicted, the Safavi forces recaptured Tabriz. According to Bidlîsî, the sultan understood that he had acted on wrong advice and punished those who had agitated for the armies to return, but this only led to increased hostility towards Bidlîsî\(^{100}\).

In the autumn of 1514 after the Ottoman army left Tabriz, Bidlîsî moved to the Safavi lands on the eastern border of the Ottoman State by the order of the sultan in order to organize the tribal groups, particularly, independent Kurdish leaders\(^{101}\), who lived in this area, against Safavi rule. The short-term purpose of the Ottoman sultan in sending Bidlîsî on such a diplomatic mission to Safavi lands was to persuade the Kurdish leaders to fight against their Safavi leader on the side of the Ottoman forces; and, in the long term, to weaken the Safavi forces and thus attach the provinces of the Kurds to the Ottoman lands.

Even though it is unclear who advised the sultan to give this important mission to Bidlîsî, it is possible that either Bidlîsî himself persuaded the sultan that he would be able to succeed in this charge or that someone close to Bidlîsî reminded the sultan of the connection Bidlîsî had with the Kurdish leaders, and of his prestige among them. Also it is difficult to determine the kind of position to which Sultan Selim assigned Bidlîsî but

\(^{100}\) *Ibid.*, fol. 121b.
\(^{101}\) Our usage of the term of leader indicates the tribal leadership of Kurds.
the sultan provided him with an imperial decree bearing the imperial cipher but without any written commands. As is well known, in the Ottoman administrative system, both the sultan and the beylerbeyi, the highest ranking provincial official, had the right to give imperial edicts. In fact, if the sultan did not participate in person in a campaign during wartime, the grand vizier substituted for the sultan and could grant an imperial edict, using his own initiative\(^{102}\). Bidlîşî was neither a commander nor a beylerbeyi, but it seems that his authority was equal to that of either. It indicates that the sultan gave Bidlîşî the responsibility to make political and administrative decisions when he left Amasya in order to meet with the Kurdish notables in the Safavi districts.

In the *Selimshahnâme*, which Bidlîşî had just begun to write, he defines his aim in visiting the Kurdish notables as being to give them news of the Ottoman victory over the Safavi State and to counsel them so that they could cooperate with the Ottoman forces. With this aim, Bidlîşî met the tribal Kurdish notables who ruled over both the settled and nomadic tribes located in the area of Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Van Hakkari, Muş, Urmiye, Siirt, Hasankeyf, Mosul and Kerkük. According to Bidlîşî, in consequence of his hereditary links with them and the spiritual fellowship and old ties between them, the leaders offered their allegiance and services to the Ottoman sultan\(^{103}\). Throughout the political visits he undertook between the years 1514-1517, Bidlîşî sent Sultan Selim reports to inform him about his activities and the developments in the region. In addition, in these reports, Bidlîşî recorded in detail his routes, meetings, experiences and successes in a personal voice. Indeed, probably in order to underline the seriousness of his troubles and the importance of the outcome of his activities, he described how Shah Îsma’îl had sent


\(^{103}\) Bidlîşî, *SN*, fol. 119b.
his servants to persuade Bidlîsî to change sides, but they could not succeed because Bidlîsî gave them the answer that best befit a good Muslim\textsuperscript{104}.

As we shall examine in a detail in the second chapter, having managed to organize the Kurdish tribes, Bidlîsî led the Kurdish leaders to rebel together against the Safavi government and they began to seize important centers in the Safavi districts. Some of these centers, in which effective and united struggles on the part of Ottoman-Kurdish tribal troops against the Safavi armies, consisting of Turcoman tribes, took place, were in the province of Amid where Kara Khan, the Safavi commander, laid siege to Mardin and Hasankeyf, between Amid and Cizre. During this time, unrest broke out among the Ottoman commanders as well as between the Ottomans and Kurdish leaders, because of the fact that Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha appointed as governor of Diyarbakır employed a different siege plan from that of the Kurdish leaders and Bidlîsî.

Bidlîsî claimed that when the Ottoman governor’s military tactics ended in catastrophic defeat, Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha began to be vindictive towards him. Accordingly, when Sultan Selim called Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha with his armies to participate in a second military campaign against the Mamluk State and, ordered Bidlîsî to stay on in Diyarbakır in order to complete the conquests in the provinces of the Kurds and to deal with the affairs of the state there, Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha\textsuperscript{105} prevented him from staying in Diyarbakır.\textsuperscript{106} He criticized the Pasha for his impudence and found him refractory. While clearly defending the practice of shared administrative power, Bidlîsî implied that Bıyıklı Mehmet Pasha had neither accepted his advice nor had any consultations with him, furthermore, he regarded Bidlîsî’s efforts to make an alliance

\textsuperscript{104} TSA, E. nr. 8833/II.
\textsuperscript{105} Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 146b-147a.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., fol. 147b.
between the Kurdish notables and the Ottoman State as a threat to his authority. According to Bidlîsî, Bîyîklî Mehmed Pasha asserted that the Kurdish people regarded him as having less authority than Bidlîsî, and for this reason, demanded that the sultan appoint either him or Bidlîsî to another post\textsuperscript{107}.

At that time, the sultan appointed Bidlîsî as kadiasker of Acem and Iraq, an office that included Damascus and Cairo\textsuperscript{108}. This office seems to have been created solely for honoring him and did not survive into later periods. But, probably upon Bîyîklî Mehmed Pasha’s complaints, Sultan Selim then might have dismissed Bidlîsî also from this office. All these developments were again frustrating to Bidlîsî during the last years of his life. His agitated state of mind is apparent in a poem he wrote in these years, entitled \textit{Kasîda-i Misr (Ode to Egypt)}. Ostensibly, Bidlîsî wrote this poem to inform the sultan about the problems that had emerged in Cairo after the Ottoman conquest, as well as about the malfunctions and abuses present in judicial offices. At the same time, however, he turned the problems in Cairo into his own personal problems, reproaching the sultan, and questioning why certain ulema of Cairo in general and he, himself, in particular, had not been appointed to the offices they deserved\textsuperscript{109}.

İbrahim Gülşenî who was in Cairo at the same time as Bidlîsî, pointed out that when Bidlîsî asked him for advice because he was annoyed about the sultan’s lack of concern, he suggested to him that he present the sultan with a poem. It is the poem that was entitled \textit{Kaside-i Misr}. But it seems that İbrahim Gülşenî warned Bidlîsî not to use language that would make the sultan angry. Otherwise, the sultan would punish both him

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{108} İsmail Hakkı Uzunca\textsuperscript{r}li, \textit{Osmanlı Devletinin İlişkelerine Teşkilatı} (Ankara, 1988), p. 152.
and Bidlîsî\textsuperscript{110}. Even though he was very cautious in his use of words when addressing the sultan, this poem also includes various accusing and threatening expressions. Probably for this reason, this poem did exasperate the sultan, and in 1518 he ordered Bidlîsî to return to İstanbul, without elevating him to any further position\textsuperscript{111}.

IV. The Last Years

Bidlîsî spent the last two years of his life in İstanbul probably in the hope of obtaining a position in the Ottoman court. At that time, the repercussions of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict were very much on the agenda in the Ottoman palace and in elite circles: the military, political and religious matters relevant to the conflict were taken up in the chronicles as well as political writings and judicial tracts. As someone who had personally witnessed the war, and who had played a direct role in the negotiation that had affected the outcome of the military and political conflict between the Ottomans-Kurds and Safavis, must have shared this mood. Also this situation provided an opportunity for Bidlîsî to complete his professional life with a high rank. Probably with these motivations he began to draft the \textit{Selimshahnâme} through which he would display his political efforts and prove the importance of his role in realizing the Ottoman political success in the Safavi western lands and his share in this victory. While he tried to complete this work, he probably began to write the \textit{Kânûn-i Shahenshâhi} in order to present Sultan Selim. But before Bidlîsî completed the two works, the Ottoman sultan died unexpectedly. Most likely, Bidlîsî, too, was ill. Still in a last effort he finished the \textit{Kânûn-i Shahenshâhi} and managed to present it to the new Ottoman sultan Süleyman. In the same year, in 1520,

\textsuperscript{110} Gülşenî, \textit{Menâkab-i İbrahim Gülşenî}, p. 355.
\textsuperscript{111} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, fol. 177a.
Bidlîşî died. He was buried in the town of Eyüb, near to the tomb of Abu Ayyûb al-Ansâr.
CHAPTER TWO
PRACTICING DIPLOMACY ON BEHALF OF THE OTTOMANS: THE ROLE OF İDRİS-İ BİDLİSİ IN THE OTTOMAN INCORPORATION OF WESTERN SAFAVI TERRITORIES

As we have seen in the previous chapter, with the outbreak of the war between the Ottoman and Safavi states, Bidlîsî visited the Kurdish notables on a mission from Sultan Selim. Through his diplomatic strategies, he helped to organize the Kurds against the Safavi shah and to bring the lands where the Kurdish tribal population lived under Ottoman sovereignty. At the same time, he also helped win for the Kurdish notables considerable concessions as tribal leaders and/or provincial governors of the newly incorporated Ottoman lands. In this chapter, we shall take a closer look at this process and its political outcomes by analyzing the complex roles Bidlîsî played as the architect of a military and political alliance between the Kurds and the Ottoman state as well as a major figure behind the administrative reorganization of the Kurdish lands under Ottoman rule.

The first section of this chapter elucidates the ways in which Bidlîsî presented the Kurds to the Ottoman central government both during and in the aftermath of the alliance he forged between them. The second section focuses on Bidlîsî’s role in forging a military alliance between the Ottoman and Kurdish leaders against the Safavi state, while the third section appraises his contribution to the establishment of a new administrative structure in the lands recently incorporated into the borders of the Ottoman state. In a broader sense, the second chapter illuminates the strategies used by the state as
alternatives to the policy of using military force in the process of incorporating a new territory. In other words, the role of Bidlîsî brings out the importance of creating an agreement with local notables who would share power and authority with the central government.

The principal sources utilized in this chapter include the reports Bidlîsî sent to the sultan regarding the political situation with the Kurdish notables, and the *Selimshahnâme*, which he completed after his diplomatic mission and a clean copy of which was made by his son posthumously. The reports of Bidlîsî as well as the *Selimshahnâme* will be considered in this chapter not only as documents that shed light on the process of the negotiation between the Ottomans and the Kurdish notables but also as texts written from the perspective of a political intermediary, who was on the one hand an informal agent of the Ottoman state and on the other, an affiliate of the local notables. Moreover, it should be noted that Bidlîsî wrote the *Selimshahnâme* in the hope of obtaining a formal and high rank in the Ottoman administrative system and was thus concerned to underline his own role in the process. Interestingly, when later Ottoman historians such as Hoca Saadeddin used the *Selimshahnâme* in their chronicles, they “edited out” the self-referential remarks of Bidlîsî.\(^{112}\)

To be able to better situate Bidlîsî’s version of events, this chapter will also make use of other contemporaneous or near contemporaneous sources. The first and most important of these is the *Sharafnâme*, a history of the Kurds, written in Persian in the late

\(^{112}\) For such editing can be seen in the accounts of Hoca Saadeddin on the conquest of Mardin. While he did not give any place to the problems between Bıyık Mehmed Pasha and Bidlîsî, in the *Selimshahnâme* the stress of Bidlîsî on the conflicts is obvious. To compare the accounts of Hoca Saadeddin with Bidlîsî’s see Hoca Saadeddin, *Tacü’t-Tevârih*, pp. 313-314, Bidlîsî, *SN*, ff.134b-137b. Since most modern historians have also relied exclusively on the later Ottoman chronicles, both the the complexity of the negotiations and the role of Bidlîsî in these negotiations have been considerably obscured in modern scholarship as well.
sixteenth century. Its author, Şeref, who was a primary candidate of the Ottoman governorship of the district of Bitlis at that time, but who also had to account for his family’s both past and present political affiliation with the Safavis, came from a similar cultural background as Bidlîsî, and held similar views on the political interests of the Kurdish leaders. Second, this chapter also makes use of the reports of the Ottoman commander Büyük Mehmed Pasha to counterbalance the local/imperial perspective of Bidlîsî with that of an Ottoman official who had no such connection with the local Kurdish notables. Finally, the third section of the present chapter will draw on such archival sources as the first cadastral registers and budget records of these lands in order to illustrate the outcomes of the diplomatic efforts of Bidlîsî for the Ottomans and the Kurdish notables.

I. The Kings of Acem: The Presentation by Bidlîsî about the Kurds

i- Locating Kurdistan

In a recent study, it has been argued that the use of the term “Kurdistan” or the “provinces of the Kurds” for central western Iran and eastern and southeastern Anatolia was of relatively recent origin: the term appears for the first time in a fifteenth-century source, Zafernâme, and then in the Selimshahnâme of Bidlîsî, written in the early sixteenth century, and finally assumes a more precise meaning in the Sharafnâme, written in the late sixteenth century. All were significantly historical rather than geographical sources, a fact which suggests that the term came into usage largely as a result of the rise
of the Kurdish notables as major political players in the borderland between the Ottoman and Safavi empires\textsuperscript{113}.

This was significantly a region with a highly mixed population both ethnically and religiously. Principal groups who inhabited the mountainous lands between the Ottoman and Safavi empires included Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Syrian Christians as well as Turcomans. In general, it seems that before the Ottoman-Safavi conflict, the region was identified not so much by the ethnic composition of its population but rather by its topographical characteristics or by the political powers that prevailed in its administration. For instance, the fourteenth-century geographer al-‘Omarî referred to the region as “the mountainous lands”(\textit{mamlakat al- jibāl})\textsuperscript{114}, while Ibn Bibi, a historian of the fourteenth century, called roughly the same region “the land of the Armenians” (\textit{diyār-i Arman})\textsuperscript{115} probably because at the time the Armenians had political superiority over the other major ethnic groups living in that geography.

It is important to stress that the term “the province of the Kurds” did not have an ethno-demographic meaning for Bidlîsî, either. It is true that in his writings he made no mention of the Turcoman or Christian populations who lived in the region, and mentioned the existence of an ethnic mixture only in relation to political concerns as in the case of the Arab tribes such as the Ban-i Rabi‘â and ‘Ubada\textsuperscript{116}. But a similar privileging of the political can also be seen in the way he defined the geographical borders of “Kurdistan.”

\textsuperscript{113} Tezcan, “The Use of Kurdistan”, p. 541.
\textsuperscript{116} Bidlîsî mentioned two tribes in order to indicate their political preferences. See TSA, E. nr. 6610.
Writing at a time when the political status of the Kurds was still being negotiated, and as one of the key negotiators himself, Bidlîsî was either hesitant or perhaps simply unable to give precise coordinates for Kurdistan. In the reports he prepared for the Ottoman sultan, he named an extensive area spreading over the Iraq-i Arab and the Iraq-i Acem, the lands between the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates, Luristan and Khuzistan as Kurdistan or the provinces of the Kurds. According to the Selimshahnâme, Armenia, consisting of Kemah, Azerbaijan, Bayburt, Tercan and Erzurum, constituted a frontier between the lands of Rum and Kurdistan. When Bidlîsî needed to introduce the local coordinates for the route he followed or for the enemies’ military movements or to specifically the locates where the tribes lived, he preferred to use geographical names such as Diyarbakır, Bitlis, İmadiye, Urmiye, Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Khorasan or general terms of geographical identification such as Acem.

In Bidlîsî’s chronicle and reports, the geographical borders of Kurdistan were determined to a certain extent by the political statements of the Kurdish tribes. In this regard, Bidlîsî listed numerous Kurdish tribal leaders as legitimate governors of “Kurdistan”. Some of them were presented as the leaders of large tribal confederations like Rozki, Bohti, Baradost, Süleymâni, and Baban. Among them, the tribe of Rozki, which had settled in the province of Bitlis and ruled over extensive districts in the areas of Ahlat, Erciş, Urmiye, Hakkari, Van, Vustan and Shirvan, was emphasized to be the largest confederation of the time. In this connection, Bidlîsî introduced the province of Bitlis as “the Rozki government (dâr el-hukûme) of Kurdistan”. The importance of the

---

117 TSA, E. nr. 8333/1, nr. 1019.
118 Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 123a; Kurlanguç, Selim Şah-nâme, p. 247.
119 Bruinessen, Agha, p. 199.
120 Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 120b.
tribe of Rozki was also stressed in the *Sharafnâme*, probably because this tribe affected the decisions about who the ruler of Bidlîsî would be. In Bidlîsî’s writings, political recognition is mentioned not only in connection with the major tribal leaders in these lands and the leaders of the cities of Çemişkezek, Diyarbakıır, Mardin, and Hasankeyf, but also with reference to the tribal leaders whose tribes seemed to have been divided into smaller units situated across the lands from Mosul to Shiraz and from Van to Shirvan.

The first reports of Bidlîsî, dating probably to 1515 indicate that he classified all these lands under the designation “Kurdistan” in consideration of the potential resistance among Kurdish leaders to Shah İsma‘il’s administration. In these reports, Bidlîsî claimed that he had met numerous Kurdish tribal leaders who had trouble with the Safavi shah and that the problems between the leaders and Shah İsma‘il had arisen either because the former did not recognize the governor appointed by the Safavi shah or because, as they were being integrated into the Safavi administration, they could no longer lay claim to being rulers of their own territories. It must have been with these conflicts in mind that Bidlîsî defined the borders of Kurdistan as being greater than he would in later reports. At the beginning of his diplomatic visits to the region, Bidlîsî was probably counting on an Ottoman victory in the area and wanted to promote the Kurdish notables as the potential Ottoman governors of the lands he called Kurdistan. On the other hand, as the conflict between the Safavi and Kurdish forces progressed, he also took into account the results of that conflict. These results are mirrored in his last reports, in which Bidlîsî redefined Kurdistan to exclude Luristan and Khuzistan, which were designated as part of Kurdistan in his first reports. Furthermore, he referred to these as provincial territories, separate
from each other\textsuperscript{121}, probably because both the Kurdish tribal leaders in the aforementioned provinces considered it politically advantageous to remain under the Safavi administration, and because the Ottoman sultan would not attempt, or even envisage, any military expedition to these lands for some time to come. Therefore, in his last reports, dating probably to 1515 and 1516 and in the \textit{Selimshahnâme}, which may be regarded as his last word on the military and political developments in these areas, Bidlîşî defined the provinces of the Kurds as comprising the territories between Azerbaijan, Baghdad and Diyarbakır\textsuperscript{122}. This is also how they would be defined in the cadastral registration which we will examine in the last part of the present chapter. In short, the borders of Bidlîşî’s Kurdistan changed whenever lands were captured, lost or recaptured by the Kurdish military forces.

Bidlîşî’s efforts to locate the cities of Kurdistan also reflect the power dynamics in this region. According to his reports, some specific cities such as Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Hasankeyf, Mosul, and Erbil were the fields where Safavi military units under the command of the Turcoman leaders, Mehmed UstaCLU and Çayan Sultan, clashed with Kurdish tribal troops under the leadership of Şeref Khan and Melik Halil Eyyûbî. Again, the conflicts between some Kurdish tribes and Safavi forces in the territory of Khuzistan and Luristan encompassing the mountainous region of Zaghros, which Bidlîşî calls the mountain (\textit{kûhistân}) of Kurdistan\textsuperscript{123}, developed independently of the Ottoman forces, which had not yet marched as far as these areas. In fact, the Kurdish tribes who lived in

\textsuperscript{121} For to compare the two documents see, TSA, E. nr. 8333/I and nr. 6610. While the former was recorded shortly after the battle of Çaldiran in 1514, the latter must be sent in a time between 1515-1516, when the Kurdish armies waited for the support of the Ottoman armies to conquest the citadel of Diyarbakır and Mardin.

\textsuperscript{122}Bidlîşî, \textit{SN}, ff. 129b-130a; Kurlangıç, \textit{Selim Şah-nâme}, p. 261. Even though Bidlîşî attributed these expressions to the Kurdish leaders, these might of course be his own words.

\textsuperscript{123} TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
the mountains of Zagros and in the lands near Shiraz, west of Isfahan, were depicted as people who did not recognize Safavi sovereignty, and who had rebelled against the Safavi administration and recaptured their lands.

In the *Selimshahnâme*, Amid is described as an important and impregnable citadel in order to take which violent skirmishes took place between the Safavi armies and the allied powers of the Kurds and the Ottomans. In fact, for the Safavis, Amid constituted the farthest district they had managed to reach in the west and its administration was allocated to the Turcoman Ustaclu tribe. Probably because he noticed the strategic location of Amid for the Safavis, Bidlîsî wanted to remind the Ottoman sultan of the geopolitical importance of the city by referring to it as “the key to the conquest of the Iranian lands (*Âmid-i mahrûse ki kilîd-i futûh-i memâlik-i Irânî est*)”\(^{124}\). With the same intention, Bidlîsî underlines its historical significance of the city, by referring to the first conquest of Amid by Muslims under the command of a historical figure, Halid bin Velid, emphasizing the difficulties of capturing the city and citing Amid to be “the center of the throne of Diyarbakır (*tahtegâh-i vilâyet-i Diyarbakr*)”\(^{125}\). Moreover, the solid walls, tall bastions and spacious interior of the stronghold of Amid extending from the earth to the heavens, together with the Tigris flowing before it, were a source of aesthetic delight for Bidlîsî\(^{126}\), and he describes it in metaphoric expressions and poetic phrases. As narrative strategies the fulsome compliments Bidlîsî’s paid to Amid served to accentuate its geopolitical significance.

As a good politician, Bidlîsî represented the war in such a way as to show the Ottoman sultan a situation in which all the leaders of “Kurdistan” were uneasy and ready

\(^{124}\) Bidlîsî, *SN*, fol. 130a.
\(^{126}\) Bidlîsî, *SN*, ff. 132b-133a.
to organize themselves to rise against the Safavi administration. In fact, it should be noted that the conflicts between the Ottoman and Safavi states for the control of trade routes provided the disorganized Kurdish leaders with an opportunity to rule the lands which they had lost or over which they had never established effective political rule. In this connection, in the narratives of Bidlîsî we can see his efforts to turn this development into an advantage both for the state he served and for the Kurdish tribal rulers. As a consequence, the term Kurdistan was created in order to organize a district to be administered by the Kurds who would be integrated into the Ottoman imperial system.

In his monumental history of “the sultans of Kurdistan” Şeref had a similar aim as Bidlîsî. The borders of the lands that belonged to the Kurdish “sultans” as drawn in the Sharafnâme, correspond to the larger Kurdistan conceived by Bidlîsî in his first reports. Differently from Bidlîsî, nevertheless, his choice for the provincial center of the region was not Diyarbakır, but rather, Bitlis. Therefore, in his chronicle, Şeref stressed the Hellenic and Persian origins of Bitlis to bolster both its history previous to the Islamic era and the link between the Muslim Kurds and pre-Islamic Iranian history.

