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Research Article

THE EMPIRE, SUNNI ISLAM, AND QIZILBASH ISLAM IN CELÂLZÂDE MUSTAFA'S HISTORICAL WRITINGS*

Hüseyin Ongan Arslan**

Abstract

The intricate interplay between religion, state, and historiography in the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the sixteenth century—a period marked by the Empire's transformation from a medieval state to an early modern power—was significantly shaped by the emergence of the Qizilbash challenge circa 1500. The comparable leadership claims of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties, coupled with the Safavids' capacity to attract Ottoman Muslims, explain the urgency and strictness of the measures taken by the Ottoman dynasty and its elites. This context also highlights why Ottoman intellectuals, devoted to upholding the political and cultural integrity of the state, made the Ottoman-Safavid conflict a central theme in their historical narratives. Within the diverse spectrum of Ottoman thought on Sunni and Qizilbash Islam and responses to the Safavid challenge, Celâlzâde Mustafa stands out as a crucial voice, whose distinguished and impactful tenure as chancellor earned him the title "the Great Chancellor." His works offer valuable insights into these complex dynamics and are essential for understanding the full picture of Ottoman responses to the period's religious and political challenges. This article, through an in-depth analysis of *Tabakat* and *Selimname*, presents Celâlzâde as an exemplar of the Ottoman elite and explores (i) his interpretation of Sunni Muslim identity, (ii) his portrayal of

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** Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, İktisat Bölümü, İktisat Tarihi Anabilim Dalı, E-posta: huseyinonganarslan@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-5442-5301.

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Qizilbash Muslims, and (iii) his strategies for reinforcing Ottoman legitimacy against the Qizilbash Safavid threat.
Keywords: History, Ottoman Empire, Historiography, Celâlzâde Mustafa, *Tabakat*, *Selimname*, Ottoman Sunnism, Qizilbash, Ottoman-Safavid Rivalry, Khalwatiyya, Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu.

Celâlzâde Mustafa'nın Tarih Eserlerinde İmparatorluk, Sünni İslam ve Kızılbaş İslam

Öz

1500 yılı civarında ortaya çıkan Kızılbaş tehdidi, bir Ortaçağ devletinden erken modern bir imparatorluğa evrilmekte olan Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki din, devlet ve tarih yazımı arasındaki kompleks etkileşimi önemli ölçüde şekillendirmiştir. Bu yükselen Kızılbaş Safevi hanedanı ile Osmanlı hanedanının liderlik iddialarının benzerliği ve Müslüman Osmanlı tebaasını hitap edebilme kabiliyetleri, Osmanlı hanedanı ve elitleri tarafından alınan aceleci ve sert önlemleri açıklar mahiyettedir. Bu bağlam, Osmanlı siyasi ve kültürel bütünlüğünü korumaya kendilerini adamış Osmanlı entelektüellerinin tarih yazımında Osmanlı-Safevi mücadelesini merkezi bir tema haline getirmelerinin nedenini de vurgulamaktadır. Sünni ve Kızılbaş İslam anlayışları ve Safevi meydan okumasına verilen tepkiler üzerine oluşan Osmanlı düşüncesinin geniş yelpazesinde, uzun ve başarılı nişancılık görevi ile "Koca Nişancı" ünvanını kazanmış Celâlzâde Mustafa önemli bir ses olarak öne çıkar ve dönemin dini ve siyasi meydan okumalarına Osmanlı tepkisini tam anlamıyla kavramak için hayati önem taşır. Bu makale, *Tabakat* ve *Selimname* eserlerinin derinlemesine analiziyle Celâlzâde'yi Osmanlı elitinin örnek bir temsilcisi olarak sunmakta ve (i) Sünni Müslüman kimliğine dair yorumunu, (ii) Kızılbaş Müslümanlara bakışını ve (iii) Kızılbaş Safevi tehdidine karşı Osmanlı meşruiyetini güçlendirme stratejilerini incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Tarih Yazımı, Celâlzâde Mustafa, *Tabakat*, *Selimname*, Osmanlı Sünniliği, Kızılbaşlık, Osmanlı-Safevi Rekabeti, Halvetilik, Şeyh Gümüşlüoğlu.