Bidlîsî’s concern, above all, was the territorial integration of these areas into the Ottoman state, so he gave the term “Kurdistan” an administrative meaning. In this sense, the borders of Kurdistan were established but lacked a specific geographic, demographic or ethnic content. On the other hand, in the depictions of Bidlîsî, Kurdistan, identified as being within the geographical boundaries of Acem, was an area where Kurdish leaders

---

127 In the Sharafnâme, the borders of Kurdistan also extended from the shores of the sea of Hurmuz to Maraş and Malatya, see Sharafnâme, pp. 13-14. Seemingly, when a new conflict re-emerged between the Safavi and Ottoman states in the middle of sixteenth century, the prince of Bitlis, Şerafeddin, as the one who had potential to establish an autonomous state revealed the Bidlîsî’s map, adding in detail the histories of tribal leaders or “Kurdish sultans” who fought with each other for leadership or with foreign states such as Mongols and Turcoman groups for independence. By doing so, Şeref, alike Bidlîsî, proved the political legitimacy of Kurds in the lands in a definitive depicted border.

128 Sharafnâme, pp. 335-338.
had historically held political power. In this regard, the term “Kurdistan” makes reference to the ethnic identities of the regional political powers. For this very reason, Bidlîsî frequently emphasized in his writings the names of the Kurdish leaders having political power as the following: Emir Davud, the king (melik) of Hizan¹²⁹, Emir Şeref/Şeref Khan, the king of Bitlis¹³⁰, Melik Halil Eyyûbî, the holder (sâhib) of Hasankeyf¹³¹, Ali Beg, the ruler (hâkim) of Sason¹³², Emir Sultan Hüseyin, the ruler of İmadiye¹³³, Bahtiyâr and Ağh, the Emirs of Bahtiyârî and Kulkher of Luristan and Khuzistan¹³⁴, and so on.

The Kurds’ political position characterized their geographic locations in Bidlîsî’s presentation. Culturally, Bidlîsî depicted Kurdistan as an area overlapping with Acem/Iran and to a lesser degree with Arabia. Furthermore, he wanted to include the Kurds in the history of these two regions. In this manner, Bidlîsî provided a solution to the problem of legitimacy of the autonomous entity and authority of the Kurds. We shall see in the next section Bidlîsî’s attempt to establish a historical and cultural link between the Kurds and the people of Iran in order to legitimize the leadership of the Kurds in the lands of Iran and Arabia.

ii- Genealogical Legitimacy

Nobility

In the Selimshahnâme, the leading Kurdish tribes who lived in the abovementioned lands were presented as having an aristocratic structure. Bidlîsî’s

¹²⁹ Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 120a.
¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³¹ Ibid.
¹³² Ibid.
¹³³ Ibid., fol. 119b.
¹³⁴ TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
discourse on the dynastic formation of the Kurdish families made use of the claim of noble lineage based on the Kurdish leaders’ being either members of or in the service of families that had played a significant role in the region.

The titles of the Kurdish leaders, as used by Bidlisi, were expressions of their nobility even though he did not attempt to expound their origins. As an all-embracing formula, the title of the kings of Acem (mulūk ve hukkâm-i Ajem) frequently appears in Bidlisi’s writings. This title, which was used to connect the Kurds with Iranian history, might have also originated from the belief that certain Kurdish leaders’ ancestors were Iranian or even Iranian nobles. The Sharafnâme also gives considerable space to semi-legendary stories about the origins of the Kurdish ruling families in order to prove this connection. Accordingly, the ancestors of the rulers of Bitlis, for example, were the descendants of a Sasanid king.

The lineage ascribed to pre-Islamic Iranian kings produced a strong justification for the right of inheritance in the territories of Acem for Bidlisi and Şeref. But, regarding the historical past of Iran, it is obvious that the noble lineage of the Kurds depended on various historical figures who would provide them with a prestigious genealogy. The most influential of these genealogies went back to the family of the Prophet. For this reason, Bidlisi glorified some Kurdish tribal leaders because they were seyyid. Also in the Sharafnâme, numerous Kurdish families were presented as Abbasid nobles, based on their being descendants of the Khashimi family, or simply seyyids. Since descent from

---

135 For a couple of examples see Bidlisi, SN, ff. 121a, 130a.
136 Sharafnâme, p. 362. For some stories indicating pre-Islamic Iranian ties of Kurds families see Ibid., pp. 191, 252.
137 For the praise of Bidlisi devoted to Ahmed Beg Zorraki, whom he called with the title of seyyid see Bidlisi, SN, fol. 126b; Kurlangç, Selim Şah-nâme, p.254.
138 For the Kurdish families who were from Abbasid lineage see Sharafnâme, pp. 89, 106, 162, 220.
the family of the Prophet strengthened the Islamic identity of the Kurds, it seemed to be as significant a source of political legitimacy as descent from the Iranian kings. Besides, to come from Arab lineage or to be a member of a family with a prestigious history in the area must have been considered as a determining factor in becoming leader. One such Kurdish family who had played a major role in the period of the crusades was that of Salah al-din al-Ayyûbî. Having stressed that Melik Halil descended from this family of Salah al-din al- Ayyûbî, Bidlîsî also justified Sultan Selim’s grant of the lands of Hasankeyf to Melik Halil Eyyûbî139.

**The Hereditary Political Positions**

Bidlîsî defined the socio-political groups to which the Kurds belonged as tribes (aşâir, kabîla or kavm). More detailed information about the socio-political organization of the Kurds comes from the Sharafnâme, which states that the Kurds were subdivided into numerous tribes (aşâir) and confederate tribes. Both Bidlîsî and the author of the Sharafnâme referred to the leaders of the Kurdish tribes with such titles as beg, melik, emir/mir, or sultan. It is obvious that the titles conveyed governmental meanings despite the fact that Kurdish leaders with these titles listed in Bidlîsî’s writings did not occupy any governmental positions at that time. Therefore, the usage of these titles simply referred to these leaders’ status remaining from the past. For this reason, Bidlîsî presented the leaders as those who had hereditary rights on the administrative leadership of the lands dating back to the time of their prestigious, powerful, and warrior ancestors.

When Bidlîsî emphasized the authority of the Kurdish tribal leaders, his concepts of leadership had a dual meaning. The first is tribal leadership, which has to do with the inner organization of the Kurds, and the second is provincial administration, which was

---

139 Bidlîsî, *SN*, fol. 122a; Kurlanguç, *Selim Şah-nâme*, p. 244.
granted by whichever state prevailed in the region. In fact the Kurds had had certain
problems of the states that had rules the region\textsuperscript{140}. At the same time, however, they had
also provided the states with provision troops. By the end of the Seljuk era, many Kurdish
rulers had been rewarded for their service as military officers with a grant of lands and
they emerged as the new local rulers in the Kurdish tribal structure\textsuperscript{141}.

Even if the details of these military developments at that time are omitted in the
\textit{Sharafnâme}, there is particular mention of the rights of Kurdish leaders to govern the
territories they had gained, seemingly as a result of these conflicts, even when they were
required to formally recognize the central government or local governmental appointees.
Accordingly, the ancestors of the Kurdish leaders had obtained governance over their
territories by permission of the Abbasid caliphs, Seljukid sultans or Timur\textsuperscript{142}. Furthermore, it was asserted in the \textit{Sharafnâme} that Emir Şemseddin and İzzeddin Şir,
who had been the rulers of Bitlis and Ahlat respectively, in the fifteenth century, had an
imperial edict issued by Chingis, the Mongol emperor. The author of the \textit{Sharafnâme}, a
potential candidate for the governorship of Bitlis in the late sixteenth century, stated the
reason for the existence of this edict, written in Uighur as follows:

\begin{quote}
This edict declares that this noble and well-known family has the property right of
the province of Bitlis for good. The writer of these words saw this edict given by
Chingis. The aim is to prove that the great sultans favored this family, did not
attack its territories, or even if they did, later gave them back\textsuperscript{143}.
\end{quote}

Even if the author of the \textit{Sharafnâme} attempted to demonstrate the governorship

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 19, 91, 153.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 91-92. In the \textit{Sharafnâme} the author mentioned that his own family had also such
of his ancestors with evidence from formal registers, the ownership of the lands by the Kurdish tribal rulers mostly originated from stories, legends and hearsay current among Kurds. On the other hand, what was important for Şeref was that documents or hearsay provided Kurdish tribal leaders with the justification for their political leadership. At the same time, Bidlisi’s insistence that the administrative authority inherited by the Kurds from their ancestors had been seized by Shah Isma‘il was related to his efforts to justify the Kurdish leaders’ political legitimacy in the eyes of the Ottoman sultan. Relying on foresight, Bidlisi must have found such legitimacy necessary for later developments. Indeed, by acquiring positions of power from the Ottoman sultan, the Kurds would become one of the parties forming the military, political and administrative conjuncture that emerged after the Battle of Çaldiran.

iii- Marital Kinsmen

In the Kurdish and Turcoman tribes, kinship established by marrying into the ruling dynasties with military, political and economic dominance was another way to obtain great prestige and power as well as political and economic advantages. The kinship network among the Kurdish notable families that had intermarried with Arab, Akkoynlu, Safavi and other Kurdish families seem to have provided both sides with benefits, even if they were not as important as the ones obtained by the Kızılbaş families.


145 By marring with Safavi princes, Kızılbaş families became the members of the dynastic family. See Szuppe, “Kinship Ties”, pp. 80-95.
With matrimonial ties among ruling households of different ethnicity, commercial relationships were also firmly established as in the case of the Kurds of Şehrizar and the Arab Bedouins, the Ban-i Shayban. Several political figures appeared in Iranian geographical territories: one of these was Daysam bin İbrahim (d.956-57), who was the son of an Arab by a Kurdish woman. Such a network was also established between local leading families and the royal families of the central government. In the fifteenth century, Şemseddin, the ruler of Bitlis, gave his daughter in marriage to Kara Yusuf, the ruler of the Karakoyunlu State, and helped him to re-establish his power. On the other hand, such networks, which were established to consolidate the political authority of both sides, gave birth to rival factions. Uzun Hasan, the ruler of the Turcoman Akkoyunlu dynasty, a rival to the Karakoyunlu, married the daughter of Ömer Beg, the leader in Tercil and Atak around northeastern Diyarbakır. As a result of this marital tie, Uzun Hasan bestowed on Ömer Beg and his sons governorship over the villages of Mihranî and Nuşad. Furthermore, he added Bidlis to Tercil and Atak. In doing so, Uzun Hasan must have aimed both to exclude Şemseddin, who did not recognize his sovereignty, and to gain power over the alliance between Şemseddin and Kara Yusuf. As for the leader of Tercil, he enlarged his domain thanks to this marital tie. With the same aims, the ruler of Bitlis in the sixteenth century, Şeref Khan, married the daughter of the ruler of Hasankeyf, and gave his sister to the ruler of Sason, Ali Beg. After the Safavi invasion, marriages of a similar nature took place between the Kızılbaş and Kurdish

---

146 Minorsky, “Kurds, Kurdistan”, p. 452.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., p. 457.
149 Ibid., p. 250-251.
150 Ibid., p. 382.
151 Ibid., p. 193.
leaders. In order to legitimize his authority in the province of Diyarbakır where contests among Kurdish tribes emerged against the Safavi governance, Muhammad Ustaclu married the sister of Diyâdin Süleymâni, the tribal leader in the district of Meyyafarkin to the south of Diyarbakır\textsuperscript{152}.

As seen above, the author of the \textit{Sharafnâme} gave considerable place to marital kinship probably in order to bolster the political claims of the Kurdish tribal leaders. With the same aim, Bidlîsî mentioned the marriage between Melik Halil Eyyûbî, who was one of the most prestigious notables of the area, and the sister of Shah İsma‘îl. Interestingly, when he mentioned this marriage between a Kızılbaş and a Sunni Muslim, he did not express any disapproval. Rather, he limited his criticism to the Safavi shah’s bypassing his son-in-law and appointing a Kızılbaş leader to be governor of Hasankeyf instead\textsuperscript{153}. Apparently, Bidlîsî thought that the marital tie of Melik Halil with the Safavi dynasty had provided him with the right to the administration of Hasankeyf, quite apart from his Ayyubid background.

In this geography, marriage was a pivotal institution in establishing and maintaining sovereignty. Taking this fact into consideration, Bidlîsî asserted that the Safavi rulers married the daughters of kings and Iranian sultans (\textit{bābenāt-i mulûk ve selâtîn –i İran}) with this very aim\textsuperscript{154}. When he made such remarks, Bidlîsî probably meant not only the post-Mongol sultans and the Akkoyunlu sultan, Uzun Hasan, the maternal grandfather of Shah İsma‘îl, but also the dominant Kurdish families, whom he regarded as “the kings of Acem”. If this is correct, Bidlîsî also implied that the marriages between the ruling Kurdish families and the Safavi dynasty were a major factor in

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., pp. 264-265.
\textsuperscript{153} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}., fol. 126b.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., fol. 72b.
validating the claims of the Safavi shah and his administrators for their political presence in Iran. Even if the marital ties justified the political authority of the Kurdish tribal leaders, too for both Bidlîsî and Şerefi, from another perspective, the cases of Melik Halil and Süleymânî can be regarded as a factor in the Safavi shah’s favor. Having noticed this fact, Bidlîsî would also state that what the Safavi shah aimed at by establishing a marital kinship with the Kurdish notables was no more than a strategy for expanding his power.

Bidlîsî consistently stressed that the Kurds were rightful heirs to the lands which the Safavis had usurped in their territories. Nevertheless, it is a fact that when the Safavi military forces began to seize the Akkoyunlu lands where the Kurds lived, the ruling leaders who were removed from local government began to negotiate with the Safavi shah with the aim of regaining their authority. In the same way, the Safavi government allied with the Kurdish leaders in order to be able to control over the Kurdish tribes. To marry off Kurdish women into Safavi royal families or to marry Safavi royal women can be regarded as part of these negotiations because marriage created a political, social and economic alliance, even if it did not always satisfy both sides at the same time.

Between the Kurdish leaders and Shah Isma‘il, there was an obvious political and, in some cases, religious affinity, which was formed with or without matrimonial ties. This stemmed from the fact that the Safavi shah, as a regional power over the lands of Iran, awakened the Kurdish leaders’ political and religious interests. Bidlîsî was aware of this fact just as the Ottoman government was. What is significant here is that the alliances between the Kurds and the Safavi shah led the Ottoman sultan and officers to distrust the Kurdish tribal leaders and to suspect them of being on the same side with the Kızılbaş. It

---

Ibid.
was unlikely that the Kurds, seen as potential religious followers of Shah ʿĪsmaʿīl, would obtain Ottoman military support or governorship of the lands. Regarding this as an eventual probability, Bidlîsî’s efforts as they were represented in his reports seem to have been to dissipate the distrust and suspicions of the Ottoman government. In doing so, he portrayed the Kurds as being eager to take back their hereditary lands from the Safavis. Moreover, by representing the Kurds as having fought against the Safavi forces much more than the Ottoman armies, he tried to prove that Kurds already deserved the governorship of the lands for the sake of which they had been fighting and over which they held property rights. Another attempt by Bidlîsî to gain the confidence of the Ottoman sultan manifested itself in the expressions through which he tried to demonstrate that the Kurds were eager to fight not only for territorial domination but also for the salvation of religion. In the following part we will appraise this effort and examine how and why Bidlîsî exonerated some of the Kurdish leaders and tribes from the label of “Kızılbaş”.

iv- Kurdish Religious Affiliations

The territories of Iraq-i Arab and Iraq Acem where the Kurds lived were rather heterogeneous not only ethnically, but also religiously. Among the Kurds there were not only sectarian Sunni orders but also mystical marginal groups such as Yezidis and ahl-i Hak as well as ghulat Shiʿi. It is difficult to determine the exact nature of the

---

156 Bruinessen and Dowall suggested that with the Seljuk’s sovereignty the eastern Anatolia welcomed the massive migration of Turcoman tribes and they led to the cultural changes and social formations in the new and old hosts of this lands. Bruinessen related the existence of variety in beliefs among the Kurdish tribes to the new formations, see Martin Van Bruinessen, Kürtlük, Türklük, Alevilik (İstanbul, 2000), pp. 95-96; Dowall, A Modern History of The Kurds, pp. 22-23.

157 For the sectarian characters of Kurds see Martin van Bruinessen, Mollas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society, Collected Articles (The ISIS Press, İstanbul, 2000).
religious connections between the Safavi shah and these marginal groups in the early sixteenth century. However, at that time, Bidlisi regarded the leaders of the Kurdish tribe of Pazuki and the leaders of the district of Hakkari, İzzeddin Şir, and his son, Zahid, as religious followers of Shah İsma’îl\textsuperscript{158}. Even if within the Kurdish tribal society there were marginal religious factions politicized by the Safavi shah, according to Bidlisi, the tribe of Pazuki and the ruling family of Hakkari had become Kızılbaş because of their military and political preferences. In fact, during the Ottoman military expedition against the Safavi state, anyone who fought against the Ottoman armies or who did not agree to fight against the Safavi state was simply regarded as Kızılbaş by Bidlisi. Alaüddevle, the leader of the Dulkadir principality, for example, was accused of this\textsuperscript{159}. It is no surprise that a similar argument was used in the \textit{Sharafnâme}. It seems that the author labeled some of the Kurdish tribal rulers including İzzeddin Şir and Halid as Kızılbaş because Shah İsma’îl supported them as political alternatives to Şerf Khan and the latter’s allies such as Melik Halil\textsuperscript{160}. Above all, both Bidlisi in the \textit{Selimshahnâme} and Şerf in the \textit{Sharafnâme} attempted to secure the governorship of Bidlis, Van and Hasankeyf in favor of Şerf Khan and his ally, Melik Halil Eyyûbî, by accusing the rivals of being Kızılbaş. They did this by implying that if they were not with them then they must be against them: namely, with the Kızılbaş. It is most probable that together with other political factors, a similiar manner of reasoning also had an effect on the murder of Pazuki Halil by the

\textsuperscript{158} Bidlisi, \textit{SN}, fol. 126b; TSA, E. nr. 8333/I-II. Also for the accusations of Bidlisi about the leaders of Hakkari for being deviant Kızılbaş particularly see TSA, E. nr. 1019.

\textsuperscript{159} For such accusations as hak nâ shinâs, munâfik, mulhid see Bidlisi, \textit{SN}, ff. 123b-124b; Kurlangç, \textit{Selim Şah-nâme}, pp. 246-248.

\textsuperscript{160} For particularly the tribe of Pazuki the author of \textit{Sharafnâme} used the phrase of “ they had no a certain sect (medheb-i mu’âyyen nedârend) “. For this and other definitions about the leading family of Hakkari, the tribes of Bajnawî and Pazuki see respectively \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 95, 157, 328-329; TSA, E. nr.1019. In \textit{Sharafnâme} there is also mention about such religious excessive groups as Kızılbaş and Yezidi Kurds besides to Kızılbaş Kurds as being political followers of Shah İsma’il, see \textit{Sharafnâme}, p. 14.
Ottoman sultan, even though the former had pledged his loyalty to Sultan Selim in person.\footnote{For the details of the case of the leader of Pazuki see the second part of the present chapter.}

It is striking that Bidlîşî always found it necessary to differentiate the Kızılbaş from the Sunni Kurds as follows: “…The leaders of Baradost and Nasir Ustani were people with pure souls and differed from the Kızılbaş…”\footnote{TSA, E. nr. 6610.}, “…. Seyyid Sultan Ahmed was a pure Muslim but out of necessity had to associate with to Kızılbaş Hüsameddin…”\footnote{TSA, E. nr. 1019.}, “… the kings of Shirvan were Kızılbaş…”\footnote{Ibid.}, “Melik Beg, [the grandson of İzzeddin Şir] was fortunately chastened [by Bidlîşî] ”\footnote{Ibid.}. In specifying people and geographical locations in his reports, Bidlîşî categorized them according to their sectarian preferences. Through such narrative strategies, he tried to identify the friends and foes of the Ottoman sultan. In this respect, the case of the chaste Melik Beg is a striking example. Bidlîşî wanted to introduce him to the sultan as a devout Muslim, in spite of his father, Zahid, and grandfather, İzzeddin Şir, known for their adherence to Shah İsma‘îl. As we shall examine in detail, Bidlîşî must have adopted this strategy because he had promised Melik Beg an administrative position.

Bidlîşî represented the Kurds as pious Sunni Muslims and makes no mention of the Yezidis, ahl-i Hak or Kızılbaş Kurds with a few exceptions such as Pazuki Halil and İzzeddin Şir. Nevertheless, while Bidlîşî made considerable effort to prove that the Kurds were Sunni Muslim, at the same time, he confessed that the Kurds had adjusted themselves to the religious rituals of the Kızılbaş. According to Bidlîşî, after the Kurds had been called to fight for Islam and jihad, they proved their devotion to the Sunni sect
and its protector, the caliph-sultan Selim, by relinquishing their subordination to the Kızılbaş, removing the vile and deviant practices of the Kızılbaş from their worship and beginning to act in accordance with the beliefs of the Sunni sect. In another section of his work, he noted that after the leaders of Kurds had turned away from the Safavi shah, they eradicated the religious practices of Kızılbaş that were performed in the mosques, and changed them in the direction of ahl-i Sunna. Despite the fact that these statements of Bidlîşi indicate the religious tendencies among Kurds towards the practices of a marginal mystical order, the endeavors of the Kurds to be pious Sunni Muslims were emphasized to demonstrate their credibility as political leaders.

Furthermore, to prove the piety of the Kurds, Bidlîşi claimed that when the Safavi state had established sovereignty in Iran, the Kurds had fought against the Safavi armies not only to get back their hereditary lands but also for the sake of Islam. While displaying superior heroism and prowess during the war, after the conquest they embellished their territories lavishly with mosques and medreses. Moreover, “for this very reason”, Bidlîşi wrote, “they were exposed to the tyranny of Shah Îsma‘îl; in particular, the virtuous pure religious scholars of Diyarbakır were suffering... and they sought refuge with the Ottoman sultan who provided it to the adherents of Islam”. References to the wronged but brave Muslim Kurds appear in Bidlîşi’s works whenever he reminds Sultan Selim of the necessity of military unity under his leadership during the conflicts between the Kurdish forces and the Safavi armies. Probably Bidlîşi emphasized the wretched state into which the Kurds had fallen in their fight against Shah Îsma‘îl not only to prove their

---

166 Bidlîşi, SN, ff. 129b-130a; Kırlangıç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 261-262.
167 Bidlîşi, SN, ff. 120a-120b, 133b.
168 Bidlîşi, SN, fol. 120a.
169 Bidlîşi, SN, fol. 119a, 130a; TSA, E. nr. 6610.
religious devotion as Sunni Muslims, but also to persuade Sultan Selim, who had postponed the second military expedition against Iran in part because of the inconsistent activities of Kurds, that they could, in fact, be trusted.