Introduction

A young secretary of the imperial council (*divan katibi*) was summoned to appear before Sultan Selim during the final year of his reign (1512–1520).[1] Selim was furious over intelligence regarding the sudden reappearance of his late brother Prince Ahmed's son, Prince Murad, in the Amasya region. According to reports, Prince Murad had met with local notables in Amasya to prepare for a potential revolt against Selim. The sultan's response was swift and brutal, in keeping with his reputation: "Kill all the notables he met with." Though harsh, Selim's order was not without reason.[2] Prince Ahmed had governed Amasya for twenty-two years before being eliminated by Selim during the 1513 succession wars. Thus, the prince was well known to the region's notables. Moreover, Prince Murad had previously joined the Qizilbash during the Nur Ali rebellion and likely sought refuge in Shah Ismail's Iran around 1512.[3] Given the available information, Selim saw the crisis as imminent: a surviving prince was preparing a revolt, supported by both the Ottoman and Safavid Qizilbash, along with the notables of Amasya. Among these notables was Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu Mehmed, a prominent leader of the Halvetî Sufi order, who was accused of meeting with the aspirant prince.[4]

This would prove a fateful day for the young secretary. Summoned before the sultan due to his knowledge of the sheikh, he was asked to testify regarding Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu's loyalties. Despite the sultan's fury, the young secretary defended the sheikh, stating, "I know him as a noble man who is the essence of the repository of sainthood and the pure gold of asceticism."[5] This young man, in his late twenties at the time, was none other than Celâlzâde Mustafa, who would later be known as the *Koca Nişancı*. This anecdote offers a glimpse into the socio-political environment of the Ottoman Empire that shaped his early career, spanning from the early to mid-sixteenth century in the Ottoman Palace: the Qizilbash uprisings, rebellious notables in princely governorates, deep distrust of various Sufi orders, the multifaceted Safavid challenge with its ideological, cultural, and military dimensions, and Selim's persistent concerns regarding the legitimacy of his rule.

1 While the exact date of the incident remains uncertain, the dates surrounding the meeting are 5 Rabi-ul-Awwal 925 (March 7, 1519) and 22 Shaban 926 (August 7, 1520), see Celâlzâde Mustafa, *Târîḫ-i Sulṭân Selîm*, ms. British Museum Add. 7848, 213a, 217a. This edition of *Târîḫ-i Sulṭân Selîm* (hereafter referred to as *Selimname*) is used throughout the article.

2 *Selimname*, 215b–216a.

3 Çağatay Uluçay, "Yavuz Sultan Selim Nasıl Padişah Oldu? (II)," *Tarih Dergisi / Turkish Journal of History* 7, no. 10 (1955), 127–131; Selahattin Tansel, *Yavuz Sultan Selim* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969), 99–100.

4 *Selimname*, 216b.

5 Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l Ahbar, Dördüncü Rükn* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2009), 256a. For a detailed view of the incident, see ibid., 255b–256b.

This article introduces Celâlzâde Mustafa as an exemplar of the Ottoman elite, presenting a threefold analysis: (i) his interpretation of Sunni Muslim identity and its representations, (ii) his portrayal of Qizilbash Muslims, and (iii) his strategies to bolster Ottoman legitimacy against the Qizilbash Safavid challenge. To achieve this, I will utilize Celâlzâde's historical works, *Ṭabaḳâtu'l-Memâlik ve Derecâtu'l-Mesâlik* (The Echelons of the Dominions and the Hierarchies of Professional Paths, hereafter *Tabakat*) and *Selimname* (History of Selim).[6] These works not only documented the political events of his era but also contributed to shaping the Sunni identity of the empire and formulating its response to the Qizilbash, whose ideological and existential challenges threatened Ottoman legitimacy. By delving into Celâlzâde's writings, this study investigates his ties with the Halvetî Sufi order, his vision of Sunni Islam, his stance on Qizilbash beliefs, and his endeavors to uphold the established Ottoman order. In doing so, it highlights how religious, political, and historical narratives were intertwined to support imperial policies and delineate the contours of Ottoman identity in the early modern period.