Bidlîsî was not alone in emphasizing that the Kurds were Sunni Muslims. It is also echoed in what the representatives of Kurdish tribal leaders, who tried to convince Bîyiklî Mehmed Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of Erzurum, of their loyalty to Sultan Selim, told the Ottoman commander, saying that their business was to live between the Safavi and Ottoman lands as good Muslims and not to cause any disorder within these boundaries. The reports sent by the Ottoman commander, Bîyiklî Mehmed Pasha to Sultan Selim, on the other hand, indicate that he did not trust the Kurdish notables. Aware of this distrust on the Ottoman side, Bidlîsî insisted that the Kurds were ahl-i Sunna and tried to make a sharp distinction between the Kurds and the rest of Safavi society in religious terms with the ultimate goal of dismissing all suspicion that the Kurds could be religious and political followers of Shah Îsma‘îl. Furthermore, the lands to be bestowed by the Ottoman Sultan would be safe as the Kurds had pledged their loyalty to the sultan in the presence of Bîyiklî Mehmed Pasha.

v- Political Associations with Neighbors in the Early Sixteenth Century

When Bidlîsî and the author of the Sharafnâme argued that the sole common characteristic of the Kurds was to believe in the oneness of God and in the sunna of the Prophet Muhammed, they implied that this factor was not strong enough to bring the Kurds together. In fact, with this remark Bidlîsî as well as Şeref sought to draw the

170 TSA, E. nr. 5858.
171 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 129b-130a; Sharafnâme, p. 16.
attention of the Ottoman sultan to the inner conflicts among the Kurds, which made them vulnerable to external interference. Also with this remark, Bidlîsî suggested that this led to a division of political authority among the Kurdish tribes. He seems to have presumed that if proper political strategies were applied, these conflicts could result in favor of both the Ottomans and the Kurds. At the same time, he probably wanted to remind the Ottoman sultan that otherwise, the Kurds would change sides whenever they saw their political future at stake.

When informing the sultan about the political condition in the region, Bidlîsî also took into consideration the political experiences of the Kurdish leaders in the past. Most probably, he had been an eyewitness to most of the events he discussed when he was in the Akkoyunlu palace. At that time, the Kurdish tribal leaders had tried to protect their political existence by turning the conflicts between the two Turcoman states, the Akkoyunlu and the Karakoyunlu, to their advantage. The ruler of Bitlis, for example, had established close relationships with the ruler of the Karakoyunlu State, when the Akkoyunlu State augmented its pressure on the Kurdish leaders.\textsuperscript{172} By doing so, the latter had both divided the forces that would constitute a threat in his territories and maintained his political existence by playing one rival off against another. As for the Akkoyunlu ruler, he had tried to weaken the power of the ruling dynasties of Bitlis and Hakkari, by appointing the family of the Mahmûdî to be the administrators of Hakkari, thus inciting a new struggle between the family of the Mahmûdî and the leading families of Bitlis and Hakkari\textsuperscript{173}.

\textsuperscript{172} For the attitudes of Uzun Hasan towards those who allied with Karakoyunlu state see \textit{Sharafnâme}, p. 190. Also see the part of Marital Kinsmen in the present chapter. For the relationship between the Karakoyunlu leader, Kara Yusuf and the leaders of Bitlis, Şemseddin, see \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 474-478.

\textsuperscript{173} For the struggle for the leadership of Hakkari see \textit{Ibid.}, p. 301.
When Uzun Hasan established his sovereignty in the Iraq-i Arab, most Kurdish leaders were exposed to the centralizing policies of Uzun Hasan and later, of his sons.\textsuperscript{174} In fact, at this time, the Kurdish leaders may have been looking for support from another power such as the Ottoman State. But probably because the Ottoman military agenda did not include expansion in that direction at that time, the appearance of the Safavi shah as a new power in the east must have seemed like an opportunity for the Kurdish leaders to regain the political power they had lost during the period of the Akkoyunlu State. With this aim, twelve major Kurdish leaders declared that they accepted the sovereignty of Shah İsma‘il in his presence.\textsuperscript{175}

Having considered these political relationships between the Kurdish notables and the Akkoyunlus and, later, Safavis, Bidlîşî in the \textit{Selimshahnâme} and his reports occasionally hints at the slipperiness in the Kurds’ political preferences; he does not mention explicitly the political contacts of the Kurds with the Safavi shah, except in the case of Kurd Halil and the son of İzzeddin Şir, Zahid Beg. In reality, not only Zahid Beg and Kurd Halil, but also most of the ruling Kurdish families whom Bidlîşî defined as loyal servants of the Ottoman sultan seem to have been ready to provide military support to the Safavi shah when the Safavi state emerged as a new power in Iran in the early sixteenth century. But some of those who were the most powerful leaders supported by the confederate tribes, such as Emir Şeref Khan\textsuperscript{176}, Melik Halil Eyyûbi\textsuperscript{177}, Shah Ali bin Bedir\textsuperscript{178}, were being kept captive in the Safavi palace. The fact that the aforementioned

\textsuperscript{174} Bruinessen, \textit{Agha}, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Sharafnâme}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{176} For the reports about the courtesy of Şeref Khan and his pledge of allegiance to the Safavi shah see \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 408-410.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 156.
\textsuperscript{178} For the case of the leader of Bohti see \textit{Ibid.}, p. 125.
Kurdish leaders had submitted to the authority of the Safavi shah is not mentioned in the Selimshahnâme. Rather, concerning the captured Kurdish leaders, Bidlîsî simply related that they had courageously and faithfully defended against Shah 伊斯馬‘il’s military forces the territories in which they lived and to which they claimed administrative rights. It is a fact that some Kurdish leaders, like the leaders of Bohti, resorted to military struggle when the victory of Shah 伊斯馬‘il in Iraq-i Arab was assured179. The domination of the rulers of Turcoman tribes over the Iraqeyn compelled the Kurdish leaders to strike a bargain with the Safavi shah whereby they would retain administrative control over their lands but accept the Safavi state’s sovereignty.

Bidlîsî explained the political victory of the Safavi shah in the territories where the Kurdish tribes lived by arguing that the Kurds had had to submit to Shah 伊斯馬‘il because they had been weakened by him economically as well as politically180. Without giving any place to the political association between the Kurdish notables and the Safavi shah, Bidlîsî claimed that the forced subordination of the Kurds to Shah 伊斯馬‘il actually presented an advantage for the Ottoman state and an opportunity for negotiation with the Kurds.

Another reason for the silence in Bidlîsî’s writings on the details of the political contacts of the Kurds with the Safavi shah, and for his effort in depicting the captive Kurdish leaders as wronged, must have been to prevent the Ottoman sultan from resorting to severe policies at a time when he was trying to persuade the Kurdish leaders to submit to Ottoman power. It is probably this anxiety that led him to avoid reporting the suspicious acts of some Kurds to Sultan Selim. But Beyükli Mehmed Pasha did this in his

179 The leaders of tribe of Bohti took considerable place in Sharafnâme in term of his resistance to the Safavi shah, see Sharafnâme, pp. 124-125.
180 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 72b, 129b; TSA, E. nr. 6610.
stead. According to the reports of Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, Davud Beg, the leader of Hizan, and Pir Hüseyin Beg, the ruler of Çemişkezek, had maintained their contacts with Shah İスマ‘il although they had declared loyalty to the Ottoman sultan. It seems that the foremost expectation of the Ottoman officers controlling military developments along the Ottoman borders in the east, was that the Kurds would provide them with information about the Safavi military front. Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha accused the two Kurdish leaders of not acquainting him with the developments in Iran, and of reporting the Ottoman plans for military operations to the Safavi shah. Pir Hüseyin, for example, had encouraged Shah İスマ‘il to come to the district of Diyarbakır, by claiming that he held territorial rights to Diyarbakır. The Ottoman commander asserted further that some men in the Ottoman palace were working for Pir Hüseyin. It is possible that Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha was misinformed. Still, he believed in the reliability of this information and felt compelled to warn the sultan about the Kurds.

Although such news brought the affairs of Bidlisî to an impasse and increased his worries about the possibility of failure in uniting the Kurds in the service of the Ottoman sultan, all the major Kurdish leaders including Davud Beg and Pir Hüseyin were on the Ottoman side during the battle against the Safavi armies for Diyarbakır, according to Bidlisî. Until this event, Bidlisî seems to have made extraordinary efforts to persuade the Ottoman sultan of the credibility of the Kurds as leaders. In this respect, we examined the representations of Bidlisî to Sultan Selim about the Kurds as ones who were noble and pious and were exposed to the tyranny of Shah İスマ‘il because they had defended

---

181 TSA, E. nr. 6627, 8283.
182 TSA, E. nr. 8283.
183 Ibid.
184 For the names of Kurd leaders he listed at the rank of the Ottoman army see Bidlisî, SN, ff. 137b-138a; Kırlangıç, Selim Şah-nâme, p.279; TSA, E. nr. 8333/III.
their hereditary territories against Shah ʿĪsmāʿīl and that their links with the Safavi State developed out of necessity. On the other hand, for the Ottoman State to try to acquire the Safavi lands by fighting in alliance with disorganized tribal forces, namely the Kurds, might have seemed to be a futile military effort. Nevertheless, the Ottoman sultan took the risk of allying with the Kurds. Most likely, Bīdīlī’s positive representations of the Kurds were a major factor behind the establishment of the trust in the Kurdish notables by the Ottoman sultan and officers in favor of the Kurds. Let us now examine Bīdīlī’s political visits to western Safavi lands to see how he was also to bring the Kurdish tribal leaders and their military forces together in the service of the Ottoman State.
II. Organizing the Kurds on the Side of the Ottoman Sultan

Even though Bidlîsî represents the Kurdish notables as the ones who were ready and eager to fight against the Safavis throughout the *Selimshahnâme* and in his reports in order to underline their reliability, when he left Amasya to meet the Kurdish notables, probably he did not yet have any definitive strategy to organize the Kurds. Most likely the plans of Bidlîsî took shape during his meetings with and in line with the changing situation of the Kurdish notables during this process. In addition, the political strategies of Bidlîsî developed parallel to Shah 伊斯邏爾’s. In a critical period in which the latter supported some alternative political figures among Kurdish tribes and ruling families, Bidlîsî discarded these members from his plans and connected with those tribal leaders who had problems with the Safavi shah. In the *Selimshahnâme*, he did not mention these strategies, but instead praised his newfound allies among the Kurdish tribal leaders as particularly pious and reliable, while denigrating those who sided with the Safavi shah. In fact, what determined the policies of both Bidlîsî and Shah 伊斯邏爾 was the existence of the ruling families which had political influence in the area. When the Safavi shah captured tribal leaders such as Melik Halil Eyyûbî and Şeref Khan and supported those who would be rival to these leaders, he upset the political balance among the Kurdish tribes living within the borders of the Safavi state. In the following section, we will examine these developments and the measures that Bidlîsî took to counteract them.
Playing the Tribes and Members of the Same Family off Against One Another

When Shah ʿIsmaʿil detained Kurdish leaders such as Melik Halil Eyyūbî and Şeref Khan, he formed new alliances, as he had pledged, with other influential tribes, and even with relatively minor ones. Through this strategy, the Safavi shah aimed to legitimize his political power in the Safavi state through alliance with different tribal powers. The political rise of the leaders of the Pazuki tribe in the area around Bitlis is the best manifestation of this policy. According to the *Sharafnâme*, the leader of the Pazuki, Şehsuvar Beg, had entered the service of Şeref Khan and further, acted as his tutor (*lâla*) after the political ruin of the Akkoyunlu state. But Shah ʿIsmaʿil offered Pazuki Halid, Şehsuvar Beg’s son, authority over and independent governorship of Muṣ, Hınıs, Malazgirt, and, later, Bitlis, and Ahlat.

In recounting the case of Halid as he did, Şeref was clearly concerned to account for the fact that after the establishment of the absolute rule of the Safavi shah in Iran, Halid, like other Kurdish leaders, pledged loyalty to Shah ʿIsmaʿil, the latter bestowed on him the governorship of Ahlat, Muṣ, and Bitlis despite the fact that Şeref Khan was the governor of these districts at that time. According to Şeref, later, during the Battle of Çaldıran, Halid had declared that he wanted to join with Sultan Selim. After taking part in the victorious Battle of Çaldıran, Halid went to Amasya both to congratulate Sultan

---

185 *Sharafnâme*, pp. 329, 401.
186 In fact there was an old struggle for these districts between Şeref Khan and his uncle, İbrahim. In this period Halid appeared in the side of İbrahim inspite of his father objections. The one of these two powers, İbrahim, was eliminated by Shah ʿIsmaʿil, see *Ibid.*, pp. 400-407. On the other hand the Safavi shah stimulator the man of İbrahim, Halid who was less powerful rival for him against Şeref Khan. For the rise of the leaders of Pazuki and his relates see *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330; TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
187 *Sharafnâme*, p. 329.
Selim and to swear allegiance to him, as did Şeref Khan. But Sultan Selim must have distrusted Halid’s allegiance as he had him killed\(^{188}\).

In the *Sharafnâme*, in order to acquit the family of Şeref Khan in the eyed of the Kurdish tribes, Şeref implicitly justified the killing of Halid, presenting Halid and his family as those who betrayed their patron, the leader of Bitlis. Probably since Halid constituted a potential threat to Şeref Khan, who claimed to be the only governor of the province of Bitlis and the districts north of Lake Van, the elimination of Halid seemed to be a must. Unlike Şeref, Bidlîsî did not mention about the fact that Halid went Amasya to present his allegiance to the Ottoman sultan in the *Selimshahnâme*, probably not to give a positive impression to the Ottoman reader about Halid. It is possible that Bidlîsî, who did not think the presence of Halid would be advantageous for Şeref Khan, whom he believed to be more faithful than Halid, prodded the Ottoman sultan to have Halid executed during his diplomatic activities. Likewise, the death of Halid allowed Şeref Khan to rise unopposed after the Ottoman sultan left Eastern Anatolia, whereupon Shah Isma‘il prodded the son and brothers of Halid to attack Şeref Khan and to seize the territories north of Lake Van\(^ {189}\). In order to eliminate the military threat posed to Şeref Khan by Halid’s sons, Bidlîsî may have provoked the outbreak of new local tribal struggles between the members of the Pazuki family and the leaders of minor tribes such as the Sekri\(^ {190}\).

---

\(^{188}\) In the *Sharafnâme* Halid seemed to serve to the Ottoman sultan, but since he did not draw a faithful profile he was killed by the order of the Sultan, see *Sharafnâme*, p. 329. On the other hand Bidlîsî mentioned not his desire for serving to the Ottoman Sultan, but his killing by the Sultan Selim and struggle between Şeref Khan and the sons of Halid. See Bidlîsî, *SN*, fol. 126b.

\(^{189}\) TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.

\(^{190}\) *Sharafnâme*, p. 287.
Subsequently, Shah İsmail used various tactics to establish and consolidate his authority over the tribes. By supporting politically powerless families against influential leading families, for example, he attempted to prevent the rise of any power that he would not be able to control. It was in connection with this that the tribes of Pazuki and Mahmûdî around Lake Van rose to prominence. The tribe of Bajnawî reappeared as the leading family of Hasankeyf and, as a result of Safavi shah’s project to weaken other powerful leaders, the leaders Melik Halil Eyyûbî and Emir Bedir also regained power. According to the *Sharafnâme*, the families of Boht and Bajn, who ruled Cezire and Hasankeyf respectively, shared a common ancestor but had longstanding problems with each other191. After the ancestor of Melik Halil had seized the citadel of Hasankeyf by defeating the Bajn, Emir Bedir, head of the Bohtî, had wanted Melik Halil to kill Mir Muhammed, the head of the Bajnawî192. It was the murder of Mir Muhammed which had provoked a blood feud between the families of Bajn and Melik Halil and Emir Bedir.

The historical enmities among the Kurdish families enabled Shah İsmail to develop his strategies towards the Kurdish tribes. According to the *Sharafnâme*, the family of the Bajn had allied with Shah İsmail to avenge their father’s death193; Shah İsmail may also have provoked the sons and brothers of Pazuki Halil to take revenge on those who consented to their father’s death. Most likely, by provoking this enmity between Emir Şeref, Emir Bedir, Melik Halil and the Pazuki and the Bajnawî tribes, Shah İsmail tried to change the dynamics of power in this region. Nevertheless, Bidlîşî’s link with the family of Bajn is difficult to determine. Probably, this family, which laid equal claim with Melik Halil to inheriting the governorship of Hasankeyf, had been excluded

191 Ibid., p. 158.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
from the organization of the Kurds to the side of the Ottoman state in order not to create a force that would rival that of Melik Halil and Emir Bedir. Therefore, the fact that the family of Bajn remained partisans of Shah Isma‘il may have been advantageous for the rise, in particular, of Melik Halil.

Another favorite leader of Shah Isma‘il was İzzeddin Şir and his son, Zahid. This family, called the Shanbu in the Sharafnâme, ruled the mountainous lands south of Lake Van: Hakkari, Ahtamar, Van and Vustan. Since the mountainous terrain made this region impenetrable to foreign invaders, the tribal Kurdish leaders could exercise independent rule in these districts, even when they were militarily subordinate to the imperial state. When Bidlîsî was organizing the Kurds, this region appeared to him to be the best zone in which to establish a garrison to prevent Safavi attacks. It seems, however, that Bidlîsî could not manage to persuade Zahid to join the Ottoman ranks, but he did not mention about any meeting with Zahid probably to downplay his failure in this regard. But interestingly, Melik Beg, son of Zahid, is represented as a follower of the Ottomans in Bidlîsî’s writings. Accordingly, Melik Beg had attended the meetings of the Kurds and defended the districts of Van and Vustan against the Safavi armies. On the other hand, from the Sharafnâme, we understand that Zahid held the governorship of the region under the Safavi shah until his death, and there is no evidence that the son of Zahid served as his father’s representative in his father’s lifetime.

Whereas Zahid acted in the name of the Safavi shah, his son, Melik Beg, as potential candidate for the governorship of Hakkari under Ottoman guarantee of suzerainty, was probably encouraged to fight against the Safavi armies along with Şeref

---

194 Ibid., p. 89
195 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 120a-120b.
196 Sharafnâme, p. 95.
Khan. However no conflict between father and son is mentioned either in Bidlisi’s writings or in the *Sharafnâme*. In fact Bidlisi did not report any drastic conflict between the Kurds and the Safavi forces north of Lake Van. It seems that Melik Beg did not participate in any military events, even though Bidlisi represented him as an Ottoman ally in spite of his father. Perhaps the reason for Bidlisi’s representation of Melik Beg in this manner was to use him as a trump card against his father or to give prestige to the Kurdish alliance and to prove his efforts to persuade the members of family of Shanbu.

ii-The Two Captive Kurdish Leaders Back in Power

In line with their particular agendas, both the *Sharafnâme* and *Selimshahnâme* put particular stress on the importance of certain tribes and their leaders. As a candidate for the governorship of Bitlis in the late sixteenth century, Şeref ascribed great significance to the Rozki tribe as the most powerful confederation which was in the district of Bitlis and to the Bilbashi and Kavalisi as the significant families of the confederation\(^\text{197}\). As the leader of this confederation, his family, the family of Diyaeddin or Şeref khans, was also represented as having been the rulers of Bitlis since the period of Jalâl al-din Kharizmî (1220-1231)\(^\text{198}\) with the support of the Rozki tribe. The closest ally of the ruler of Bitlis to the southwest of that town, the Melikan family, was depicted as another leading dynasty that ruled the district of Hasankeyf. As for the Shirvan, Zirkan, Rashan, and Bajnawî, they were other tribes which played an effective role in the election of the ruler of Hasankeyf, according to the *Sharafnâme*\(^\text{199}\).

\(^{197}\) *Ibid.*, p. 418
\(^{198}\) The author of *Sharafnâme* recorded that when the Kharizmî shah came to Bitlis, Melik Eşref from the lineage of Diyaeddin ruled Bitlis, see *Ibid.*, pp. 364-365.
In order to strengthen his justifications about the influences of Şeref Khan and Melik Halil Ayyûbî on other Kurdish tribal leaders, the author of the *Sharafnâme* recounted the case of captivity of the two leaders by the Safavi Shah. Accordingly, in the early sixteenth century when Shah İsma’il, on deciding to release several Kurdish leaders he had been keeping captive in his palace, asked them who their leader was, all of them gave the names of Şeref Khan, the ruler of Bitlis, and Melik Halil Eyyûbî, the ruler of Hasankeyf. Upon hearing this, the Safavi shah released all of them except for these two leaders. In the *Selimshahnâme*, Şeref Khan and Melik Halil Eyyûbî were similarly represented as the most important leaders of the region as well as vital for establishing Ottoman sovereignty over the western lands of the Safavi state. Depicting these leaders as the most influential leaders over the tribes located in Iraq-i Arab, the southern borderlands of the Safavi state, Bidlîsî might have wanted to give the message that if the Kurdish tribes were to be united and organized against the Safavi state, the two most powerful rulers in the region should once more become politically active in their lands.

Şeref claimed that Bidlîsî had met with the Kurdish notables before undertaking the long journey to the Safavi frontiers in the west. If this was the case, during this particular political visit, Bidlîsî may have been given information by the members of the Rozki tribe such as Mehmed Bilbaşı and Muhammed Kelhori about the developments in the Safavi borderlands. It is possible that the members of the Rozki tribe wanted Bidlîsî to guarantee that the attitude of the sultan would be positive if they managed to organize the Kurds under the leadership of Şeref Khan and Melik Halil in favor of the Ottoman state. While it is difficult to establish the details of the first political negotiations, it is safe...

---

to say that Sultan Selim approached the demands of the Kurds positively, and probably promised the Kurdish notables that he would reinforce their efforts by a second military expedition to the Safavi frontier in the west\textsuperscript{202}, if the Kurds managed to unite on the side of the Ottomans. In this regard, Bidlîsî gives us some hints to understand the first agreement between the Ottoman sultan and Şeref Khan and Melik Halîl Eyyûbî. According to him, these last two notables had sworn allegiance to the Ottoman sultan and begun the fight against the Safavi shah in the name of the Ottoman sultan. In return, the sultan had bestowed on them the governorship of the district of Bitlis and Hasankeyf\textsuperscript{203}. Following the departure of Şeref Khan and, later, Bidlîsî from Tabriz, an uprising in the aforementioned districts broke out against the Safavi governors; a short while after the war between the Ottoman and the Safavi states had begun, the Safavi military forces also had to deal with revolts in Safavi provinces such as Bitlis, Diyarbakîr, Hasankeyf and Mosul, which were organized by the two leaders.

Most likely, both Bidlîsî and Şeref overstated the role of Şeref Khan and Melîk Halîl Ayyûbî in the Ottoman-Safavi conflict to justify their outstanding political authorities among the other tribes and their political standing in Bitlis and Hasankeyf. The same strategy is manifested also in the accounts of Bidlîsî about the clashes between the Kurds and the Safavi forces. These accounts also give information about the other tribal leaders whom Bidlîsî specified to display their endeavors in the struggle against the Safavi forces and thus to justify their right to claim to be provincial ruler of the territories for which they struggled. According to these events, between 1515 and 1516, Bidlîsî traveled through the lands from Tabriz to Diyarbakîr and contacted the Kurdish tribal

\textsuperscript{202} TSA, E. nr. 8333/III.
\textsuperscript{203} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, fol. 120b.
leaders there. As a result of his visits, the leaders of these districts assembled under his leadership in order to unite in military action and decide on their strategies. Bidlişî lists the names of the participants with their titles as the following: the melik of Bitlis, Emir Şeref, the melik of Hizan, Emir Davud, whom Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha accused of being a follower of Shah İsmail, the hakim of Sason, Ali Beg, the hakim of Nemran, Abdul Beg, and the son of İzzeddin Şir, Emir Melik Abbas, all of whom were leaders of the tribes located around Lake Van and had close relationship with Emir Şeref, and the governor of Hasankeyf, Melik Halil Eyyübî.

According to Bidlişî, all of them declared their allegiance to the Ottoman sultan and agreed to remove the Kızılbaş from the region. The presence of Şeref Khan and Melik Halil Eyyübî must have encouraged the Kurdish tribes to combine their forces. Through this collaboration, while guerilla warfare began between the Kurdish tribal armies based in Bitlis, Şirvan, Sason, Hizan, Mükêş and Nemran, and the Safavi armies based in the mountainous areas around Lake Van, Kurdish resistance to the troops of the families of Pazuki and İzzeddin Şir also broke out in the territories to the north and south of Lake Van. In addition, after the temporary victories of the Kurds in these districts and the conquest of the small citadels of Atak, Palu, and Eğil around Diyarbakir, the entrance to Diyarbakir from the northeast could be blocked. In the districts of Hasankeyf, Mardin, Siirt, Cezire-i Ömeriyye, Ruha and Meyyafarkin conflicts broke out between the Safavi armies and the Kurdish forces under the command of Melik Halil

204 *Ibid.*, fol. 120a.
205 Bidlişî reported the details of these uprisings in his first report, see TSA, E. nr. 8333/I. Also see TSA, E. nr. 8333/II; For the accounts of the struggles of the united Kurds forces with the Safavis see Bidlişî, *SN*, ff. 126b-127a; Kırlangıç, *Selim Şah-nâme*, pp. 254-255.
Eyyûbî. The Kurdish forces were supported by Shah Emir Ali b. Bedir\textsuperscript{207}, the leader of the tribe of Bohtí which had influence in the region extending from Bitlis and Diyarbakır to Baghdad.

The collaboration of the tribes of Rozki and Bohtí was represented as critical for obtaining ultimate victory at Bitlis, Siirt and Hasankeyf, Mardin, Meyyafarkin, and Ruha. Moreover, Bidlîsî stressed that the tribe of Bohtí extended the conflict to Mosul, and supported the tribal leaders of İmadiye, Soran and Baradost who were continuing their struggle against the Safavi forces in Mosul, Kerkuk and Erbil\textsuperscript{208}. The district of Iraq-i Arab was, in fact, a strategic military zone for the Safavi state as well as for the Ottomans that targeted the political and military stability in this area and its borders, Syria which the Ottomans were preparing to conquer at that time. Therefore, Bidlîsî mentioned that he corresponded also with the tribal leaders on these borders and advised them to protect their territories and defend them against the Safavi state in the name of the Ottoman sultan\textsuperscript{209}; then sought to make an alliance with the tribe of Baradost which suffered from internal leadership problems. This was reinforced by an alliance with the two rival tribes, Baban and Soran. On the advice of Bidlîsî, according to him, three tribes, Baradost, Baban and Soran, agreed to unite under the leadership of Soran and took under their protection the leader of the Mekri who ruled over territory near Lake Urmiyye\textsuperscript{210}.

The fastidiousness with which Bidlîsî recounted the tribes that joined the alliance and the districts for which they struggled indicates his intention to specify the names of those tribal leaders who were/would be the political addressee of the Ottomans during

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{207} \textit{Ibid.}, fol. 127a.
\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Ibid.}, ff. 127a, 134b-135a.
\textsuperscript{209} TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
and after the Ottoman-Safavi conflict. From another perspective, it can be inferred from his diplomatic tactics that Bidlîsî aimed to establish a zone of resistance near Lake Urmïye, a Safavi center. Joint as well as independent skirmishes and conflicts in the abovementioned lands blocked Safavi access to Baghdad, Azerbaijan and Diyarbakır. But it seems that the mission of Bidlîsî was not limited to organizing the Kurdish tribes in the districts of Bitlis, Diyarbakır and Hasankeyf. In order to ensure both the continuation of Ottoman authority in these lands and to realize the future projects of Sultan Selim in Iran, Bidlîsî would also keep watch over the activities of the Kurds in the Iraqeyn.

iii- The Kurds in the Iraqeyn

In the territories stretching from Shirvan on the coast of the Caspian Sea to Laristan on the strait of Hurmuz and to Balkh in today’s Afghanistan, the Safavi shah attempted to control the ports and the silk route, seeking to establish his sovereignty over these areas from 1507 onwards. Sultan Selim, too, had designs on these lands and possibly planned to advance further towards Shirvan in the north, Herat in today’s Afghanistan in the east, and Hurmuz in the south, after conquering the western parts of the Safavi state. This is why Bidlîsî reported on the developments in these lands, tried to contact the Kurd tribes in the Iraqeyn, and sought information about their affiliations with the Safavi state as the Ottoman sultan had ordered.

In order to capture the Safavi territories in the area from Baghdad to Hurmuz, it seemed crucial to contact the Kurds located between these areas in the pivotal regions of Luristan and Larestan. In the *Sharafnâme* the area named Luristan is divided into two

---


212 TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
parts: Lur Minor (Lur-i Küchek) [from Baghdad to Basra] and Lur Major (Lur-i Buzurg) [Larestan from Basra to Hormuz] 213. Bidlîşî presents tribes such as the Bahtiyârî, Kelh, Ağîl and Mash’ash’î as being the politically significant families in Luristan 214. According to the information Bidlîşî gave the Ottoman sultan, the sons of Mash’ashî and the people and notables of Bahtiyârî and Kalkh had revolted against the Safavi shah and recaptured their territories in Luristan and Larestan 215.

In his first reports to Sultan Selim, Bidlîşî wrote that he had traveled in person as an ambassador from Mosul to Larestan and Shiraz 216. He maintained that as a result of his propaganda, the Kurds in the region extending from Shiraz to Isfahan, whom he refers to as the rulers of Acem, declared that they would no longer submit to Shah Ḥusayn Isma’il. Probably Bidlîşî considered the military conflicts between the Uzbek, Mughal and Safavi troops around Isfahan, Khorasan and Shirvan as an advantage for both the Kurds and the Ottoman state. Moreover, he describes the Mughal ruler, Babur Mirza (d.1530), who had sought to repulse the Uzbek armies by allying with Safavi shah, as an enemy of the Kızılbaş and a protector of the Kurds 217.

“According to the news from Khorasan”, Bidlîşî wrote:

Babur Mirza captured several districts of Khorasan; defeating all the Kızılbaş there. As for the Timurid ruler, the son of Hüseyin Baykara, he fought with the Kızılbaş at Astarâbad to the north of Khorasan. On declaring his sovereignty over Khorasan, Babur Mirza forbade the rulers of Mazenderan, Gilan, Fîruzruh and Rustamdar to pay tax to Shah Ḥusayn Isma’il 218.

---

214 TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
215 Ibid.
216 TSA, E. nr. 6610.
217 TSA, E. nr. 8333/I.
218 Ibid.
While blocking the way to Iraq, thus preventing the entry of the Kiźılbaș, Babur Mirza also protected a certain amir, who had gained support from the ruler of İmadiya to defend Mosul, according to the report of Bidlîsî\(^{219}\). In fact, on the other hand, it would be wrong to think that Shah İsma‘il lost control over all the areas under his sovereignty at that time, as Bidlîsî claimed. Considering the difficult circumstances in this area and Bidlîsî’s advanced age, it does not seem possible that he went as far as Larestan or Khorasan. Presumably, Bidlîsî was reporting on events he had not witnessed in person but had only heard about. On the other hand, even if Bidlîsî exaggerated the opposition to Shah İsma‘il in Larestan, Khorasan and Shirvan, the descriptions of Bidlîsî about the names were to give an idea about the existence of potential allies for the Ottoman sultan in this vast area.

When anti-Safavi uprisings started in Iran, Shah İsma‘il sought to negotiate with the rebel leaders in order to restore them to the Safavi ranks. According to Bidlîsî, he managed to control the rebellions in Shirvan, Khorasan, Shiraz and Larestan\(^{220}\). In his last reports as well as in the Selimshahnâme, Bidlîsî no longer makes any mention of anti-Safavi developments, probably because at that time no Ottoman military expedition towards Iranian lands was expected. A second reason for these omissions might be that Shah İsma‘il had already established a relatively firm control over this region. Still these cities and others, such as Baghdad, Luristan, Gilan, Mazenderan, and Rasht, had been the main target of conquest by the Ottoman state\(^{221}\), at least until 1516 when Diyarbakir and Mardin were besieged. Therefore, Bidlîsî had considerable concern about the districts of

\(^{219}\) Ibid.
\(^{220}\) Ibid.
\(^{221}\) TSA, E. nr. 6610.
inner Iran and he considered it part of his diplomatic mission to inform the Ottoman sultan about them.

As we have seen above, Bidlîsî represented the Kurdish notables and his diplomatic meetings with them from a distinctly local perspective. In contrast, it was from a distinctly imperial view that he related the process of creating the alliance between the Ottoman military officials and the Kurdish leaders. The following section will cover this difficult process, its results and Bidlîsî’s critical role in the negotiations between the two sides during this period.

iv- The Unification of the Kurdish-Ottoman Forces

The first formal directive Sultan Selim gave to the Kurdish tribal leaders via Bidlîsî when the sultan returned to Amasya in 1514 was to fight for their own hereditary territories. At that time, he wrote them *fetihnamesi* and edicts which he sent with Bidlîsî. These *fetihnamesi* called upon the Kurds to submit to the Ottoman state. At the same time, certain letters of intent (*istimâletnâmes*), guaranteeing the Kurds Ottoman protection, were handed to Bidlîsî to be delivered to the Kurdish leaders. Through the *istimâletnâme*, the Ottoman sultan also promised military support to the Kurds as long as they fought in the name of the Ottoman state. This last seemed to be one of the conditions required by Bidlîsî which he used as his main argument when seeking to provide unity among the Kurdish tribes.

Yet in 1515, one year after the Battle of Çaldıran, the Ottoman sultan had still not organized a second military expedition against Iran. Among the Kurdish tribal forces,

---

who were in conflict with the Safavi forces in Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Hasankeyf, Mosul, Kerkuk, İmadiye and Urmîye without any Ottoman military reinforcement, there was considerable unrest. Bidlîsî reported this military and political situation to the Ottoman sultan, saying that the Kurds were waiting for the Ottoman armies, which the Sultan would lead in person, in order to confront the Safavi armies in Diyarbakır and Mardin224. Furthermore, probably in order to draw the Ottoman sultan’s attention to the situation of the Kurdish forces, he stressed that the Ottoman reinforcement was necessary not only for the conquest of these two citadels but also for the capture of all the Iranian lands225. In fact, when Sultan Selim returned to Istanbul in 1514, leaving the Kurdish leaders on their own, this created panic among the Kurdish tribes, because they then constituted the only force the Safavis would encounter in these lands. Probably this unexpected decision by the Ottoman sultan changed the perception of those who recognized the Ottoman state as the new power in place of the Safavi state. Indeed the recapture of Tabriz by Shah İsma‘il indicates the change in the balance of power along the newly formed frontier between the Ottoman and Safavi states. Furthermore, in Luristan and Laristan and in the north of Iran bordering on the Uzbek and Mughal lands, the control of the Safavi state became absolute after the withdrawal of the Ottoman sultan from the lands of northern and western Iran. Also in western borderlands the Safavi forces put down the Kurdish uprisings around Bitlis, Diyarbakır and Hasankeyf, thus terminating their united front.

Over all, at that time, the Kurds, who claimed to have entered the war in the name of the Ottoman sultan and with his guarantee, began to establish contact with the Safavi shah and the latter gave them gifts, such as swords and plumes, which symbolically

---

224 The hopeless of Kurds occupied particular place in Bidlîsî ‘s historical narrative, see Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 130b-131b.
225 TSA, E. nr. 6610, 8333/III.
meant that Shah İsmail recognized the hereditary authority of the Kurds over western Iran. Bidlîsî regarded these gifts as an effective factor in the submission of some Kurdish leaders to Shah İsmail.

In the summer of 1515, Sultan Selim finally undertook the expected military campaign but followed a route different from the one predicted. It seems that the main aim of this campaign was to eliminate the allies of the Mamluks and Safavis in Anatolia, such as Alaüddevle, dominant in northeastern Anatolia as the ruler of the principality of Dulkadir, and to capture the territories of the Mamluk state. Probably, the sultan postponed an Ottoman campaign against Iran and Transoxiana until the uncertainty over the territories in which skirmishes continued between the Kurds and the Safavi forces had been eliminated, and the boundaries of the Ottoman state in these lands had been determined. Bidlîsî was worried by this unexpected change of mind on the part of the sultan.

When Sultan Selim left the encampment in Amasya for his second military expedition, Bidlîsî had the opportunity to inform the sultan in person about the recent developments in Bitlis, Diyarbakır and Hasankeyf, on which he had reported earlier. Apparently, this was because the sultan persistently asked Bidlîsî whether there actually was any Kurdish resistance to the Safavi forces in Diyarbakır and whether it would be possible to occupy this province. Bidlîsî mentioned about these difficult moments in the Selimshahnâme. From the expression of Bidlîsî it is understood that as a diplomat he was exposed to the pressure of both sultan and the Kurdish notables. He writes that in this

---

226 TSA, E. nr. 1019.
227 For the report of Bidlîsî devoted to the developments in Diyarbakır, see TSA, E. nr. 6610. Also for the efforts of Bidlîsî to meet the Sultan when the latter was in Kemah see Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 118b-119a; Kırlangıç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 235-236; Hoca Saadeddin, Tacü’t Tevârih, vol. II, pp. 307-308.
228 Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 131b; Hoca Saadeddin, Tacü’t Tevârih, vol. II, p. 308.
period he was an Ottoman pawn among the Kurds (be dāʿī ki bûdem meyânishân rehîn) and he was exposed to persistent pressure from them as to whether the Ottomans would support them or not.\textsuperscript{229} Even if these comments can be interpreted as Bidlîsî’s attempt to underline his sufferings in this period, they also suggest that the Kurdish notables regarded Bidlîsî not only as their representative but also as the representative of the Ottoman sultan and thus they insisted on their political demands from Bidlîsî.

Bidlîsî writes that he coped with this difficult situation, saying that the sultan would come to help them after resolving the problem of Alaüddevle. As a representative of the Ottoman state, on the other side, he also persuaded the Kurdish leaders who had not yet pledged in words their loyalty to the sultan as a whole group, to meet the Ottoman sultan. Eventually, Bidlîsî’s efforts resulted in favor of both sides: when Sultan Selim was in the district of Kemah, he summoned Bidlîsî and the Kurds to appear before him.\textsuperscript{230} But at that very time, the sultan had to leave Kemah on another operation and it became clear that he would not engage in a fight with the Safavi forces. He did, nevertheless, recommend Bidlîsî and the Kurdish leaders to Bîyıklı Mehmed Pasha who had been appointed commander of the army to besiege Diyarbakır.\textsuperscript{231}

The Beylerbeyi of Erzurum was not, in fact, the first Ottoman authority the Kurds encountered. Earlier the Ottoman sultan had sent a military official, Yiğid Ahmed, to help the Kurdish forces. The beylerbeyi, nevertheless, was a high ranking officer, thus meeting a central demand of Bidlîsî and the Kurds. Apparently, Bidlîsî had reported that the Kurds who acted independently and did not accept an elected leader needed an Ottoman

\begin{footnotes}
\item[229] For the difficult process see Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 127b, 131a-131b; Kirlangîç, Selim Şâh-nâme, pp. 255-256, 264-265; Hoca Saadeddin, Tacû’-Tevârih, vol. II, p. 306.
\item[230] Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 118b-119a.
\end{footnotes}
military official appointed by the sultan as the commander of the Kurdish forces. According to Bidlîsî, such an official could subjugate the Kurds.\textsuperscript{232} Probably both Yiğid Ahmed and Bîyîkî Mehmed Pasha were appointed as commanders as a result of attempts by Bidlîsî to bring the Ottoman and Kurdish forces together. In fact, whenever Bidlîsî mentioned about the military situation among Kurdish forces, he manifested best his imperial view. Also the most important reason why Bidlîsî wanted an Ottoman military official as commander of the Kurdish leaders during the guerilla warfare with the Safavi state was to transform these clashes from being an internal problem of the Safavi state into that of a struggle between the Ottoman and Safavi states. Bîyîkî Mehmed Pasha, who was the first high-ranking Ottoman authority the Kurds had encountered, would also be regarded as the most significant indication of Ottoman military and political existence in the provinces for which Kurds fought against Safavi military forces.

In the meeting between Bîyîkî Mehmed Pasha and the Kurdish envoys,\textsuperscript{233} the problems which Bidlîsî had reported to the sultan earlier were discussed. We learn of the ultimatums and audacious demands of the Kurdish notables from his reports. Accordingly, the Kurds had explicitly declared that they would submit to Shah  İslâm if the Ottoman sultan did not help them. Further, they suggested that a certain area

\textsuperscript{232} According to \textit{Sharafnâme}, upon the require of Bidlîsî for an Ottoman commander who would undertake the leadership of Kurd forces, Sultan Selim sent Bîyîkî Mehmed Pasha, see \textit{Sharafnâme}, p. 417. Bidlîsî pointed that the obligation of an Ottoman officer over the Kurds leaders was a decision of Kurds, see Bidlîsî, 	extit{SN}, ff. 120a-120b; Kirlangîç, 	extit{Selim Şah-nâme}, p. 239. In fact it is rash to say that this offer came from the side of Kurd. Probably Bidlîsî reported this fact in this way because he intended to display again the loyalty of Kurds to the Ottoman state.

\textsuperscript{233} Bidlîsî wrote that the Kurds in person met the beylerbeyi and presented their submission to him, see Bidlîsî, 	extit{SN}, fol. 131b.
identified by them as the Çoban Çesmesi should be established as the Ottoman and Safavi border, and guaranteed that they would not cause any disturbances around this border.\footnote{234 TSA, E. nr. 5858. We cannot identify the location of Çoban Çesmesi but probably it was near Hims in the east of Van.}

It seems that Sultan Selim was persuaded to accept the political alternatives proposed by the Kurds and ordered Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, as well as Şadi Pasha, the Beylerbeyi of Amasya and Sivas, to move to Diyarbakır with their troops. The Kurdish and Ottoman troops joined forces in the district of Kığı near Diyarbakır. The news of the union soon took effect on the Safavi armies and Kara Khan, the Safavi Turcoman administrator of Diyarbakır, fled to the city of Mardin.\footnote{235 Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, fol. 132a; Kirlangîç, \textit{Selim Şah-nâme}, p. 268; Hoca Saadeddin, \textit{Tacü’r-Tevârih}, vol. II, p. 310.} This development made it easier to control the area and allowed the Ottoman-Kurdish troops to conquer the citadel of Diyarbakır without any major clashes between the two sides. Following this, the armies under Ottoman command triumphed over the districts around Diyarbakır and established firm Ottoman control over this area. But the southern part of Diyarbakır was still under Safavi control and was constantly reinforced by Safavi forces from the direction of Iraq. Thus an Ottoman expansion to the south, in particular towards Mardin, the last Safavi center in the area, seemed mandatory in order to control the whole area and block the way to Iraq from the north.

However, whereas the Kurdish leaders insisted on the need to move beyond Diyarbakır, the Ottoman commanders hesitated to besiege Mardin. In addition, a clash became evident between Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha and Şadi Pasha. The latter claimed that the orders given to him by the sultan were limited to the conquest of Diyarbakır, and, on
these grounds, he refused to advance towards Mardin. This difference of opinion
between the two Ottoman commanders both divided the Ottoman army and gave rise to a
conflict between the Ottoman and Kurdish authorities. In his accounts of these events,
Bidlîşî emphasized his efforts to persuade the two commanders to continue to fight
against the Safavi forces, but also admitted that he failed in this endeavor. He also
implied that he used his initiative as an Ottoman official to prevent an ultimate rupture
between the Kurdish leaders and the Ottoman state, encouraging the Kurds to march
towards Mardin without the Ottoman forces. It seems unlikely that Bidlîşî would have
made this decision against the orders of the Ottoman commanders. In all probability, he
agreed with at least one of them, most probably Büyük Mehmed Pasha. Indeed, when the
Kurdish forces began to triumph over the Safavi armies in Mardin, Bidlîşî called on
Büyük Mehmed Pasha to march with his armies to consolidate the Ottoman victory in
Mardin. But, because of the problem between the two beylerbeyis, Şadi Pasha had
returned to Amasya with the majority of the Ottoman forces. In this situation, Büyük
Mehmed Pasha could not respond favorably to Bidlîşî’s call for help. It seems likely that
he ordered Bidlîşî and the Kurds to come back to Diyarbakir, and then discontinued the
siege of Mardin.

In his account of the events, Bidlîşî implied that the military problems that
emerged in this process stemmed not from a disagreement between the Ottomans and the
Kurdish forces or from the refractoriness of the Kurdish notables but from the conflict of
power between the two Ottoman military authorities. Accordingly, after the beylerbeyi
had informed the sultan about the problems with Şadi Pasha armies and after new forces

236 Bidlîşî, SN, ff. 133b, 134a; Kirlanç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 270, 272.
237 Bidlîşî, SN, fol. 133b.
238 Bidlîşî, SN, fol. 135b.
from İstanbul and Anatolia arrived, the Safavi western borderlands from Urmiye to Erbil and from Çemîşkezek to Arapgir were conquered by the Ottoman-Kurdish forces without any problem,\(^{239}\) not counting the personal problem of the Beylerbeyi with the influence of Bidlisî over the Kurdish tribes, as mentioned in the first chapter of this study.