Historical Context, Historiography, and Religion in Celâlzâde's World

Celâlzâde was probably born in the 1490s into a military-administrative class (ʾaskerî) family from the central-western Black Sea region, possibly originating from Tosya or Amasya.[7] The era that shaped Celâlzâde's upbringing was defined

6 Throughout the article, the following version of *Tabakat* is cited: Celâlzâde Mustafa, *Geschichte Sultan Süleymān Ḳānūnīs von 1520 Bis 1557, Oder, Ṭabaḳat ül-Memālik ve Derecāt ül-Mesālik*, ed. Petra Kappert (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981).

7 Celâlzâde's father, Celâleddin, held the position of judge (kadı). Given Celâleddin's financial and social status, which afforded him the means to receive an education in Istanbul, Kaya Şahin proposes that it is likely Celâleddin's father was also part of the ʾaskerî class, see Kaya Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth Century Ottoman World* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15–19. Most sources indicate that Celâleddin was from Tosya, although some suggest Amasya as his place of origin. Uzunçarşılı points out that Ibn al-Hanbali (d. 1563), the 16th-century mufti of Aleppo, mentions in *Durr al-Ḥabab fi Târîkh A'yân Ḥalab* (The Pearls of the Beloved in the History of the Notables of Aleppo) that Celâleddin, the father of the Celâlzâde brothers, hailed from a region called "Celed" near Amasya, see İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "XVI. Asır Ortalarında Yaşamış Olan İki Büyük Şahsiyet: Celâlzâde Mustafa ve Salih Çelebiler," *Belleten* 22, no. 87 (1958), 391; Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Ḥanbalī, *Durr Al-Habab Fi Tarikh A'yan Halab*, ed. Maḥmūd Ḥamd al-Fāḵūrī and Yaḥyā Zakariyyā' 'Abbāra (Dimashq: Wazarat al-Thaqāfah, 1972), 700–701. Regardless, as Mehmet Yilmaz rightly notes, it is reasonable to conclude that Celâlzâde's family maintained connections to Amasya, a significant cultural hub of the period, see Mehmet Şakir Yılmaz, "Koca Nişanci of Kanuni: Celalzade Mustafa Çelebi, Bureaucracy and Kanun in the Reign of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566)" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ankara, Bilkent University, 2006), 26. Moreover, the anecdote about the Halvetî Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu, briefly mentioned in the introduction, also reinforces the notion of

by the transformative reforms of Mehmed II (second r. 1451–1481), whose policies reshaped nearly every aspect of the early Ottoman state's structure.[8] Building on the work of Mehmed I (r. 1413–1421) and Murad II (r. 1421–1444, 1446–1451), Mehmed II inherited a polity that had nearly healed from the destructive impacts of Timur's invasion of 1402.[9] The prestige gained from the 1453 conquest of Constantinople gave Mehmed II the authority to implement extensive reforms that shifted power in favor of the Ottoman dynasty and away from its "contractors."[10] While these changes resulted in a stronger, more militarily capable ruler, they also caused alienation among various social groups.[11]

Mehmed II's reforms also reached into the religious sphere, notably through the appropriation of endowments, which disrupted the Muslim notables, Ulama, and Sufis.[12] This economic move was a deliberate attempt to curb the power and influence of these groups, aligning with his broader centralization agenda.[13] Other examples further illustrate his efforts to consolidate control over religious authorities. For example, as Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu points out, in the construction of the Sultan's complexes bearing his name, Mehmed II's decision to exclude the dervish lodges traditionally built alongside mosques and to construct only a madrasa reflects his preference for the Ulema, who were under his direct authority,

Celâlzâde's familial ties to Amasya through his father, see Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l Ahbar, Dördüncü Rükn*, 255b–256b.

8 For a concise history of the early Ottoman state, see Rudi Paul Lindner, "Anatolia, 1300–1451," in *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume I, Byzantium to Turkey, 1071–1453*, ed. Kate Fleet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102–137.

9 To learn more about the devastation Timur inflicted on Ottoman lands and its consequences, see Dimitris Kastritsis, *The Sons of Bayezid: The Sons of Bayezid Empire Building and Representation in the Ottoman Civil War of 1402-13* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007); For an overview of significant developments during this time, see Nikolay Antov, *The Ottoman "Wild West": The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 16–18; For insights into the reigns of Mehmed I and Murad II, see Feridun M. Emecen, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Kuruluş ve Yükseliş Tarihi (1300-1600)*, 2nd ed. (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2016), 95–130.

10 For an in-depth but succinct overview of Mehmed II's reforms, see Halil İnalcık, "Mehmed II," in *MEB İslam Ansiklopedisi*, ed. İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Heyeti (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1978).

11 For Mehmed II's marginalization of some older Anatolian and Muslim figures, see Heath W. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 115–130; For the loss of "hereditary" privileges by influential families, see Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151–154.

12 Two fifteenth century historians made the extend of the discontent these reforms created obvious, see Tursun Bey, *Târîh-i Ebü'l-Feth*, ed. Mertol Tulum, vol. I, II vols. (İstanbul: Ketebe, 2020), 19; Âşıkpaşazâde, *Menâkıb-ı Âl-i Osman*, ed. Necdet Öztürk (İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2013), 298–299.

13 Oktay Özel, "Limits of the Almighty: Mehmed II's 'Land Reform' Revisited," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 42, no. 2 (January 1, 1999), 228.

over the more autonomous dervishes. [14]His suspicion of Şeyh Alâeddin el-Halvetî, which led to the sheikh's banishment from Istanbul, also fits within this pattern of centralization.[15] Moreover, Mehmed II's 1473 order to encourage daily prayers and penalize those who did not pray highlights his more disciplinary approach toward religious practices among his subjects.[16]

Mehmed II's efforts signified a marked change in the Ottoman stance toward religious affairs. Before his reign, the Ottoman approach could be characterized by its neutrality, with the dynasty acting as a mediator among different religious expressions within Islam. Although the dynasty adhered to Sunni Islam and judges conducted their duties in line with Sunni jurisprudence, particularly the Hanafi school, there was no deliberate political agenda to impose a uniform faith on elites or subjects. As discussed, Mehmed II's policies signaled a shift toward viewing religious matters as politically significant. The Ottoman role as a balancing force among diverse religious expressions, along with pragmatic partnerships for maintaining power, began to diminish under Mehmed II's centralization efforts.

Bāyezīd II's reign, particularly from its early years to 1500, can be characterized by efforts to balance the sweeping reforms introduced by Mehmed II. These efforts aimed to regain the support of alienated groups, notably Sufis and established Ottoman notables, while preserving the benefits those changes had secured for the Sultan and the Ottoman military machine. During this period of rapprochement between the Sultan and the discontented elements of Ottoman society, a significant challenge emerged: the rise of the Qizilbash Safavids, an alternative political force capable of appealing to the Ottoman masses, from the East around 1500. Although Bāyezīd II swiftly took measures to address this new threat, their impact was weakened by Prince Selim's rebellion, which began in 1510 and ended in April 1512 with Selim's successful takeover of the throne, as well as the ensuing struggle among the princes, resolved only in April 1513.

The Qizilbash rose with their "alternative" understanding of Islam and their challenged the Ottomans for the leadership of the Muslim community circa 1500 was the beginning of the abondonment of the balancing agent role of the Ottoman dynasty among the different religiosities of Islam. Both the Ottomans and Safavids shared an almost identical Turco-Persian cultural heritage, with cultural affinities so

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[14] Çiğdem Kafesçioğlu, *Constantinopolis/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital.* (Louisville: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 75–77.

[15] Taşköprizâde Ahmed Efendi, *Eş-Şakâ'iku'n-Nu'Mâniyye Fî Ulemâi'd-Devleti'l-Osmâniyye*, ed. Muhammet Hekimoğlu (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2019), 424–426.