Significantly, Bidlisî was not only one of the architects, or as he saw it, the architect, of the Ottoman-Kurdish alliance that won the war, but he also made it possible for this alliance to work by creating a balance between the local rulers and the Ottoman military officials\(^{240}\). It is thanks in large part to Bidlisî’s efforts that the military actions ended as both the Ottoman state and the Kurdish notables had wished even at a minimum level. These can be observed best through archival documentations. In the following section we will analyze the archival sources that detail the newly formed Ottoman administrative structure in the east. In doing so, we will seek to underline the Ottoman administrative policy on the Kurds as newcomers to the Ottoman system.

**III. Organizing the Administration of the Eastern Ottoman Frontiers**

**i- Administrative Arrangements**

In his classic study of the Ottoman policies of conquest in the early Ottoman period (1300-1500), Halil İnalcık differentiates between two phases in the process of the Ottoman absorption of newly acquired lands. In the first stage, the Ottoman state would seek to establish indirect sovereignty over a given territory. In the second, the state would tighten its control over the newly conquered lands by incorporating local traditional

\(^{239}\) For the details of conquests of the lands around Diyarbakır and Mardin, see Bidlisî, *SV*, ff. 137b-140a; Karlangıç, *Selim Şah-nâme*, pp. 279-283.

\(^{240}\) To note that, even Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha had the highest rank among the Ottoman army, there are a lot provincial military officials in this army subjected to Ottoman State.
organizations into its military-administrative system, that is, the timar system. While İnalcık’s model also applies, to a certain extent, to the Ottoman administrative policies in the Iranian lands, specific local conditions, too, played an important role in shaping the administrative status of the new borderlands to the east of the Ottoman state. Local conditions such as the struggle for leadership, land and blood feuds among Kurdish tribes, and topographic characteristics would make this region open to Safavi interference. In such a critical zone, therefore, the Ottomans needed to introduce different administrative policies, rethink their strategies and to allow room for the political interests of the local powers, the Kurdish tribes, whenever the political conditions changed.

As the first indicator of the Ottoman policy of integration of the local political powers, we can take a look at the istimâletnâme the sultan sent the Kurdish tribal leaders. As was emphasized in the previous section, with these letters of intent Sultan Selim guaranteed Ottoman protection to the Kurdish leading families if they fought against the Safavi forces in the name of the Ottoman state. During military clashes in the provinces of the Safavi state, such a guarantee paved the way for Ottoman domination in the western provinces of the Safavi state without their engaging in any military conflicts with the local forces in this region.

After the conquests which took place from 1518 to 1520, the administrative organization in the new Ottoman borderlands in the east was formed in such a way as to

---


242 On the importance of local conditions in shaping the incorporation process, see Suraiya Faroqhi, The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It (London and New York, 2004), p. 78.
allow for both imperial central control and local autonomy. The imperial edicts (ferman) dating from 1517 and 1530 inform us that the administration of the borderlands in the east was arranged on the basis of the coexistence of the two systems. In a 1518 ferman, Sultan Selim asks Bidlisi to assist Büyük Mehmed Pasha in organizing the sancaks and timars. Thus, Büyük Mehmed Pasha and Bidlisi were charged with two administrative duties: firstly, the allocation of the military and administrative control of the lands to the begs; secondly, the arrangement of a hierarchy through the distribution of titles (elkâb) among the begs as seen below:

the imperial edicts were sent to my beylerbeyi of Diyarbakır; [you] grant the begs ranks and incomes in whatever manner is proper, register detailed copies of their timars and berats, and send them to me so that they may be kept here and every issue can be known; [you] declare in detail which livâ was distributed to whom and for what reason they were distributed, and what the beg’s titles, subjects and incomes are…

Apparently, Sultan Selim carried out the promises that he had given the Kurds via Bidlisi. But, according to the ferman, he planned to allocate the newly acquired lands to local begs as timar. This meant that the Kurdish notables would obtain not the property of the lands but the revenue provided by the lands. In addition to introducing the timar system, the state gave the Kurdish begs the inherited right to leave the land revenue to their sons: that is, the right known as yurdluk ve ocaklık.

In the ferman of 1533 in which Sultan Süleyman states the administrative conditions in the eastern borderlands, the privileges of the Kurdish begs were determined as follows:

Their provinces, fortresses, cities, villages and arable fields (mezra’â) with all their harvest under the condition of inheritance from father to son are also given to them as their estate (temlik). There should never be any external aggression and

conflict among them… In case of a beg’s death, his province shall be given, as a whole, to his son, if there is only one. If there is more than one son, the sons shall divide the province, contingent upon mutual agreement among themselves. If they cannot reach any compromise, then, whoever the Kurdistan begs decided to be the best choice shall succeed, and through private ownership he shall be the holder of the land forever. If the beg has no heir or relative, then his province shall not be given to anybody from outside. As a result of consultation with the Kurdistan begs, the region shall be given to either begs or their sons suggested by the Kurdistan begs

In the light of this ferman it can be said that Sultan Süleyman granted some lands to Kurdish begs not as timar but as freehold (temlik). On the other hand, in the 1518 ferman Sultan Selim calls the lands -probably all newly conquered lands in the east- allocated to the beghs timar or sancak, not mulk as they are called in his son’s ferman. While this differentiation in the two fermans indicates the coexistence of different administrative systems, it may also be taken as the result of the bargaining process which went on during the years following the conquest. In this process, which is best seen in the administrative divisions of the area in 1518 and 1540, there were the Kurds, who insisted on the right to self-government, on the one side, and the Ottoman government, which insisted on a policy of centralization, on the other.

ii-The Emergence of Semi-autonomous and Autonomous Principalities:

Eyâlet-i Diyarbakır and Cema‘ât-i Kurdân

From the orders, it is obvious that the sultan gave full authority first to Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha, and then to Bidlisi. In fact, the sancakbeyi was appointed by the central government and its high-ranking official representatives such as the beylerbeyi. Therefore the task the sultan gave Bidlisi was not an official one; in principle, Bidlisi was expected

244 The translations belong to Hakan Özoğlu. For his cite see, Hakan Özoğlu, “State-Tribe Relations”, p. 18; For the original document see TSA, E. nr. 11969.
to serve as consultant to Bıyıkli Mehmed Pasha. By giving him this authority, the sultan must have sought to create a balance between the two men and to prevent them from making arbitrary appointments. Likewise, through this edict, Sultan Selim sought to remind Bidlîsî that he would be responsible for the appointments and would be expected to explain to whom and for what reason he had distributed the lands.

Even though there is no information about the appointment process, Bıyıkli Mehmed Pasha and Bidlîsî as well as the defterdar must have surveyed the lands and their revenues and begun to distribute them to the holders beginning from July 1518, as the records in the first cadastral register are dated between July and September 1518. According to the cadastral register of 1518, some of the newly conquered lands were organized into standard Ottoman administrative units under the name of eyalet-i Diyarbakır. The city of Amid together with some villages constituted the livâ of the Beylerbeyi of this eyalet, and, thus, the revenues were allocated to the beylerbeyi, Bıyıkli Mehmed Pasha. In addition to Amid, Mardin, Sincar, Beriyyecik, Ruha, Siverek, Çermik, Harput, Ergani, Arapgir, Kïği, and Çemişkezek constituted other livâs of the eyalet-i Diyarbakır. Except for these livâs and some other villages, there is no record about any administrative unit that was categorized under the eyalet of Diyarbakır.

However, another document that Barkan affixed to the budget of 1533 presents a different profile about the administrative structure of Diyarbakır in 1520. The differences, first of all, demonstrate the existence of another form of administration in the newly conquered lands. Accordingly, the beylerbeyi, as the only formal authority,
granted, of course by the will of the sultan, administrative privileges to some Kurdish begs on the newly formed border between the Ottoman and Safavi states. These privileges, in fact, fulfilled the guarantees that, by permission of the sultan, Bidlîşî had given the Kurds during the wartime.

The register of 1520, which resembles a sort of ru’us register, affixed to the budget of 1533, consists of two administrative units which differ from the cadastral register of 1518. These were the newly acquired lands organized as eyâlet-i Diyarbakîr and as cema‘ât-i Kurdân\textsuperscript{249}. It seems that the term cema‘ât as given in the register of 1520 did not refer to nomadic groups as was its general use in cadastral registers, but rather to the Kurdish tribal community\textsuperscript{250}. Probably, the use of this term ensued from the uncertainty concerning the administrative type to which these territories belonged within the Ottoman system.


\textsuperscript{249} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{250} In the budget, the term of cemâ‘at was also used to identify the military, administrative officers bureaucrats and certain professional associations such as “cema‘ât-i erbâb-i sanayî ve ehl-i hiref, cema‘ât-i müşähere-horân, cema‘ât-i mülazimân-i dergâh-i âli” and so on. For these examples see Ibid., pp. 309-313.

Whereas, in one sense, the existence of the cema‘ât in a ru’ús register, demonstrates that these Kurdish begs were considered as Ottoman officials, their absence from the cadastral register indicates that their territories were not/could not be integrated into the ordinary administrative structure. Apparently, the territories listed above were allocated to Kurdish begs not as timar but as freehold lands as in Sultan Süleyman’s ferman of 1530, mentioned above. Under this regulation, the landowners held land tenure and had the right to dispose of the yield the land supplied. In addition to administrative rights, they probably also had judicial authority within the borders of their territories. Overall, this means that the state would not able to obtain as many military and financial benefits from this administrative unit, named cema ‘ât, as it usually obtained from the timar system.

The Ottoman state was committed to granting to the Kurds the lands which they had struggled for during the conflict between the Ottoman-Kurdish and Safavi forces. On the other hand, in order to establish central authority in this newly formed borderland, the Ottoman state introduced some measures that would prevent the domination of any one local authority over that of the central state. Such a policy manifested itself in the formation of the cema‘ât. In the register of 1520, it can be seen that the number of cemâ‘ât was strikingly high. In fact, if one considers that Bidlisî and the author of the Sharafnâme generally mention only influential tribes, it is safe to say that half of the cema‘ât was composed of the leaders of small tribes. It seems that the Ottoman state sought to create a great number of administrative units among the large Kurdish tribes,

even if they were outside the state’s regular system. This “divide and rule” policy served to weaken the power of the influential Kurdish leaders\textsuperscript{252}. In this manner, the state prevented the tribal leaders from establishing autonomy in the freehold lands.

In addition to this policy of “divide and rule”, the state sought to turn to the state’s advantage some of the privileges it had granted by interfering in the internal affairs of the tribes. In accordance with ancient custom, Sultan Selim consented to allow the Kurds to retain the right to elect their own leaders. But the Ottoman sultan tried to influence the election of the tribal leader, as in the case of the election of a leader of the Sason family. In this case, when Shah İsmail detained the Kurdish leaders, the notables of the Sason tribe elected Hıdır\textsuperscript{253}. But another member of the family, Muhammed, rejected his brother’s leadership and asked for the protection of the Safavi shah. Probably in order to prevent this alliance, Sultan Selim also supported the leadership of Muhammed in return for the latter’s submission to the Ottoman state\textsuperscript{254}. Even though the dynamics were different in this particular case\textsuperscript{255}, the Ottoman sultan may have used his initiative in other cases of election also and supported a candidate who would not be damaging to Ottoman policies. Furthermore, Ottoman intervention served to connect the Kurdish tribal leaders with the center in the process of election and in the creation of loyal forces.

In order to provide security and stability on the borders between the Ottoman and Safavi states, the Kurdish begs in autonomous administrative units might have had to serve with their military forces which were recruited from the tribes loyal to the state.

\textsuperscript{252} As for the tribes in the lands where the Ottoman state they arranged as \textit{miri} lands, they were ruled by uniting. See Özoğlu, “State-Tribe Relations”, pp. 17-18.

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{Sharafnâme}, pp. 193-194.

\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 194.

\textsuperscript{255} The Kurds always had the opportunity to change their side in the favor of the Safavi state, and after the Ottoman conquest, they used this statement as a threat and ultimatum. Therefore, it can be suggested that also after the conquest, the Ottoman state introduced such policies to blockade the ways of the threats.
They were probably expected to protect the border from Safavi attacks and the caravans from bandits. Furthermore, in the reign of Sultan Selim, their obligation to participate in wartime military expeditions became law.\textsuperscript{256}

To control more directly the autonomous begs under the unit of the cema’ât, the Ottoman state attempted to create a central administrative unit, the eyâlet-i Diyarbakar, in the middle of these autonomous lands. In this vilâyet, the revenue of two important cities, Amid and Mardin, was allocated to the current Ottoman military administrator, the beylerbeyi Bıyıklı Mehmed Pasha. The rest of the sancaks were distributed to those who would be considered as Ottoman military administrators. Some of these Kurdish notables were those mentioned in Bidlîsî’s writings, among whom Pîrî Beg, Shah Ali Beg, Yiğid Ahmed Beg, Sultan Ahmed and Pir Hüseyin were appointed as mirliva of Ruha, Çermik, Ergani, Kiği and Çemişkezek respectively.\textsuperscript{257, 258} The mirlivas of Siverek and Arapgir, Muzaffer and İskender Begs, may also have been Kurdish notables, even though their names are not known to us. The Ottoman state granted to these mirlivas the lands as has, (lands with a tax yield guaranteed to be over 100.000 akçes), or as zeamet, (a unit of middle rank which generated a revenue of from 20.000 to 100.000 akçes). For example, the livâ of Sincar and the villages of the livâ of Amid, Tercil, Rabat, Ciske, and Kulb were allocated to Kurdish notables as zeamet.\textsuperscript{259} Furthermore, some mirlivas’ sons and relatives were able to possess timars yielding up to 20.000 akçes. For example, the relatives of Muzaffer Beg, mîrlîvâ of Siverek, the relatives of İskender Beg, mîrlîvâ of

\textsuperscript{256} Ahmet Akgündüz, Osmanlı Kanunnameleri ve Hukuki Tahlilleri (Istanbul, 1990), vol. 7, p. 134.
\textsuperscript{257} Bidlîsî mentioned Yiğit Ahmed Beg as an Ottoman officer but Diyarbakir in origin. See, Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 127b.
\textsuperscript{258} BOA, TT, E., nr. 64, pp. 387, 508, 537, 723, 757.
\textsuperscript{259} We determined their Kurdish origin with their nicknames such as Atak, Sasoni or Kurd.

Here, we have simply tried to illustrate how the Kurds who sought to obtain autonomy were molded into the central system. It should be noted that Kurdish notables constituted only one element out of several in the administration of the province of Diyarbakır. Apart from the local Kurdish administrators, there were Ottoman officers appointed from the center or from Rumelia, and other local notables such as the Turcomans; some others were former Akkoyunlu or Dulkadir elites like Tur Ali, the mîrlivâ of Berriyyecik261. This colorful mixture seems to have stemmed from an Ottoman policy to balance as well as weaken the powerful groups each of who had potential to declare its autonomy. In conclusion, it can be said that the Ottoman state brought various politically powerful notables in the area to important positions, but all were appointed as Ottoman officials and became part of the Ottoman administration262. In addition, the politically autonomous Kurds on the Safavi border would always be under the control of the province of Diyarbakır, the regional center of power.

However, even if the Kurdish notables in the picture were integrated into the central system that the state sought to establish, some records indicate that these new Ottoman administrators tried to obtain further rights. Firstly, they managed to obtain recognition of the *livas* in the provinces of Diyarbakır as *yurdluk ve ocaklık*, which meant that succession to the *sancak/livâ* would remain within the family. Secondly, some of the

261 For the examples see BOA, TT, nr. 64, pp. 58-60, 64-68, 74, 78-80, 368, 407, 416, 418, 420, 489-491.
262 Faroqhi also suggested that to local man as governor enabled the establishment of control of the state in the first place. See, Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World*, p.75.
zeamet and timar holders not only had the right to collect land tax as representatives of the Ottoman state but also took rent from the farmers on their fields as mâlikâne hissesi\textsuperscript{263}.

While the Ottoman state organized the administration of the borderlands in the east, it also gradually tried to undermine the Kurdish begs’ autonomy. On their part, these notables struggled with the Ottoman officials in order to expand the borders of this extraordinary administrative unit. The differences that emerge when we compare the cadastral register of 1518 and the registers of 1520 with each other, allow us to trace this disagreement between the Ottoman and local rulers.

Some districts that are listed under the title of cema‘ât-i Kurdân in the registers of 1520 are listed as livâs of the province of Diyarbakır in the 1518 cadastral register. Whereas, in the cadastral register the five sancaks, Berriyyecik (Birecik), Çemiskezek, Çermük, Sincar and Siverek were apparently considered as ordinary Ottoman administrative units, in the registers of 1520 they were categorized as cema‘ât. Furthermore, the village of Atak, organized as an administrative unit under the livâ of Amid in the cadastral register, appears under the cema‘ât in the records of 1520. Even though these discrepancies, which are mirrored in the 1518 and 1520 records, are limited to six districts, it seems likely that the Ottoman state and the Kurdish notables were involved in strife with each other over other territories also\textsuperscript{264}.

\textsuperscript{263} For the examples see BOA, TT, nr. 64, pp. 6-9.
\textsuperscript{264} In addition, there were not only Kurds but also other political actors in the Kurdistan of Bidlisî, even though he never mentioned them. For this district of Berriyyecik, the Ottoman state seems to have negotiated with a Turcoman leader, Tur Ali Beg. I can be speculated that the Ottoman state appointed Tur Ali Beg as mirlivâ-i Berriyyecik in order to create an alternative power to the autonomy of Kurds. In either case, it is understood that some disagreements between the Ottomans and Turcoman tribal leader revolved around the type of administrative position of Berriyyecik.
This administrative structure that was formed shortly after the conquest illuminates, above all, the process of negotiation between the local Kurdish notables and the Ottoman state and their struggles for autonomy in the governance of the territories in the Ottoman borderlands in the east. Taking into account the conditions among the Kurdish tribes and the topographical characteristics of the area, the state did not/could not turn the whole of this newly conquered area into a regular Ottoman province. Rather, central and local administrations were allowed to coexist. In the years following 1518, the Ottoman state gradually increased its dominance over the lands by rearranging most of the cema‘ât as livâs\(^{265}\). In 1540, livâs such as Sincar, Çermûk and Siverek, seem to have been considered as ordinary Ottoman administrative units in the province of Diyarbakır\(^{266}\). Furthermore, from 1540 onward, Hasankeyf\(^{267}\) and some territories of Bitlis and Van seem to have been compelled to welcome the Ottoman cadastral officers\(^{268}\). In the seventeenth century, the number of the cema‘ât-called hükümet at that time decreased\(^{269}\). Apparently, the Ottoman state aimed to rearrange the administration of Bitlis and Van as standard eyalets like Diyarbakır. Likewise, shortly after the survey of 1540, a new eyalet emerges in the cadastral registers under the name of eyâlet-i Bitlis\(^{270}\).

The reorganization of Bitlis and Van as standard Ottoman administrative units signified an important success for the Ottoman state because these districts constituted the Ottoman border in the east. As we have shown, Bitlisî, too, for this reason, gave great importance to the two districts, but he was not able to incorporate the shore areas of Lake

---


\(^{266}\) BOA, TT., nr. 200.

\(^{267}\) Ibid.

\(^{268}\) BOA, TT, nr. 208.


\(^{270}\) Akgündüz, Osmanlı Kanunnameler, vol. 7, p. 134.
Van, consisting of Van, Ahlat and Adilcevaz, into the Ottoman lands, despite the fact that he had struck a deal with the son of the ruler, Melik Beg. Apparently, the ruler of Van, Zahid Beg, whom Bidlîşî called a deviant, continued to swear allegiance to the Safavi shah up to 1527. After this time, Zahid Beg appears in the Ottoman registers as the ruler of an unidentified territory. On the other hand, in 1530, the ruler of Bitlis, Şeref Khan, whom Bidlîşî represented as the most reliable and pious ally of the Ottoman sultan, would revolt against the Ottoman sultan, and take refuge with the Safavi Shah Tahmasb, thus inculcating a new period of tension between the Ottoman and Safavi states. This last case obviously manifests one result of the centralizing polices of the Ottoman state. In 1533, the Ottoman provincial officials had begun to change their policies in favor of the Turcoman leader, Ulama Tekelu, who was a more malleable leader than Şeref Khan, representing the central state in the province in order to bring the district of Bitlis under the control of the Ottoman authorities. The cases of the tribal governors of Bitlis and Van indicate that time could cause changes in the political tendencies, conditions and considerations for both the Ottoman state and the Kurdish leaders, and old allies could become enemies or, vice versa, old enemies who had been accused of being deviant could become allies. All in all, during the sixteenth century the Ottoman state began to annul the extraordinary status of the Kurdish leaders in the territories east of Diyarbakır. In time, the number of freehold lands decreased; by integrating Kurdish landowners into the timar system, the state expanded central control to the lakeshore territories of Van.

271 Kunt, Sancaktan Eyalete, p. 130.
272 For this development see Sharafnâme, pp. 417-446.
273 The registers demonstrated that in 1568-67 most of territories were not considered as cema‘ât anymore, but as standard Ottoman provincial unit. See, Kunt, Sancaktan Eyalete, pp. 142-144. Also the number of the freehold lands were pointed as four in Evliya Çelebi. Besides, it is understood from his accounts that in seventeenth century, the Ottoman State collected the tax from most of freehold lands, even it was
Changes in the fiscal arrangements indicate also the increasing control of the central state in the eastern provinces. Subsequent to the conquest, the state would prefer to negotiate with the local notables about the types, amounts and rates of taxes, and accept the existence of local taxes that had been valid before the Ottoman conquest\(^{274}\). In this manner, the state prevented any interruption in the collection of taxes during the process of adaptation to local customs. But in the years between 1520-1540, the state rearranged the tax and introduced standard Ottoman taxes instead of local taxes that could not be controlled by the state.

Consequently, the lands in the newly formed administrative structure were granted to Kurdish notables in return for their loyalty to the Ottoman sultan and military success during the war between the Kurds and the Safavis. As the result of these negotiations and on account of local conditions, such as the influence of the Kurdish notables on the tribes in the area, an extraordinary administrative unit appeared in the Ottoman administration on the borderland between the Ottoman and Safavi states. Shortly after the conquest, this unit was called *çema‘ât* and, later, *vilâyet-i Kurdistan* or *hükûmet*. In practice, in Ottoman administrative organization of the early sixteenth century, the *timar* system did not apply in some provinces such as Crimea, as it did in the eastern borders under the *çema‘at* system. Rather, Crimea, for example, had been subject to annual taxation. In fact there is no mention in any law of the early sixteenth century about whether the Kurds considered to come under the *çema‘at* formula might have been subjected to such a taxation. But even if they regularly paid a certain amount to the

\(^{274}\) For the gradual changes in the tax arrangements in the *kanunnames* of eastern provinces during the sixteenth century see BOA, TT, nr. 64, 200; also see Akgündüz, *Osmanlı Kanunameler*, p. 134.
central state, this autonomous unit in the Ottoman borderlands in the east should be considered as an exceptional case at that time. Over all, it can be said that the Ottoman-Safavi conflict gave way to the politically rise of the Kurdish notables in the area of Iraq-i Arab. They would always keep their political influence in the Ottoman provincial administration in eastern borderlands. Bidlîsî as the one who masterminded the negotiations between the Ottoman and Kurdish leaders, may be also considered the most significant agent in the establishment of such an extraordinary administrative unit.