[16] Necati Lugal and Adnan Erzi, *Fatih Devrine Ait Münşeât Mecmuası* (İstanbul: İstanbul Matbaası, 1956), 94–95. For a brief analysis of this order and a comparison with Süleyman's later directive for the same purpose, see Aydoğan Demir, "Kanunî Sultan Süleyman'ın Terk-i Salât Edenlerle İlgili Fermanı," *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 2, no. 1 (1984): 46–53.

strong that distinct boundaries were virtually non-existent, enabling the newly established Qizilbash Safavids to mount a formidable challenge to Ottoman hegemony across various fronts. The leadership claims of the two dynasties were similar to the extent that either could effortlessly legitimize their rule over the same populations in Iran, Anatolia, and the Balkans. This similarity explains both why the Ottoman dynasty and its bureaucrats took extremely strict and hasty measures against the rise of the Qizilbash and why the intellectuals who identified themselves with the Ottoman political entity and were committed to preserving it devoted a central place in their historical writings to the Ottoman-Safavid struggle.

The rise of the Qizilbash, with their "alternative" understanding of Islam, challenged the Ottoman claim to leadership in the Muslim world around 1500 and marked the beginning of a significant shift. This period saw the Ottomans moving from their historical role as mediators among various Islamic expressions toward a more defined alignment with "madrasa-trained" Sunni Islam. Even though the attitude toward different manifestations of Islam changed dramatically, the period from the turn of the sixteenth century to its mid-point can be seen as a transitional phase for this shift. The Ottomans and the newly established Qizilbash Safavids shared an intertwined Turco-Persian cultural heritage, with cultural affinities so strong that distinct boundaries were nearly indistinguishable. This shared heritage enabled the Safavids to pose a significant challenge to Ottoman hegemony across multiple fronts. The leadership claims of both dynasties were so similar that either could convincingly assert their legitimacy over the same regions in Iran, Anatolia, and the Balkans. This resemblance accounts for the Ottomans' swift and severe counteractions against the Qizilbash and highlights why Ottoman intellectuals, who aligned with and sought to defend the state, placed a central focus on the Ottoman-Safavid conflict in their historical narratives.

The newly appointed elite, serving in positions created by the empire's expansion, anchored their identity to the state, thus forming a cultural bulwark to protect the empire's ideological and cultural legitimacy. They embraced the task of strengthening this front by crafting a new imperial identity that drew on cultural and religious justifications. Cornell H. Fleischer's depiction of these elites as a class-conscious group, coupled with his argument that their engagement in historiography stemmed from political motivations, supports this view.[17] Similarly, Piterberg underscored this self-imposed duty in his exploration of Ottoman historiography by referencing Fleischer's point that Mustafa Âlî described the chancellor as the "mufti of kanun," and concludes that "in the broadest sense of kanun, this meant that the bureaucrat-intellectuals saw themselves as the guardians of everything that defined the Ottoman state, from its operational norms to its

17 Cornell H. Fleischer, "Between the Lines: Realities of Scribal Life in the Sixteenth Century," in *Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of Professor V. L. Ménage*, ed. Colin Heywood and Colin Imber (Istanbul: ISIS Press, 1994), 58–59.

etiquette."[18] Given that the Ottoman palace did not have an official historian until the late seventeenth century, the extent of the responsibility assumed by this new class through their historical works becomes more apparent.[19] During the first half of the sixteenth century, the principal challenge to the Ottoman order was posed by the Qizilbash, making it natural that the predominant theme in most Ottoman historical accounts from Selim's reign to 1559, when Süleyman's son, Prince Bāyezīd, sought refuge with the Safavids, centered on this Qizilbash threat.

Celâlzâde, whose distinguished and successful tenure as chancellor earned him the title "the Great Chancellor," was a key figure among the Ottoman elite, embodying their collective power and perspective. However, this does not imply that Celâlzâde alone represented the Ottoman elite's understanding of Sunni Islam, Qizilbash Islam, and the Safavid challenge.[20] Rather, he was one distinct voice within the wide-ranging spectrum of Ottoman Sunni Islam—a significant one that contributes to a fuller understanding of this vital landscape. With his historical works, *Tabakat* and *Selimname*, Celâlzâde offers valuable insights into what the Ottoman elite stood for and how they viewed the world around them.