The results of the efforts of Bidlîsî are best demonstrated through the military and political successes of the Ottoman state in the Iranian lands. Even if we allow some exaggeration, it seems certain that Bidlîsî’s intimate knowledge of the local power dynamics and his skill in bringing about an alliance between two parties with sometimes clashing interests was a major factor behind the success of Sultan Selim in his policies on Iran in the early sixteenth century. In a more general sense, the efforts of Bidlîsî also illustrate the importance of diplomacy alongside military confrontation in Ottoman policies of expansion as well as the roles played by local power holders and mediators with both local and imperial connections in the process.
CHAPTER THREE
İDRİS-İ BİDLİSİ’S VIEWS ON RELIGIO-POLITICAL AUTHORITY

As the Ottoman state expanded towards predominantly Muslim lands to the east and south during the early sixteenth century, Ottoman self-image and political identity were also transformed. The Ottomans not only came to embrace a much more clearly delineated Sunni identity, but also began to see themselves as the foremost rulers of the Muslim world. Perhaps the clearest traces of these developments can be found in the budding Ottoman political literature of this period\textsuperscript{275}. Interestingly, the people who produced this literature were not all products of the Ottoman political system. They also included many scholars of Iran who had fled the region upon the Safavi take-over and who had found new employment in the Ottoman court. Among them was also the subject of this study, İdris-i Bidlisi.

When the Ottomans were beginning their military campaigns in the eastern Muslim world in 1514, Bidlisi had already penned the \textit{Risâla fi’l-Khilâfa wa Âdâb al-Salâtîn}, a treatise in the form of an \textit{adab} book -ideal refinement of thought, word and deed\textsuperscript{276} in which he theorized about the model for an ideal sultan based on his readings in Sufi and juridical literature. But it was after he returned to İstanbul from Diyarbakır in 1518 that he truly became involved in the intellectual efforts among the Ottoman learned men to legitimate their ruler. As we have seen in Chapter One, the products of his intellectual activities on this front appeared in his last years: the \textit{Selimshahnâme}, a chronicle of the reign of Sultan Selim, and the \textit{Kânûn-i Shahenşâhî}, a political tract that

\textsuperscript{275} For more detail evaluation about the factors behind the increasing in the number of political writings the age of Sultan Süleyman see Yılmaz, \textit{The Sultan and The Sultanate}, pp. 125-134.

broke fresh ground in Ottoman political literature. Written by a bureaucrat who had personally witnessed the policies and affairs of both Sultan Selim and Shah ʻIsma‘il, these writings must have held special importance for Bidlîsî’s Ottoman patrons.

The aim of this chapter, then, is twofold: to analyze how this important scholar and statesman represented the Ottomans as well as their rivals, the Safavids, in his political and historical writings and to situate his views in their proper intellectual and historical context. With the latter aim in mind, the first part of this chapter, organized in two sections, examines changing conceptualizations of political authority in the eastern lands of Islam during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The focus of the second part of this chapter is Bidlîsî’s refutation of the religio-political claims of Shah ʻIsma‘il and his depiction of Sultan Selim as the ideal sultan. Within this framework, Bidlîsî’s arguments on the nature of rulership, and the religious and ethical qualities of an ideal ruler are examined. Finally, the last part of this chapter explores Bidlîsî’s conceptualizations of the caliph-sultan and his grounds for thinking that only one person at a time could hold this office. To illustrate the parallels between the outlook of Bidlîsî and that of the Ottoman elites of his time, references will also be made throughout to the writings of such Ottoman scholars and bureaucrats as Kemalpaşazâde, Ebussu’ud (1574) and Lütfî Pasha (d.1562) about governance, Shah ʻIsma‘il and ghulat Shi‘i.
I. Muslim Concepts of Political Authority during the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries

i- The Regional Caliphate

Political as well as astrological events, religious tendencies and considerations, and debates over judicial questions shaped and changed the theories and concepts of Islamic political authority. One of the most important political events in this regard was the invasion of much of the eastern lands of Islamdom, including Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid caliphate, by the Mongols in the thirteenth century. While afterwards a branch of the Abbasid family took refuge with the Mamluks and maintained the caliphate under the protection of the Mamluk rulers, they no longer provided a leadership of much significance to Muslims.\footnote{Ann K. S. Lambton, \textit{State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists} (Oxford, 1981), p. 138.}

After this development, the historical caliphate ceased to exist and jurists such as Ibn Jamâ’a (1241-1333), Ibn Taymiyya (1262-1328)\footnote{Ann Lambton, “Changing Concepts of Authority in the Late Ninth/Fifteenth and Early Tenth/Sixteenth Centuries”, in \textit{Islam and Power}, ed. by Alexander S. Cudsi and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (London, 1981), pp. 49-71, at p. 49.} and philosophers such as Ibn Khaldun (d.1406) and later, post-Mongol authors such as Dawâñî, Mulla Jâmî and Fadl Allâh Isfâkhânî needed to redefine and reformulate the caliphate. Despite the variety of their ideas, these authors of the post-Abbasid and the post-Mongol period seemed in general to ignore one main axiom: namely, that the caliph had to be from the tribe of Kuraysh. Relieving the caliphate from the burden of having to be of prophetic lineage, they basically suggested that “upon the death of the prophet Muhammed the sovereignty...
devolved on all those who by their learning and virtue were the authorized interpreters of
the law and charged with adapting it to new conditions of time and place.”

Above all, these confirmations gave birth to new consideration of the caliphate
that is regional caliphate. In the fifteenth century, several Muslim Turks and post-Mongol
rulers in Iran and Minor Asia appeared as the caliph-sultan of their own territories,
claiming that they protected the religion and acted in the name of God. In this connection,
while the scholars such as Dawânî sought to provide a theoretical base to the nature of
this new concept of the caliphate, both Ottoman and Acem rulers began to use the title of
caliph, which were attributed earlier to only Abbasid caliphs.

According to Imber, the word “caliph” and its variants such as “mücâhids and
ghazis after the apostle of God and the rightly guided caliphs”, “the swords of God” and
“the instrument of God’s religion” were used as a title for the Ottoman sultans for the
first time in 1424, but these usages were simply rhetorical embellishments. Likewise,
while the rulers of Anatolian principalities such as Karaman, Canik and
İsfendiyar addressed Sultan Murad II [r.1421-44, 1446-51] as “the chosen caliph of
human kind (güzide-i halife-i âferide)” or “the shadow of the God” in the letters they sent
to congratulate the Ottoman sultan on the victories he had gained over the Christians,
in his reply, Sultan Murad, who was aware of the religious as well as political meaning of

279 Lambton, “Changing Concepts”, p. 50. Even tough Lambton attributed this argument to Ibn Jamâ’a and
Ibn Taymiyya, it can be safely say that Ibn Khaldun and Dawânî based their interpretations on this
argument. Ibn Khaldun, for example, regarded the caliphate as a position to which every sultan could be
appointed, and suggested that government and kingship are the caliphate of the God amongst men, for the
execution of His ordinances amongst them. See, Hamilton A.R. Gibb, “Some Considerations on the Sunni


281 Colin Imber, “The Ottoman Dynastic Myth” in Studies in Ottoman History and Law (The ISIS Press,

282 Sir Thomas W. Arnold, The Caliphate (Adam Publishers, Delhi, reprint in 1994), p. 130; Feridun Bey,
this title, declared himself to be the caliph by implying that, God having graced him with the dignity of the caliphate, he, in return, devoted himself day and night to engaging in ghaza and jihad. Arnold ascertained that after the time of Sultan Murad II, Ottoman sultans from Bayezid II to Selim I used the title for themselves, and that other Muslim rulers used, both for themselves and also for the Ottoman sultans, variants of this phrase: “the shadow of God”:- “the refuge of the Sultanate/caliphate (sultân/halife-i penâh)”, “the star of the caliphate (şîhâb-u hilâfe)”, “light of the garden of the Sultanate and light of the garden of the caliphate (nûr-i hadîka’-i saltanat ve nûr-i hadîka’-i hilâfet)”, “the manifestations of the lights of the caliphate, the manifestation of the arts of God (mazhar-i envâr-i hilafet, mazhar-i âsar-i rahmet)”. In parallel to the Ottoman rulers, the Akkoyunlu rulers used the title of caliph and its variants such as “master of an auspicious conjunction” (sahib-karn), “the Lord of the Time” (sahib-i zamân), and “the Restorer of the Faith” (mujaddid-i din).

Even as waging wars against infidels seemed to be the strongest factor justifying the caliphate of the Ottoman as well as other Muslim rulers in the fifteenth century, these rulers further compounded their image as the ghazi/mujâhid caliph with the image of the sultan/caliph as a quasi-mystical leader. As is well known, the social and political dislocation caused by the Mongol invasion had stimulated the growth of Sufism.

283 Feridun Bey, Münşe’atü’s- Selâtın, p. 96.
284 For it use by the ruler of Karaman, for the Sultan Murad II see Ibid., pp. 166, 177.
285 For the same sultan see Ibid., p. 216.
286 The Sultan Mehmed II used these phrases for his sons, Mustafa and Cem; see Ibid., pp. 279, 283.
287 For these expressions used for Sultan Selim see, Ibid., pp. 368.
promising spiritual and moral advancement of the individual. In fifteenth century Iran as well as Asia Minor, there emerged various mystical movements comprising Sunni Sufis, *ghulats* (excessive mystics) including those with messianic tendencies. In order to appeal to these mystical groups the Akkoyunlu and Ottoman rulers resorted to an image of the ruler as a quasi-mystical leader. Uzun Hasan, for instance, appeared in public in the guise of a Sufi sheikh. According to Münşî, after Uzun Hasan performed the dawn prayer, the drums were played in order to gather the *divan*; then Uzun Hasan appeared with a dervish *aba* on his back and a woolen girdle around his waist and inaugurated the *divan*.

Uzun Hasan as well as Bayezid II further reinforced their mystical images through their patronage of Sufi masters. Mulla Jâmî, Husam al-din Bidlîsî, İbrahim Gülşenî, and Najm al-din Abd al-Gaffâr Tabâtabâ’î, *şeyhülislam* of Tabriz in the fifteenth century, and his son, Abd al-Vahhâb Hamadânî who served Shah İsma’îl later, were some of the esteemed Sufis who had close connections with the Akkoyunlu dynasty.

According to Hinz, Uzun Hasan’s closeness to Sufis attracted even Rumi Sufis, such as Dede Ömer from the city of Aydın. Like Uzun Hasan, Bayezid II also patronized Sufi groups; he supported particularly the Khalwatî sheikhs, facilitating the spread of their networks to İstanbul.

---


293 Hinz, “Kültür ve Teşkilat”, p.325; Dede Ömer mentioned by Hinz, was probably the founder of Khalwatî order, Ömer Rûşenî (d. 1475).

At the turn of the sixteenth century, Shah Isma‘il, who appeared as new political power in Iran consolidated his political existence with different religio-political claims, which would surpass the notions of regional caliphate. The next section discusses these claims, which would preoccupy Bidlîsî during his last years as well as the Ottoman men of letters, who dealt with the Ottoman-Safavi ideological conflict, and led them to reformulate the concept of the caliphate.

ii- From Sufi Order to Polity: The Messianic Claims of the Safavi sheikh/shah

In the fifteenth century, the adherents of Safaviyye order in Iran and Asia Minor, included Sunnis as well as ghulat Shi‘is, known as Kızılbaş. The master of the order in the fifteenth century, Sheikh Cüneyd (1447-60) began to politicize the order by claiming messianic status. In fact, messianic claims seemed to be the most effective way among the Sufis to legitimize their political authority. During the period of Mongol rule, Iran had witnessed several messianic movements, such as Mar’ashi, Sarbidar, and Nurbakhshî, which had originated in Sufi circles, and which had turned political. In the fifteenth century, the messianic claims of Cüneyd were considered as heretical by Iranian ulema such as Fadl Allâh Isfakhânî. The latter described this turn from mystical activities to political ones on the part of Cüneyd as follows:

“The fools of Rum, who are a people in error and imagine a number of devilish things, struck the bell of the inane claims of Christians on the roof of the monastery of the world…they openly called Sheikh Cüneyd “God and his son [ibn Allah]”…In his praise they said: “He is the Living one, there is no God but he. Their folly and ignorance were such that, if anyone spoke of Sheikh Cüneyd as dead, he was no longer able to enjoy the sweet beverage of life”295.

295 Translations of the phrases from Persian to English are those of Minorsky, see Arjomand, TTA., p. 80; also for original terms of Fadl Allâh Isfakhânî, see, Ibid., pp. 65-67.
It is difficult to determine whether Shah İsma‘il, the grandson of Sheikh Cüneyd as well as the founder of the newly established Safavi state, claimed to be the absolute ruler of Muslim world. But it is a fact that through his religious-political claims, he succeeded to unite the ghulat Shi‘is in Iran as well as Anatolia under his quasi-mystical leadership. Through his mystical poems the Safavi ruler announced his claims to a quasi-divine rulership. In these mystical poems written in the Turkish vernacular Shah İsma‘il bolstered his self image by identifying with all the political, religious and epic heroic characters in the cultural past of both Islamic and pre-Islamic Iran. Hence, in some verses he would declare: “I am the reincarnation of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad”\(^{296}\); and also “Jamshid, Zahhak, Faridun, Hosraw, and Alexander the Great”\(^{297}\). In other verses, he proclaimed himself to be the Messiah\(^ {298}\) who was expected to arrive at the end of the first millennium of the Islamic calendar, and thus, also the last Prophet (khatm-i enbiyâ)\(^ {299}\).

Of course, it would be rash to undertake a literal reading of Shah İsma‘il’s poetic declamations without taking into account the metaphors and symbols of the Sufi poetic tradition; nevertheless, the words and images employed in his poetry can still tell us much about the semantics of the Iranian world to which the Safavi shah addressed in order to legitimate his worldly and divine rulership in Iran\(^ {300}\).


\(^{297}\) Hatâ‘i; Also these lines of the English translations are those of Babayan. See Babayan, *Mystics*, p. xxx.

\(^{298}\) Hatâ‘i, p. 155.

\(^{299}\) Hatâ‘i, p. 155.

\(^{300}\) For the evaluation of the poem as a reflection of the society, which the poet perceived, see Victoria R. Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romans* (University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 15.
Even if it is difficult to ascertain whether with his messianic utterances Shah ısma‘il claimed to be the absolute and universal ruler of the Muslim world, the Ottomans perceived the increasing influence of Shah ısma‘il among mystical groups in Iran and Anatolia as a threat for their political existence and their projects of territorial growth. Therefore this development resulted in a religio-political and military conflict between the Safavis and Ottomans. This conflict, which was also a struggle between two Muslim rulers for power, was also one of the reasons which brought out the need to reformulate the legitimizing principles that would construct the religious basis of Ottoman political existence and represent the Ottoman sultan as superior over other Muslim rulers.

II. Sultan Selim versus Shah ısma‘il: Bidlîsî’s Definition of the Caliphate/Sultanate Contrasted with the Two Leaders’ Mode of Governing.

i-The Contribution of Bidlîsî to Ottoman Political Literature

As have mentioned in the first chapter of this study, one of the factors behind the decision of Bidlîsî in leaving Iran was probably the ideology of ghulat Shi’ism that Shah ısma‘il appropriated to consolidate his power, quitting the mystical path of his ancestors. Bidlîsî as a follower of the Safi order, who had witnessed the transformation of the Safi order from a Sunni order into a polity with a Shi‘i ideology, probably reacted to this development, rejecting the rulership of Shah ısma‘il and leaving his native land, Iran. The conflict between the Ottoman and Safavis offered an opportunity for Bidlîsî to articulate his thoughts about the rulership of the Safavi shah and his followers as well as about the rulership of the Ottoman sultan in his political writings. Moreover, the Acem scholar might have noticed that as of yet the Ottomans lacked an extensive treatment of political
philosophy and might have wanted to fill that gap by bringing to his political writings the insights he had drawn from juridical, philosophical and mystical literature as well as the experiences he had accumulated in his native land. In both of these respects, Bidlisi has a special place among the Ottoman political writers of the period.

*Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* is not the first example of Ottoman political literature but it seems to have been the primary work of political philosophy written in the reigns of Sultan Selim and his son, Sultan Süleyman. In the formative period of the Ottoman state, the demand in Ottoman society had been for epic stories such as *İskendernâme* of Firdawsî rather than for information about political theory\(^{301}\). Also more works containing entertaining features written in a simple literary style, such as *Kâbusnâme* of Kaykâ’us (d.after 1082/83), were translated rather than sophisticated theoretical works on political thought\(^{302}\). During the fifteenth century, there was a change in the nature of political literature and an increase in the number of political works as well as translations. Until the time of Bidlîsî, writers such as Amâsî (d.after 1412), Muşannifek (d.1470), Kâfiyeci (d.1474), Sinan Pasha (d.1486) and Tursun Beg (d.after 1490) wrote political works shaped by theoretical exposition, ethical and political philosophy as well as juristic and Sufi views\(^{303}\).

Like other authors of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who produced political works for the Ottoman sultans, Bidlîsî, too, seems to have been inspired by the thoughts and methodology of Jalâl al-din Dawâñî\(^{304}\) as well as Ibn Arabî, and Ghazalî (d. 1111), both of whom had influenced Dawâñî. In addition, philosophers and jurists from

---

303 For the brief information about these authors see Ibid., pp. 27-33, 37-43.
304 Tavakkoli, *Kânûn-i Şahenshahı*, p. XXXIX.
different areas and sects such as Tûsî, Ibn Jamâ’a, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldun, provided the theoretical background of Bidlîsî’s considerations concerning political authority in his *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*.

Another political writing of Bidlîsî, *Risâla fi ’l-Khilâfa wa Âdâb al-Salâtîn*, was written in a period when the political crisis between the Ottoman and Safavi states as well as the political struggles among the sons of Bayezid for the throne had just started. Differently from the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* written in Persian, this work was written in Arabic. *Risâla fi ’l-Khilâfa wa Âdâb al-Salâtîn* is divided into two main sections: in the first, Bidlîsî discusses the question whether in a given time period there could be more than one caliph from juridical, philosophical and mystical perspectives; in the second, he devotes himself to giving advice to the rulers, providing space for anecdotes from, for example, the prophet Solomon.

Differently from the abovementioned writings, the *Selimshahnâme* was a historical narrative, but Bidlîsî also articulated his political views in this work. Besides, the political treatises of Bidlîsî, particularly *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* appeared at a time when the Ottomans had just incorporated a vast chunk of the Arabic speaking lands from Aleppo to the Hijaz and Cairo into their empire were written with the consideration of the Ottoman growth as an imperial state. In line with this, Bidlîsî reformulated the model of ideal Muslim ruler that would give a universal and absolute imagery to the Ottoman sultan in the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*. For this reason, it is a product of a wider context. On the other hand, the *Selimshahnâme* was a offspring of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict and it is a key work in declaring and justifying Sultan Selim as ideal Muslim ruler, and in disproving the rulership of Shah Îsma‘îl, relaying on both his religiou-political activities
and on the axioms to be ideal ruler, which were suggested in the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*. The following section will examine the considerations of religio-political leadership that provided the Ottoman sultan in general, Sultan Selim, in particular, with superiority over Muslim rulers through the political writings of Bidlîsî.

**ii- Bidlîsî’s Concept of the Caliphate-Sultanate**

Bidlîsî’s political views have much in common with the Ottoman political literature of his time. In a recent study, the main features of the political theory of this period have been characterized as “an acquiescent acknowledgement of rulership as political power, a glorifying plaudit to portray the position of ruler as the noblest rank among mankind, and an unremitting exhortation to the ruler to endow himself with moral traits”305. In parallel to these general political views, and particularly to the mystical perspective of such contemporaries as Dizdar Mustafa b. Abdullah or of scholars writing slightly later such as Taşköprizâde (d.1561), Bidlîsî exposed the nature of rulership and the need for a ruler, first of all, in the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*. In this context, Bidlîsî explains the reason for the existence of the ruler, referring to a Koranic verse that was frequently used both before and after him:

> When thy Lord said to the angels: “Lo, I am going to place a vicegerent in the earth”. “They said: Wilt Thou place in it one who will work corruption and shed blood? We sing hymns in Thy praise and ascribe holiness to Thee” was regarded as defining the obligations of a sovereign in the earth306.

In Bidlîsî’s interpretation the sovereign in the earth was synonymous with such titles as caliph and imam. He also used the caliphate and imamate as interchangeable

---

categories. According to him, the caliph had to be the sultan at the same time, but not every Muslim sultan was caliph. This basic principle of Bidlîsî which disproved the concept of the regional caliphate can be detailed with his suggestions that any Muslim sultan who claimed to be the caliph must embody the divine caliphate and divine ethics in his person. In the introduction to his work devoted to ethics, he first addressed the issue of the divine nature of the caliphate/sultanate within the framework of the creation of humankind. According to his arguments on the creation of humankind, which were seemingly based on the ideas of illumination of Suhrawardî and the monism of Ibn Arabî, the human was the perfect created being among all those of both the physical and metaphysical world, since God had bestowed His glorious qualifications on a human being. While reinforcing this main suggestion with the Koranic verses: “...He formed the human being and breathed into him His spirit”, Bidlîsî also interpreted the mystical verse: “God made a mirror in which His perfect qualifications were reflected”. By using this metaphor of the mirror, Bidlîsî suggested that human beings are reflections of God, and thus explained the main quality of the soul of a human being.

As for the benevolence and blessings of God, these would illuminate the privileges of the caliph imparted by God. Bidlîsî discusses the blessings of God from two standpoints of kalam. In the first, he considers that if God bestowed some of His qualities such as beauty, fortune, happiness and prosperity on people without any effort on their part, these are considered as divinely given (wehbî). In the second, he explains the rest,

---

307 Tavakkoli, Kânûn-i Şahenşahi, pp. 11, 13; Bidlîsî, KS, ff. 94b, 95a.
308 Koran, 32:9.
309 Bidlîsî, KS, fol. 94b.
which were the acquired (kesbî) qualities like wealth and position. For Bidlîsî, like prophethood, the caliphate/imamate should be regarded as a divinely given blessing. He probably inferred it from the following Koranic verse: “Say: O Allah, owner of the (kingly) power, Thou givest the power to whom Thou wilt...” The verse was also used by early Muslim rulers, like the Umayyads (661-750) to construct divine evidence for their sovereignty, and was interpreted to mean that nobody can be caliph, unless God bestows this gift on him.