Tabakat addresses the general yet detailed history of Süleyman's reign, while *Selimname* focuses on the brief but crucial years of the Ottoman Empire under Selim's rule. Although *Tabakat* appears to be an unfinished work, the final touches on both books seem to have been completed between 1557 and 1565, during Celâlzâde's retirement. *Tabakat* covers the period from the final years of Selim's reign (1512–1520) to the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque (1555) during Süleyman's reign (1520–1566). Celâlzâde states that his purpose in writing *Tabakat*

18 Gabriel Piterberg, *An Ottoman Tragedy: History and Historiography at Play* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 48.

19 Although the *Shahnama* writers (şehnâmeci) of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may appear as exceptions to broader historiographical trends, their limited influence on Ottoman historiography justifies treating this experiment as a marginal case. Despite their significance, as Fetvacı explains, the short-lived nature of the post and its limited impact meant that *Shahnama* writers, such as Lokman and Talikizâde, were continuously in search of patrons, thus catering to a broader Ottoman elite audience. Thus, I consider the post of "official court chronicler" debatable, see Emine Fetvacı, "The Office of Ottoman Court Historian," in *Studies on Istanbul and Beyond: The Freely Papers*, ed. Robert G Ousterhout, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 7–21; Also refer to Christine Woodhead, "An Experiment in Offical Historiography: The Post of Şehnameci in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1555-1605," *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes* 75 (1983): 157–182.

20 For different interpretations of Sunni Islam, particularly in the universal histories written by the Ottomans, see Vefa Erginbaş, "The Appropriation of Islamic History and Ahl Albaytism in Ottoman Historical Writing, 1300-1650" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbus, Ohio State University, 2013); For an examination of Ottoman Sunni Islam as a broad spectrum and the varied perceptions of Sunni Islam among sixteenth-century Ottoman historians, see Hüseyin Ongan Arslan, "Varieties of Sectarian Consciousness among the Ottoman Elite: Sunni and Shiite Identities in Ottoman Historiography, 1450s–1580s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University, 2020).

was to extol Süleyman, and for this reason, the work is considered part of the *Süleymannâme* corpus in sixteenth-century historiography. In narrating the campaigns during Süleyman's reign, while providing information about the relevant territories, subjects, and historical events, Celâlzâde sought to meet the need for a general history of Süleyman's era. He deemed such a history necessary, asserting that those who had previously undertaken similar efforts lacked understanding of the true nature of governance due to their inexperience with state affairs.

Selimname was compiled by Celâlzâde in his seventies (circa the 1560s), following his *Tabakat*.[21] In the introduction of this work, Celâlzâde explains that he felt the need to write *Selimname* because he could not cover Selim's reign in *Tabakat*, and the existing histories of Selim's period presented a distorted narrative. According to Celâlzâde, those who had previously written about Selim's era lacked the necessary knowledge to truly understand the period, as they were unfamiliar with how the state functioned and lacked access to the essential documents. As a result, their accounts were based merely on hearsay. In contrast, Celâlzâde had served in high-level bureaucratic roles for nearly half a century, allowing him to access firsthand sources and narratives regarding the period. Additionally, Celâlzâde delves into the importance of *kanun* (the body of customary and dynastic law) in such detail that it becomes evident he is, in fact, criticizing the contemporary state of the empire and the bureaucrats responsible for its administration.[22] In the subsequent pages, he signals his strong pro-Selim stance by rejecting outright the accusations that Selim I had rebelled against his father, Bâyezîd II, and usurped the throne. His support for Selim becomes even more apparent as he recounts the events surrounding the succession war, the Şah Kulu revolt, and Selim's rival, his brother Prince Ahmed, as well as Ahmed's son, Prince Murad.[23]

Celâlzâde both opened a religious-cultural front against the Qizilbash, the strongest challenge to the Ottoman order, and worked to define and strengthen Ottoman Sunnism through his historical works which was the popular genre among the elite of the time. In both works, it is possible to observe the effort to strengthen the state's current order and legitimacy, to promote its own Sunnism as the "right path," and to establish a religious and political front against the Qizilbash.

21 *Selimname*, 22b.

22 *Selimname*, 23b.

23 *Selimname*, 64b–75b.