Nonetheless, an ambiguity in Bidlîsî’s exposition of the caliphate/imamate in terms as divinely given should be underlined. This stems partly from the fact that the subjects of both divinely given and acquired have been problematic concepts in both kalam and akaid, and partly from the fact that Bidlîsî does not give any illustrative or detailed information on these matters. Therefore, it is difficult to understand whether, by regarding the caliphate/imamate as a divinely given, Bidlîsî implied that to govern is natural in human being as Ghazâlî, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Khaldun did or whether he simply sought to justify his assumption that God bestowed the caliphate/imamate as He wished. The latter seems to be the more reasonable interpretation since Bidlîsî utilized

---

311 Tavakkolî, Kânûn-i Şahenşahi, pp. 24-5; Bidlîsî, KS, fol. 98b-99a; Yılmaz, The Sultan and The Sultanate, p. 231. The term of kash means to obtain; and Bidlîsî used it with this simple correspondence. On the other hand, since he did not mention any details about the accusation of the deeds (amal) and the effect of the God on amals, it is difficult to say by whom he was impressed in constructing his notions about kash.
312 Bidlîsî, KS, ff. 99a-b; For information on prophecy as a wahbi quality see, Şerafettin Gölcük and Süleyman Toprak, Kelam Tarih-Ekoller-Problemeler (Konya, 2001), pp. 329-331.
314 Umayyads indicated this and similar verses to legitimized their caliphate and affairs see Ismail Çalışkan, Siyasal Tefsirin Oluşum Süreci (Ankara, 2003), pp. 160-174.
similar expression such as “God selected special people to give the caliphate to as He did to the prophets”\textsuperscript{316}.

According to Bidlîsî, a ruler who claims to have been chosen by God as the caliph on earth had to be equipped with the proper qualifications. Furthermore, the true ruler was the manifestation of the prowess (\textit{kuwwa}), knowledge (\textit{‘ilm}) and wisdom (\textit{hikma}) of God, like the prophets, saints, and imams who had perfected all of these\textsuperscript{317}. For him, only if these qualifications were manifested in the ruler could true leadership (\textit{khilâfat-i Hakk}) be assumed. As the manifestation of the wisdom of God, the perfect ruler represented God’s government on earth. Accordingly, those representatives of the power/authority of God were obligated to guide people, to establish order, and manage the affairs of the city, domestic governance, and the worldly and religious acts of their subjects; “the one who executed all in the name of world leadership was called \textit{zill Allâh} and \textit{khalîf Allâh}”\textsuperscript{318}.

Since “the kings were the manifestations of the regency of God (\textit{padishâhân mazhar-i shâhî-i Hakk})\textsuperscript{319}, and the reflection or the light of God, from which the idiom the shadow/light of God originated, the caliph would govern as the representative of God upon earth. While Bidlîsî represented the divine nature of the caliphate in such a mystical light, he objected to the use of the mystical notion of \textit{hulûl} (transmigration/reincarnation) to explain the nature of rulership of Shah Îsma‘îl. \textit{Hulûl}, which is usually translated as transmigration/reincarnation, is a concept that has been interpreted differently by different groups. For some \textit{ghulat} Shi’i groups, the Divine Soul transmigrated to the

\textsuperscript{317} Tavakkolî, \textit{Kânûn-i Şahenşahi}, pp. 15, 22; Bidlîsî, \textit{KS}, ff. 95b, 97b.
\textsuperscript{318} Tavakkolî, \textit{Kânûn-i Şahenşahi}, pp.19-20; Bidlîsî, \textit{KS}, fol. 97a.
\textsuperscript{319} Bidlîsî, \textit{KS}, fol. 97b.
Prophet Muhammed, his son-in-law, Ali, and the Twelve Imams who came from the lineage of Ali\textsuperscript{320}. In Sufi conception based on the monism of Ibn Arabî, *hulûl* was regarded as the essence of the cosmos and of all creation in which the divine was manifested (*tajalliyât-i ilâhiyya*)\textsuperscript{321}. *Hulûl* was also manifest in Suhrawardi’s doctrine of illumination. According to him, light as well as darkness is an expression of existence\textsuperscript{322}. While this approach was also to become the basis for the Nizâriyya-a branch of Shiism-whose adherents believed that the Divine light transmigrated into the Prophet, Ali and Imams\textsuperscript{323}, Bidlîsî, like other Sunni Sufis, must have appropriated the theory of illumination; on this theoretical basis, he discussed human nature being in a mystical light: “God lighted the candle of the heart from His divine light” (*o dil râ az çérâğ nur-i kudsî ber efrûht*)\textsuperscript{324}.

On the other hand, Bidlîsî did not define his monistic ideas, which explained the cosmos as the manifestation of the qualities and power of God, as *hulûl*. Rather he labeled as *hulûl* the abovementioned notions of *ghulat* Shi’i or Nizâriyya. Bidlîsî regarded such beliefs as heretical, and accused Shah Îsma’il and his subjects of being *hulûlî* because they believed that God had transmigrated into the Safavi shah, who came from the family of the Prophet Muhammed, and, also that the Hidden Imam was revealed in the persona of Shah Îsma’îl\textsuperscript{325}. In this regard, Bidlîsî might have had in mind such


\textsuperscript{323} Demirci/Yavuz, “*Hulûl*”, p. 343.

\textsuperscript{324} Bidlîsî, *KS*, fol. 94b.

\textsuperscript{325} Bidlîsî, *SN*, fol. 73a; Kırlandçoğlu, *Selim Şah-nâme*, p. 121.
verses of Shah Ísma‘íl as “I am one with God” (‘ayn Allah) 326 and “I was the reincarnation of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad”327.

In sum, while Bidlîsî defined the caliph-sultan as the manifestation of the prowess, knowledge and wisdom of God on the earth, he rejected the Safavi shah’s formulation of the divine nature of his rule as heretical. Besides, Bidlîsî attempted to disprove the claim that Shah Ísma‘íl descended from the prophet Muhammed probably with the consideration of the influence of this claim over Muslims. Let us now see how Bidlîsî together with the Ottoman ulema dealt with the matter of the genealogy of Sah Ismail and how he supplemeted his remarks on the divine nature of the caliphate/sultanate with his observations on the lineage of the caliph-sultan.

iii- Redefining the Criteria for the Genealogy of the Caliph

In the sixteenth century, to be sayyid – namely to be a descendant of the family of Muhammed- was highly valued throughout the Islamic world. The Safavi shah tried to consolidate his political legitimacy in the eyes of Shi’s and Sunni Muslims in Iran by claiming descent from Ali as in the following poetical expressions: “(anamdur Fatima atam Ali dür ) Fatima is my mother [the daughter of the Prophet], my ancestor is Ali”328 Likewise, he wrote:

know for certain that Khatâ’i is of divine nature, that he is related to Muhammad Mustafa. He is of the issue of Safi, he is the scion of Junayd and Haydar [Ísmaîl’s grandfather and father, respectively], [and] he is related to Ali Murtaza329.

326 Hatâ’î, p. 129.
327 Hatâ’î, p. 125; Babayan, Mystics, p. xxxi.
328 Hatâ’î, p.18.
329 Hatâ’î, pp. 22, 155; The translations of these verses are those of Babayan. See Babayan, Mystics, p. xxxi.
As a recent refugee from Iran, Bidlisi had probably witnessed the gradual rise of the prestige of Shah Isma’il, and was aware of the effectiveness of the claim for genealogical superiority of the Safavi shahs in Muslim eyes, even after Shah Isma’il was defeated by the Ottomans. For this reason, he was particularly concerned with the matter of the lineage of the Safavi shah in his Selimshahnâme. According to him, the lineage of Muhammed was not necessarily a determining factor in becoming the ruler but was, nevertheless, important. In addition, Bidlisi seemed to be quite aware of the political use of descent from the Prophet, and he must have been sincere, when asserting that the genealogy of Shah Ism‘ail was false, as his following remarks suggest:

“the claim of the Safavi sheikhs [Haydar, Cüneyd as well as Shah Isma’il] to sovereignty stemmed from their marital kinship with Iranian Kings and Sultans; also, in order to justify their right to rule over the [Acem] lands, they insisted upon a dubious claim to the lineage of seyyid”…330 “when basing his lineage on Betül (another name of Fatma, the daughter of Muhammad and the wife of Ali), he [Shah Isma’il] did not fear the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad”331

Bidlisi asserted that political marriages were the only reason for the rise of Shah Isma’il and his known ancestors as political rulers, and he found their lies contemptible. Still the claim of the Safavi shah to be a descendant of the Prophet became an issue of dispute among the Ottoman ulema. During the reign of Sultan Süleyman, a period when the Ottoman-Safavi conflict was still continuing, the chief mufti, Ebussu‘ud, needed to answer questions such as “if their chief claim to be a descendant of the Prophet is true, would there be any hesitation in killing them?” in a fetva. In response, he declared that Shah Isma’il was definitely not of the pure line of the Prophet. He continued his argument,

330 Bidlisi, SN, ff. 72b-73a.
331 For such claims see Bidlisi, SN, fol. 77a. But because these expressions belong to Bidlisi, these can of course be regarded as attributions of Bidlisi to Shah Isma’il.
Shah Ỉsma‘îl, forced the sâdât-i ‘izam [who were descendants from Imams] to give him a place in the chain of lineage depended on the Imams, and killed those who refused to do so. Yet some sâdât did what he wanted, in order to escape death; but they deliberately tied Ỉsma‘îl’s genealogy with the one [Imam], who had no children, so that one can understand the truth332.

The Ottoman ulema as well as Bidlîsî disproved the claim of the Safavi shahs to be sayyid. At the same time they gave importance to the supremacy of lineage in becoming the caliph. Bidlîsî gave an explanation for the significance of the lineage in the following passage:

In accordance with the word of God, “I am going to place a vice-regent333[who would fulfill Our orders on the earth] and, He it is who hath made you vice-regents on the earth334, the caliph means successor [he implied the successor of God on earth], and therefore, a noble and pure lineage should be looked for in the caliph. Undoubtedly, only one accepted [in terms of his noble lineage] deserved the lordship of both body (jismaniyya) and soul (arvâh) and the throne of the divine caliphate in the world335.

In the same mystical tone, Bidlîsî designated the lineage of Ottomans, calling Âl-i Osman as the soul of the body of the sultanate/caliphate. In the section in the Selimnâme on Sultan Selim’s accession to the throne, he praised the new sultan thus:

God gave nobility to Selim who came from the lineage of Ottoman, the most auspicious of the ancestors having worn the crown (taj); [therefore] he predominated over all other nobles in terms of dignity336.

On the other hand, in the years after the death of Sultan Selim, Ottoman literati must have been still sceptical about the claim of both this sultan and later his son Süleyman to the caliphate/imamate on grounds of the fact that the Ottoman dynasty was

333 Koran, 2:30.
335 Tavokkolî, Kânûn-i Şahenşahi, p. 12; Bidlîsî, KS, fol. 94b.
336 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 56a-57b.; Kirlangîç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 82-83.
not of the tribe of Kuraysh, probably because they were confused about the concept of the caliphate. Thus, Lütfi Pasha, a former grand vizier of Sultan Süleyman, composed a *risala* discussing of this issue in order to eliminate remaining uncertainties about the Ottoman right to the caliphate. In this *risala*, Gibb elaborates, Lütfi Pasha clarified the questions of “certain noblest of the *eşraf*” who were in doubt about the necessity that the Imam belong to the Kuraysh and about the appropriateness of applying the title of caliph/imam to the Ottoman sultan. After searching canonical books on *aqaid*, Lütfi Pasha stated that

> “the requirement for imams to be of the Kuraysh was applicable only in the earliest times of Islam after the death of the Prophet Muhammed, but not, however, at this time… after the Abbasid Caliphs the matter is problematical”\(^{337}\).

Also he explained the matter of applying the title of caliph/imam to the Sultan as follows\(^{338}\):

> “I found certain books mention that…who commands the good and forbids the evil is the caliph of God upon earth. Likewise, the authors of these books applied the name of imam and caliph to the sultan, valî and âmir,”

and allowed him to use these titles. Furthermore, Lütfi Pasha added that “the opinion of jurisprudence was that the assertions of the Imamiyye that the Imamate was established with Ali and for this reason continued in his house were contrary to the Sunna”\(^{339}\).

Neither Bîdîsî nor, later, Lütfi Pasha declared that being of the Kuraysh family for the caliph/imam was mandatory. While this approach legitimates the caliphate of the Ottoman sultan, it reveals the matter of the availability of the caliphate for every Muslim ruler, and thus, multiplicity of the caliph. In the light of his political writings it can be

---


suggested that Bidlîsî did not support the concept of a regional caliph, which meant that there could be more than one caliph at the same time with a noble lineage. In this connection, it is necessary to analyze Bidlîsî’s conceptualizations of the caliph-sultan of Muslim world in greater detail.

III. The Religious and Ethical Duties of the Caliph-Sultan

Bidlîsî identified the religious and ethical principles which the caliph-sultan had to have in his Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî, and evaluated the acts of Sultan Selim and Shah İsmâ‘il according to these principles in his Selimshahnâme. These comparisons will be dealt within the following section. Through such an analysis, I will continue to put forward the role of the Ottoman ulema, in general, and that of Bidlîsî, in particular, in formulating the superiority of the Ottoman sultan over the Safavi shah as well as the religious identity of the main institutions of the state, the dynasty and society in line with Islamic as well as pre-Islamic connotations of the ideal ruler and of statecraft.

i-The Union of Religion and State/Sultanate

Religion (din) and state/temporal power (devlet) were regarded as twins in Islamic political theory.340 al-Jâhiz (d.869) and Ghazâî, for example, posited the idea that “if religion was the base, devlet was its guardian and charged with its preservation; such a principle required a norm, a canon (kânûn)”.341 In the same manner, Bidlîsî put forward

---

the axiom that kingship and religion are twins; and that kingship is a form of piety. At this point, Bidlîsî differentiated sultanate/kingship from the caliphate; the sultan was directly chosen by God but only a pious, virtuous and righteous ruler could be the caliph-sultan. In the Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî, where he listed the qualities of the caliph-sultan, Bidlîsî regarded piety as the first obligation of the caliph-sultan; as for the criterion of piety, he stipulated that the caliph-sultan should care for the tradition of the religion of the Prophet, and glorify the rules and the Book of God. He pointed out the section of hajj for the Koranic basis of his arguments:

“Who, if We establish them in the earth (allazîna in makannâhum fî’l-’arz), will observe the Prayer, and pay the zekat, urge people to do what is reputable and restrain from what is disreputable!…”

For Bidlîsî, devotion to religion represented both a personal benefit in the sultan’s next life and a political advantage for his temporal authority. The latter manifested itself in the ordering of the subjects and armies of the sultan since, in accordance with the maxim that the sultan’s religion is his subjects’ religion, too (al-nâsu ‘alâ din-i mulûkihim). While requiring piety on the part of the sultan in order to take care of the affairs of government, and harmony and unity between the sultan and his subjects, Bidlîsî reminded the sultan of what would happen if he acted counter to the orders of God by quoting the Koranic verse “And when your Lord proclaimed: Assuredly if you are thankful, I shall increase you, but if you disbelieve, My torment is severe” as a warning.

---

343 Bidlîsî, KS, ff. 115a-b; Bidlîsî referred to the same Koranic verse in his Selimshahnâme, see Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 71a.
344 Koran, 22:41.
345 Bidlîsî, KS, fol. 117a.
346 Koran, 14:7; also for the use of Bidlîsî see, Bidlîsî, KS, fol. 117b.
to preserve the blessings of God, including the sultanate. He continued with an analogy between the slave and the sultan to exemplify his argument. In this connection, he asserted that in the same way that a patron gradually increases his mercy and favors towards a slave who executes his service, so God augments His mercy and support and shows benevolence toward His servants if they praise God by serving the divine order in accordance with the book of God, the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad and the Sunna of the four rightly guided caliphs (khulefā-i rāṣidin)\textsuperscript{347}. Otherwise, the end of the sultan would be like the end of those degraded by God for deviating from the ways of religion.

At this point, in the Selimshahnâme Bidlîşî illustrated these views with the examples of Shah Îsma‘îl, whom he criticized and Sultan Selim, whom he praised. When he wrote about the religious and political acts of Shah Îsma‘îl, Bidlîşî assessed that Shah Îsma‘îl could not be a true ruler who would represent the government of God on earth and his claim to be “the refuge of the religion on the earth (eknûn ba gîtî menem dîn-penâh)”\textsuperscript{348} was unacceptable, since he had fallen into error. Already, because of his and his followers’ deviations from Islamic behavior, God punished him by the sword of His true representative, Sultan Selim, whose aim was to establish the order of God\textsuperscript{349}.

Bidlîşî thought that religious acts of the Safavi Shah and his followers demonstrated their deviations from the norms of Islam. On this point, Bidlîşî distinguished the current Shah, his father, Haydar, and his grandfather, Cüneyd, from the early sheikhs of the sect of Safî; he commended the latter as trusting and devout people,

\textsuperscript{347} Tavokkolî, Kânûn-i Şahensahi, pp. 73-76; Bidlîşî, KS. ff. 116b-117a.
\textsuperscript{348} Bidlîşî, SN, fol. 91b; Kîrlangîç, Selim Şah-nâme, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{349} For such poetical expression Bidlîşî attributed to Sultan Selim, see Bidlîşî, SN, ff. 79a-79b; Kîrlangîç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 137-138.
worthy of respect. According to Bidlîsî, the generations following these pious masters had quit praying, declared canonically forbidden acts (haram) to be canonically permissible (halal), drinking alcohol, illicit sexual relationships to be legal and despised the Koran, Islam and shari’a, cursed the sheikhs and killed the ulema, destroyed the mosques and burnt the sheikhs’ tombs and graves. In the Selimshânname such aberrant acts were represented in three partially overlapping ways. In the first, Shah Isma’il and his followers were represented as believers in Zoroastrianism; in the second, they became ghulat Shi’i. Bidlîsî construed ghulat Shi’ism, which in some passage he called Khârijî-Râfidi and, in other places, Kızıldaş, as a belief which originated in Zoroastrianism. In Bidlîsî’s poetical compositions inserted into his prose works, he asserted that Kızıldaş had learned to worship the fire from the Moghan [Zoroastrian priests]; the color of their red headgear emerged from the color of fire of Zoroaster and in accordance with the religion of Zoroaster, they put on this red headgear. Third, probably referring to the Kızıldaş belief in hulûl, as mentioned above, Bidlîsî claimed that the Kızıldaş regarded Shah Isma’il as God and that Isma’il also established his own shari’a. Because the latter amounted to heresy, he went on to label Shah Isma’il and his believers as atheists (mulhid), infidels (kafir) and apostates (murtad), heretics, and ahl-i fasâd/mafâsid (sedition) throughout his historical narrative.

In the fetvas they issued on the ghulat mystical groups, Ottoman ulema of the reign of Sultan Selim such as Kemalpaşazâde, and Hamza Gürz as well as the chief mufti of the reign of Süleyman, Ebussu’ud made almost the same arguments as Bidlîsî. Recent

350 Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 72b.
351 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 72b, 77a-77b, 80a; Kırlangıç, Selim Şah-nâme, pp. 132-33.
352 Bidlîsî, SN, fol. 96a; Kırlangıç, Selim Şah-nâme, p. 177.
353 Bidlîsî, SN, ff. 73a, 77b.
studies of these *fetwas* indicate that the common standpoint on the beliefs of Shah ʿĪsmaʿīl and his followers was that the Safavis were a heretical group uniting all earlier heresies. Based on the *fetwas* of the ulema of his own time, Sultan Selim, in the letter he sent to Shah ʿĪsmaʿīl, also mentioned the link between the pre-Islamic beliefs in Iran and Safavis’ belief as the following: “according to *fetwas* given by the ulema, the ancient obligation of extirpation, extermination and expulsion of evil innovation must be fulfilled”.

The most critical points of the Ottoman ulema’s attack on the Safavis were the ideas of *tajallā* (the manifestation of God as a human being) and *tanāsūh* (incarnation and multiplicity of forms), which Bidlîsî defined with the term *hulûl*. These ideas must have provided a key connection between the *ghulat* and the beliefs of pre-Islamic Iran, as the Ottoman ulema, and Bidlîsî asserted. Interestingly, a recent study by Babayan has also found the marks of Zoroastrianism in the *ghulats*’ cosmology.

Bidlîsî, like the Ottoman ulema, underlined the weakness of the faith of the Safavi shah and of his subjects to establish the proper religious practices of the caliph-sultan in accordance with “*shariʿa*”. Whereas the appraisals of Bidlîsî and other Ottoman ulema disproved the rulership of the Safavi shah, they granted the caliphate/sultanate to the Ottoman sultan in accordance with these proper practices. In other words, the discussions of the heretical beliefs and practices of the Safavis provided a convenient counterpoint to a discourse of merit of the Ottoman rulers as Sunni Muslims. In this respect, like Bidlîsî, Kemalpaşazâde suggested that, as a legal sect of the Ottomans, the *ahl-i sunna* did not

---

355 Üstün, *Heresy and Legitimacy*, p. 34.
believe in the incarnation of God but defended the Unity of God, the eternity of His attributes, and confirmed the shari’a of the Prophet Muhammad\textsuperscript{357}.

Bidlîsî implied that God had granted the caliphate-sultanate to the Ottoman rulers, because since the establishment of their dynasty, they had always been \textit{ahl-i iman}, and had been commended for propagating just laws based on the shari‘a. He interpreted also their success in expanding their territories to be the result of their piety and their efforts in the name of Islam. Like his successors, Sultan Selim had also endeavored to elevate and spread the practice of Islam\textsuperscript{358}. Moreover, both in the letters Sultan Selim sent to Shah Īsma‘îl and also at the time he ascended the throne, the Ottoman sultan had declared that God had given him the throne of the sultan and the caliphate, and his main aim in accepting this divine trust was, as his ancestors had done, to reinforce Islam, to fulfill the obligation to establish order in religion and the state through justice, and to eradicate cruelty as his ancestors had done\textsuperscript{359}.

\textbf{ii-\textit{Jihad} as a Religious Duty of the Caliph- Sultan}

In the works of the ulema in the sixteenth century, \textit{jihad} as a religious obligation of the Ottoman sultan was defined in detail since at that time, in their opinion, Islam was being threatened by the “heretical Safavis”. Bidlîsî, who shared the same worries with the Ottoman ulema, wrote: “in accordance with his religious duty towards God, the Sultan attempted to declare \textit{jihad}, as did his ancestors”\textsuperscript{360} and presented the war against

\textsuperscript{357} Üstün, \textit{Heresy and Legitimacy}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{358} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, ff. 71b-72a.
\textsuperscript{359} Üstün, \textit{Heresy and Legitimacy}, p. 34., Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, fol. 64a.
\textsuperscript{360} Bidlîsî, \textit{SN}, ff. 59b-60a, 73a.
the Safavis as obligatory since they construed the actions of the Safavis as violations of Islam.