Between His Sheikh and His Sultan: Celâlzâde Mustafa's Ties to the Halvetî Order

The anecdote in the introduction involving Celâlzâde and Selim I's questions about Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu serves to illustrate multiple facets of the period. It reveals Selim I's heightened vigilance toward various Sufi networks amid the Qizilbash threat and provides insight into the intricate balance required to sustain the loyalties of the elites while navigating their allegiance to respected religious figures. To better understand the historical context and key points of this anecdote, let us delve further.

When Sultan Selim summoned a divan katibi to question about Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu, the grand vizier was Piri Mehmed Pasha, whose father, Çelebi Halife (also known as Cemâl-i Halvetî, d. 1494), was a prominent Halvetî sheikh of Amasya.[24] Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the grand vizier was familiar with Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu due to their shared geographical and spiritual backgrounds. Yet, despite this connection, Selim sought another witness to testify about the sheikh. Why was this necessary? First, in Selim's eyes, the grand vizier's testimony was likely deemed unreliable because of his affiliation with the Halvetî order and his Amasya roots. Second, Selim harbored a deep mistrust of the various Sufi orders, even though they maintained connections with influential elites in the palace and sought to avoid suspicion. For instance, during Selim's reign, the Halvetî order removed the names of the Shi'a Imams from their spiritual chain (*silsile*) in response to the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry.[25] Third, as Yılmaz convincingly argues, the fact that Celâlzâde Mustafa was summoned as a witness knowledgeable about the situation (*ehl-i vuḳûf*) suggests that he had some connections with the notables of Amasya and the Halvetî order.[26] Understanding these religious and geographical ties will help us better appreciate Celâlzâde's world and facilitate the analysis of his written works.

[24] Koca Mustafa Pasha (d. 1512), a grand vizier of Bâyezîd II, became a disciple of Çelebi Halife during Bâyezîd II's governorship in Amasya. Çelebi Halife was also a staunch supporter of Bâyezîd II during his conflict with Cem Sultan and was later invited to Istanbul by Bâyezîd. The Cemâlî family, known for their affiliation with the Halvetî order, played a crucial role during this period. For more on Çelebi Halife, see Tayşi, Mehmet Serhan. "Cemâl-i Halvetî." In *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 7:302–303, 1993. For information on the Cemâlî family's influence during the reigns of Bâyezîd II, Selim I, and Süleyman, see: Küçükdağ, Yusuf. *II. Bâyezîd, Yavuz ve Kanuni Devirlerinde Cemali Ailesi*. Istanbul: Aksarayi Vakfı, 1995, 10–81.

[25] F. de Jong, "Khalwatiyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, April 24, 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0489. For further reading on the Ottomanization of the Halvetî order during Bâyezîd II's reign, see Hasan Karataş, "The Ottomanization of the Halveti Sufi Order: A Political Story Revisited," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 71–89.

[26] Yılmaz, "Koca Nişanci of Kanuni," 38; İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, "XVI. Asır Ortalarında Yaşamış Olan İki Büyük Şahsiyet: Celâlzâde Mustafa ve Salih Çelebiler," *Belleten* 22, no. 87 (1958), 392–393.

The mosque commissioned by Celâlzâde Mustafa does not reveal much about his affiliation with any specific Sufi order, but Ottoman sources provide useful details that allow us to understand his religious inclination to a certain extent. According to Nevʿîzâde Atâî (d. 1635), Sheikh Ahmed, a caliph of the renowned Halvetî-Sünbülîye Sheikh Merkez Efendi (d. 1556?), used to lead congregational Friday prayers in this mosque.[27] Atâî also mentions that Celâlzâde had commissioned a Halvetî Sufi lodge (*zâviye*) near the mosque.[28] Additionally, there is a letter that strengthens Celâlzâde's connection with the Halvetî order. In this letter, written to a judge in Edirne, Celâlzâde expresses his support for one of the disciples of the Halvetî-Gülşenîye Sheikh İbrâhîm-i Gülşenî (d. 1534).[29] Furthermore, it is known that Celâlzâde's main patron in the palace, the grand vizier Piri Pasha, was one of the leading supporters of the Halvetî order in the empire. In light of this and recalling the nature of Celâlzâde's testimony regarding the Halvetî Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu, we can conclude that Celâlzâde likely had a close relationship with the Halvetî order even before his entry into the Ottoman palace.