Bidlişî declared that fighting against the Safavis came prior to fighting infidels. In the Selimshahnâme, when he recounted the long process of decision making on the part of the Ottoman ulema on this issue, he pointed out that such a decision was given in the light of religious evidence and according to reason. According to shari‘a, the sultan had to act under the guidance of the practices and moral example established by the Prophet Muhammad, the four Caliphs and Imams. Giving specific examples from early Islamic period, Bidlişî pointed out that even though, in their time, the invitation to accept Islam had not yet reached many provinces, these leaders had given importance to fighting those who appeared in the world of Islam with a rival claim of prophethood. Referring to the historical events of that time to legitimate the Ottoman was against the Safavis, Bidlişî recommended fighting against the Safavis rather than “fighting against infidel Franks and Tatars who had trespassed the borders of the Ottoman state” and violated their religion.

The Ottoman jurists contemporary to Bidlişî and Şehzâde Korkud, the son of Bayezid II, in a comprehensive work on the issue of faith he wrote as a candidate to the throne classified Safavi society and the Turcomans who rebelled in Anatolia as murtad, mulhid or zindik, and supported the Ottoman campaign against the Safavis. Some declared that to punish them was canonically required (farz-i ‘ayn) and (wâjib), and

---

361 For the fetvas of the Ottoman ulema including Ebussu‘ud’s issued on this argument see, Üstün, Heresy and Legitimacy, pp. 39, 61; Also see Düzdağ, Şeyhülislam Ebussuûd Efendi, p. 111.
362 Bidlişî, SN, fol. 73b.
363 Bidlişî, SN, ff. 73b-74a.
364 For Şehzade Korkud’s justifications of faith and the absence of the faith see Al-Tikriti, Şehzade Korkud, pp. 163-185.
some, like Ebussu‘ud who served as şeyhülislam during the reign of Sultan Süleyman argued that it was canonically permissible (mubah)\textsuperscript{365}. Drawing on the legal consequences of the rules of jihad, the ulema found certain punishments appropriate for the Kızılbaş heretics. Some punishments cited in recent studies can be summarized as follows:

“If a village is on their (the opposite) side, the Sultan-ı Islam should execute their men and divide their women, children and property among the guzat-i Islam; after capturing these, the Sultan-ı Islam should not accept their repentance but should kill them all; whoever is captured while on his way to join them, should also be killed”\textsuperscript{366}.

Ultimately these fetvas show that the Ottoman ulema considered the Safavis as non-Muslim since, in accordance with the shari‘a, such punishments were proper for infidels.

In Bidlîşi’s definition of the Ottoman sultanate/caliphate there is a formula, masterfully designed by him. Accordingly, God had given the caliphate/sultanate to the Ottoman dynasty in return for their upholding Islam. Having fulfilled their religious obligations, the Ottomans had proved that they merited the benevolence of God. As for the other Muslim states, they became part of dar al-harb like the Safavis if they fell into religious aberration.

Bidlîşi’s definition of the duties of the sultan can be discussed in two main sections. The first, as shown above, concerns the duties the sultan undertook to carry out the commands of God and to give thanks to God for the blessing of the caliphate/sultanate by promoting and refining the Islamic religion by means of jihad. The

\textsuperscript{365} Üstün, Heresy and Legitimacy, p. 60; also Düzdağ, Şeyhülislam EbuSuûd Efendi, p, 110. The reason why he justified punishing the Kızılbaş as mubah was probably because he was considering the political relationship between the Ottoman and the Safavi states in his own time.

\textsuperscript{366} Üstün, Heresy and Legitimacy, pp. 39-40.
second duty of the caliph-sultan was to administer justice. This was the ultimate axiom of Bidlîşî’s formula, as will be discussed in the next section.

iii-The Practice of Justice

The concept of justice (adalet) was a major principle in political thought and practice and to administer justice was considered the most effective and wise principle of conduct for a king. In the administrative practices, the concept of justice meant both a principle of social action and also embraced equity as an ethical notion. Thus, in government, justice was defined as the prevention of abuse, the hearing of complaints and the protection of the interests of the subjects. The just government of the ruler was linked to his ethical principles consisting of generosity, mercy towards his subjects, humility, and faithfulness in keeping promises. In the Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî these are represented as significant factors that would lead to social harmony and peace. As for the Selimshahnâma, it was a testimony to the just order of a sultan, Sultan Selim, who was represented as having all of the abovementioned ethical characteristics.

In his advice on how to reach a state of perfect order, Bidlîşî did not overlook the link between the pious and the just king and seemed not to tolerate the Islamic sanction, “kingship is undermined by tyranny, not unbelief.” For Bidlîşî, an irreligious king was also an unjust/tyrannical one, and Shah İsma‘îl, as the head of an irreligious society, came under this category. He described the adherents of Shah İsma‘îl as cursed sect does not subscribe to the religion of God and Mustafa; their business is killing, tyrannizing,

---

367 Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors For Princes”, in Theory and Practice, p. 419.
368 For the quotation of Lambton from Bahrîl - Fevâ’îd, see Lambton, “Islamic Mirrors For Princes”, pp. 430-1.
369 Ibid., p. 439.
370 This idiom is known as hadith.
and causing sedition “(firka-i mel‘ûn ne dar dîn-i hodâ ve mustafa kâr-i ishân katl we zulm we fitna we cowr u cafâ)” 371, and he frequently emphasized the affairs of the Safavi Shah out of Islam throughout the *Selimshahnâmê* as the following: “…those who were thirsty for blood and did not recognize the True [God]” “…the complaints from the lands of Iran that the rule of religion had deteriorated; the owner of this dome [Shah Ísma‘îl] was becoming a tyrant; because of his blasphemy, law and the order had been overturned” 372, “…Wherever there was a mu‘min (believer), the Shah killed him, usurped his possessions and took over his family; in accordance with his orders, adultery and illegal intercourse (*liwâta*) were declared legal; and virtuous people were compelled to practice such immoralities” 373.

For Bidlîsî and the Ottoman ulema, the tyranny of Shah Ísma‘îl was not limited to mere physical violence. By burning the Koran and other religious works, killing the ulema, and burning the bones of deceased ulema, he violated what people considered valuable and sacred.

While waging war against Shah Ísma‘îl was the duty of the caliph-sultan towards God, the sultan who was appointed to execute justice upon earth must consider the weakness of subjects who were exposed to cruelty and this was his duty towards his subjects 374. “If the shadow of the sultan”, Bidlîsî said, “is the refuge of the old and young, [the sultan] must regard those under his order as part of his body, and consider their welfare or their suffering of any kind as his own” 375. The sultan must also show mercy

---

373 Bidlîsî, *SN*, fol. 77a; Kîrlangıç, *Selim Şah-nâmê*, p. 133.
towards His creations in accordance with the Koranic verses: “Verily Allah commandeth justice and kindness...”\(^{376}\) and “And lower thy wing to any of the believers who follow thee”\(^{377}\). Whereas the violent and impious actions of Shah Ismail towards the Sunnis in Iran as was represented in Selimshahnâme indicated his unjust rulership, the appearance of Sultan Selim as the saviour of Sunnis who suffered cruelty proved the justice of Sultan Selim in the presentations of Bidlîsi.\(^{378}\).

Faithfulness in promise-keeping (ahde vefâ), presented as a significant ethical principle, which the caliph-sultan had to have in order to be regarded as just, in the Kânûn-i Shahenshâhi, was also stressed in the Selimshahnâme. For Bidlîsi, the sultan should keep the promises he gave both to his enemies and to his allies: “And fulfill the covenant, verily, a covenant is a thing for which one is responsible”\(^{379}\); if the sultan neglected the orders of God and broke his promises, his subjects would lose their trust in him as well as their desire to serve him in peacetime and in war, and the credit of the sultan would decline in the eyes of his subjects\(^{380}\). When mentioning the events following the military conflict at Çaldıran, Bidlîsi rejoiced that the sultan had ultimately kept his promise to complete the military campaign he had planned toward Iran and reinforced the Kurdish forces in difficult situation, which had ensued when the Ottoman sultan had returned Amasya instead of advancing further to support the Kurdish forces (ez ân âvd-i sultân mulûk-i ʿajem perîshâhân dil uftâd u zâr u dizham)\(^{381}\).

\(^{376}\) Koran, 16:90; for the quotation from Bidlîsi see Bidlîsi, SN, fol. 67b.  
\(^{377}\) Koran, 26:215; also for quotation from Bidlîsi, see Bidlîsi, SN, fol. 73a.  
\(^{378}\) Bidlîsi, SN, fol. 113a; Kûrlangûç, Selim Şâh-nâme, pp. 121-122.  
\(^{379}\) Koran, 17:34.  
\(^{380}\) Tavakkolî, Kânûn-i Şahensahi, pp. 81-82; Bidlîsi, KS, fol. 120a.  
\(^{381}\) Bidlîsi, SN, ff.130a-b; Kûrlangûç, Selim Şâh-nâme, pp. 264-5.
The mention on the promise of the Ottoman sultan revealed another component of administering justice in the *Selimshahnâme*: the obligation of the unity between the people and the sultan. Here, Bidlîşî explained this axiom as the following: “the sultan is the soul (*jan we ten*) and security of the body (*beden*); the parts of the body represent the subjects of the sultan in both peace (*hazar*) and war (*sefer*)”\(^{382}\). In the *Selimshahnâme*, Bidlîşî elucidated this principle by giving the example of the Ottoman sultan’s attitude toward the Kurds. During the conflict between the Kurdish and Safavi forces, the Kurds had waited for the support of Sultan Selim because the sultan had made promises to them in this regard, as well as because his commandment would provide them with physical and spiritual power. Even if the Ottoman sultan had not actually commanded the Kurds in person, he had supported them with military forces and equipment\(^{383}\) and this was enough, in Bidlîşî’s opinion, to demonstrate his perfection as caliph-sultan.

**IV. Towards a New Formulation of the Universal Caliphate-Sultanate**

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the notion of the regional caliphate that emerged in the post Abbasid period allowed for the existence of multiple caliphs/sultans at the same time. Even though the title of caliph continued to be used as a prestigious title, it did not give the ruler who used it universal claim any more. Bidlîşî reformulated the concept of the regional caliph and endowed it again with universal meaning. According to this reformulation, there could once again be only one caliph at the same time within the Islamic realm.

---

\(^{382}\) Bidlîşî, *SN*, fol. 104a.

\(^{383}\) When Kurds insistently called the Ottoman sultan for the support, Sultan Selim appointed Bryklî Mehmed Pasha and his army to supply military force in aid of the Kurdish armies. For these historical accounts see Bidlîşî, *SN*, fol. 131b; Kirlangç, *Selim Şah-nâme*, p. 267.
In this respect, the date of the appearance of another political tract in which Bidlîsî dealt with this issue is striking. Bidlîsî wrote *Risâla fī’l-Khilâfa wa Âdâb al-Salâtîn* in 1512, when he was in Cairo and the struggles among the sons of Bayezid for the throne continued and tension between three Muslim states, the Ottomans, the Safavis as well as Mamluks was high. These political conflicts among Muslim rulers for absolute power within the Islamic realm must have rendered the coexistence of multiple caliphs/sultans unacceptable. Bidlîsî’s tract written at this critical period begins with the permissibility of two or more caliphs/imams. Relating to this, Bidlîsî resorts to opinions from Icî of the school of Ashâri, Keshshsaf of the school of Mu‘tazila and Zaydiyya, a branch of Shi‘i. To stress once more, Bidlîsî was not imbued with any sectarian bigotry. Therefore he did not object to utilizing various concepts, including those of Shi‘is, in order to reach an ultimate decision for his justification of any issue. He probably made conscious reference to different concepts through which he could justify his assumptions from many perspectives.

Besides that, he indicates the hadiths as the main support for his claims. Seemingly these hadiths comprised the juristic touchstone in the matter of the multiplicity of the caliphs. One expedient is that if people acknowledged two caliphs, one of them should be killed!; and another is that if someone appeared with a claim to the caliphate, even though there already was an Imam, people should acknowledge the first as far as they can or decapitate the latter!384. Through these hadiths, Bidlîsî probably inclined towards the idea that the second one who declared his caliphate/imamate was the target to be killed.

---

In the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî*, Bidlîsî further argued that as the representative of God’s perfect government on the earth, there could only be one sultan/caliph; the oneness of the sultan/caliph had to parallel God’s uniqueness (*uhuwiyya*)\(^{385}\). It is difficult to understand whom Bidlîsî had in mind when he implied the existence of multiple caliphs. But when we consider the subsequent developments he witnessed, we can speculate that other figures he had in mind were Shah 伊斯兰, Mutavakkil, the last Abbasid caliph who was protected by the Mamluks, or both. Of course, Bidlîsî might have wanted to justify the oneness of the caliph-sultan, and thus, the obligation to kill others who claimed to be caliph/imam, regarding the Ottoman princes who struggled for dynastic succession\(^{386}\).

To sum up, the political developments in the reign of Sultan Selim led to changes in the concept of Muslim rulership and resulted in the representation of the Ottoman sultan as the universal leader of the Muslim world. Even if this image would be manifested best in the person of Sultan Süleyman, literati of the court of Sultan Selim such as Bidlîsî who were the pioneers in this regard. Even though the reception of Bidlîsî’s political and historical writings is yet to be studied in detail, it is quite likely that his contemporaries who served Sultan Süleyman read and were inspired by these works. Also his representations of the Ottoman sultan and Safavi shah helped to construct the identities of the two leaders in the memory of the Ottoman household, being recounted from generation to generation, and whenever a new military campaign was planned against the Safavis.

---

\(^{385}\) Tavakkolî, *Kânûn-i Şahenşahî*, p. 99; also see Bidlîsî, *KS*, fol. 126b.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, we have explored key aspects of the Ottoman-Safavi conflict through an examination of the life, the religio-political writings and the diplomatic activities of İdris-i Bidlîş as a political and cultural intermediary between the Ottoman and Iranian worlds in the early sixteenth century. At this time, the relations between these two realms underwent a cataclysmic change as a result of the rise of the Safavi state in Iran and a series of pro-Safavi revolts among the Turcoman population living under Ottoman rule in Anatolia. The ensuing conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavis was played out on both a military and a religious-ideological level, and helped transform the definitive character of both states, with the Safavis adopting Twelver Shi’ism as the state religion and the Ottomans embracing a much stronger Sunni identity. It was in this context that a number of the Iranian learned elite, among them Bidlîş, left their native lands, either because of their sectarian preferences or because of the uncertainty of their future at the Safavi court, to start a new life and career in the Ottoman lands. As men who had links with both realms, some of these newcomers at the Ottoman court played pivotal roles in the conflict with the Safavis.

Without doubt the most influential of these figures was Bidlîş, who seems to have taken refuge in the Ottoman state because it seemed to him to be the most powerful protagonist in this struggle. The services Bidlîş rendered the Ottoman state were multifaceted, and shed important light on the cultural, intellectual, political and religious dynamics of early sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire as well as on the complex relationship between the Ottoman and Iranian worlds in this period.
As a product of the Iranian cultural domain, Bidlîšî acted, first of all, as a transmitter of Iranian cultural and political traditions to the Ottoman-Rumi world. Under the patronage of Sultan Bayezid and his son Selim, both of whom had a deep interest in and admiration for the Iranian cultural tradition, Bidlîšî produced two literary masterpieces in Persian: the *Hasht Behesht*, a history of the House of Osman, and *Selimshahnâme*, a history glorifying the deeds of Sultan Selim I in the tradition of the *şehnâme*. These works brought to Ottoman historiography long-established conventions of Iranian historiography and deeply influenced other Ottoman historians such as Kemalpaşažî, Hoca Saaddedin and MustafaÂli, and initiated new modes of history writing, which would culminate in the creation of the post of *şehnameci* in the reign of Sultan Selim II (r.1567-1574). During his service to the Ottoman sultans as a sufi-oriented scholar, Bidlîšî also wrote political tracts in Persian. Among them the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhi*, which he wrote towards the end of his life, represented the first theoretical exposition on Muslim leadership in Ottoman political literature.

Interestingly, Bidlîšî’s literary and scholarly output received at best a mixed response from the Ottoman court and courtly elites. In the case of the *Hasht Behesht*, some of the criticism seems to have stemmed in part from the resentment felt by the Ottoman elite towards the Acems, who were promoted by the Ottoman sultans without climbing the steps of bureaucracy. In part, too, the criticisms reflected the ambivalence felt by the Ottoman elites towards the Iranian cultural tradition, even as they engaged in a competitive dialogue with it.

Bidlîšî’s rise in the political arena largely ran parallel to the military policies of Sultan Selim. During his reign, as the tension with the Safavis was escalating, the
Ottomans looked for the ways to expand towards the Safavi territories. At this point, Bidlîsî appeared again in the Ottoman court but in a different position and with a different aim. This time, Bidlîsî used his personal connections with the local powers, the Kurdish tribal leaders, in the Safavi western borderlands; as an informal Ottoman representative, he strove to negotiate a military and political alliance between the Ottomans and the Kurdish tribal leaders.

Bidlîsî's writings about these meetings reveal a perspective that defies easy classification as imperial or local. It is clear that as an agent who had strong entanglements on both the imperial and the local level, Bidlîsî considered not only the interests of the Ottoman state but also the political benefits of the Kurdish notables. This was evident both when he tried to persuade the Kurdish notables to join the Ottoman ranks and conversely when he tried to reassure the Ottoman court of the reliability of the Kurds as allies.

Significantly, Bidlîsî's efforts in this regard were enormously influential: the Ottoman-Kurdish alliance that he helped forge brought under Ottoman sovereignty the western territories of the Safavi empire. Moreover, the newly acquired lands, where the Kurdish tribes also lived, were incorporated into the Ottoman realms under terms that granted considerable autonomy to the Kurdish tribal leaders. In short, it was as a result of the negotiations with the Ottomans that the Kurds emerged as the most important political powers in the borderlands between the Ottoman and Safavi states. Over and beyond Bidlîsî's role in all this, what this episode goes to show is first that negotiation and diplomacy were as much a part of the Ottomans' eastern policy as war and military confrontation and second that the political status of the “Kurdish lands” as the newly
incorporated lands came to be known was determined neither by Ottoman imperial policy alone nor by local power dynamics but by the interplay between the two.

Finally,Bidlis also played an active role in the religio-political discussions among the Ottoman learned elite. These discussions were fueled by the Ottoman-Safavi ideological rivalry as well as by growing Ottoman territorial and political ambitions and Ottoman expansion towards the Muslim lands in the east and south. Bidlis partook in the ensuing discussions both through his political writings such as the *Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî* and his historical works such as the *Selimshahnâme*. Remarkably for a relative newcomer to the Ottoman court, Bidlis’s treatment of the political claims of the Ottoman sultan and the Safavi shah in these works largely ran parallel to the positions taken by the Ottoman learned elite, and in some cases even anticipated them. Like the Ottoman muftis Kemalpaşâde and Ebussu’ud and many others after them, he denigrated the Safavi shah as a heretic and a tyrant, while extolling Sultan Selim as a model Sunni Muslim ruler. Most importantly, at a time when the Ottoman sultan was preparing to claim to be the supreme leader of the Muslim world, Bidlis helped articulate a theoretical base for the Ottoman sultan’s leadership that contained the new formula that the caliph-sultan as absolute sovereign would enable the justice of God to take place on earth. This signified a departure from the post-Abbasid, post-Mongol concept of the regional caliphate and a move towards a new concept of the caliphate/sultanate as a form of universal and absolute Muslim leadership.

Ultimately, Bidlis was a man of multiple involvements. His accomplishments and expertise as a man of literature, a statesman and a sufi-oriented scholar ensured him credit at the courts of many different Muslim rulers, put him in touch with a wide social
and intellectual network and ultimately granted him considerable geographical and professional mobility. It was also this cultural and professional capital that enabled him to, in some measure, transcend regional differences and play a leading role in the formation of the Ottoman policy on his native land Iran and its powerholders.
APPENDIX

Map 1: Western boundary of the Safavi State around 1512

* The map is cited from Özoğlu, “State-Tribe Relations”.

143
Map 2: The Conquests of Selim I (1512-1520)

* The map is cited from Donald Edgar Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire*, (Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1972).
Map 3: The Location of the Kurdish tribes in the Ottomans and Safavi lands in the sixteenth century and the semi autonomous and autonomous Kurdish principalities in the Ottoman provincial administration in 1518.

- The location of the important Kurdish tribes
- Autonomous units: Palu
- Semi Autonomous units: Tercil

*The map is cited from Bruinessen, Agha, p. 158.
Map 4: The Ottoman State in the Reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566)*

* Pitcher, Geography of the Ottoman Empire.
ARCHIVAL SOURCES

I. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi

TT. nr. 64, 200, 208

II. Topkapı Sarayı Arşivi
The letter sent from Bidlîsî to Bayezid II: E. nr. 5675
The letters sent from Bidlîsî to Selim I: E. nr. 1019, 6610, 8833/I, II, III
The letters sent from Büyük Mehmed Pasha to Selim I: E. nr. 5858, 6627, 8283
The ferman of Süleyman I: E. nr. 11969

PRIMARY SOURCES


Feridun Bey, Münşèâtî’Selâtîn, 2 vols., İstanbul, 1858, vol II.

Hoca Saadeddin, Tacü‘ t-Tevârîh, 2 vols., İstanbul, 1879. vol.II.


İdris-i Bidlîsî. Hasht Behesht Khâtima, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr. 2197.

--------- Kânûn-i Shahenshâhî, Süleymaniye Library /Esad Efendi, nr. 1888/2.

--------- Mecmua, Ragib Paşa Library, nr. 919.
Mir’ât al-Jamâl, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr.1881/1.

Mir’at al-Uşshâk, Süleymaniye Library /Esad Efendi, nr. 1888/4.

Risâla-i Khazâniyya, Süleymaniye Library/Esad Efendi, nr.1881/7.


Risâla fi’l-Khilâfe wa Âdâb al–Salâtîn, İstanbul University Library, nr. F 1228.


Selimshahnâme, The Topkapı Palace Library /Emanet, nr. 1423.

Tarjuma wa Tafsîr-i Hadis-i Arba’in, Süleymaniye Library/Fatih, nr. 791/1.


Scheref. Scheref-Nameh, 2 vols., ed. by Y. Veliaminof-Zernof, St.-Petersburg, 1860, vol II.


“Bîdîsî’nin Tespit Edilebilen İkinci Telif Eseri- Risâla-i Rabi’ al –Abrâr’nin Türkçe Tercümesi”, Unpublished article.

SECONDARY SOURCES


Bashir, Shahzad. Messianic Hopes and Mystical Visions, University of South Carolina, 2003.