Celâlzâde's account of Selim I's death, found in his work *Selimname*, sheds light on his position between his loyalty to the sheikh and his duty to the sultan. His account, directly related to the first anecdote about the Halvetî Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu, also clarifies Celâlzâde's religious inclinations. In *Selimname*, Celâlzâde attributes Selim's death to Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu's curse, implying that Selim died as a result of his unjust treatment of the sheikh. In this context, Celâlzâde first recounts the oppression inflicted upon the people of Amasya and then introduces Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu as a sheikh "whose prayers are answered by God" (*müstecâbu'd-da've*).[30] According to Celâlzâde, slander and defamation led to the wrongful arrest of Gümüşlüoğlu, and he was sent to Istanbul by the Ottoman authorities. The earlier anecdote, regarding the conversation between Selim I and Celâlzâde about the sheikh, likely occurred while the sheikh was imprisoned, awaiting judgment.[31] Mustafa Âlî's (d. 1600) account, which is based on a personal conversation with Celâlzâde, provides more detail: when Celâlzâde vouched for Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu, Selim reassured him and even instructed him to comfort the sheikh regarding the upcoming judgment. However, by the time Celâlzâde visited the sheikh, it was too late—Sheikh Gümüşlüoğlu had already bitterly complained to God about the injustices he faced and had prayed for Selim's destruction (*helâk*). Mustafa Âlî's account is more explicit and intriguing as it also includes the sheikh's vision, where God punished Selim through the hand of Ali, the fourth caliph of

27 Nevʿîzâde Atâî, *Hadâ'iku'l-Hakâ'ik Fî Tekmile-ti'ş-Şakâ'ik*, ed. Suat Donuk (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu, 2017), 684–685.

28 Nevʿîzâde Atâî, 490.

29 Yılmaz, "Koca Nişanci of Kanuni," 100.

30 *Selimname*, 216b.

31 Mustafa Âlî, *Künhü'l Ahbar, Dördüncü Rükn*, 255b–256b.

Sunni Islam and the first Imam of the Shi'a.[32] Celâlzâde, likely aware of the political implications of suggesting that Selim was punished by Ali, omits this "detail" in his account and presents the story more ambiguously by paraphrasing the sheikh's words: "A vision was shown to me from the invisible world, in which the cruelties on the face of the earth were removed and the traces of sedition and malice became nonexistent" (*ṭaraf-u gaybdan bana bir ṣuret gösterdiler, 'âlemden mâdde-i ẓulm ve ẓalâm mürtefi', cihândan âsâr-ı fitne u fesâd ma'dûm ve mündefi' oldı*).[33] Celâlzâde continues, noting that the oppressors suffered the manifestation of the glorified fury of God (*maẓhar-ı ḳahr-ı sübḥânî vâḳi' oldı*).[34] Although Celâlzâde does not narrate the event as clearly as Mustafa Âlî, he strongly implies that Selim I died due to his mistreatment of the Halvetî sheikh. What makes this even more remarkable is that Celâlzâde, who repeatedly praises Selim I as the champion of the right path (Sunni Islam) and the sole protector of Muslims throughout *Selimname*, implies that the cruelty against a Halvetî sheikh could not be excused, even when it was perpetrated by the caliph of the Muslims. Celâlzâde's stance not only reinforces his connection to the Halvetî order once again, but this time more strongly, but also delineates the limits of his loyalty to the Sultan and highlights the strength of the brotherhood within the Sufi order.

This narrative also invites us to reflect on how the Ottoman elites balanced their loyalty to the sultan with their personal and religious commitments. As Kaya Şahin points out, *Selimname* could be seen as "an act of gratitude," since Selim had supported Celâlzâde from his early years in the palace until the sultan's death.[35] Indeed, *Selimname* is a highly pro-Selim account of the events that took place during the reigns of Bâyezîd II and Selim, aiming to legitimize Selim's rule despite the forceful nature of his accession. Given this context, one might expect Selim's death to be portrayed in a noble light at the end of the book. However, Celâlzâde does the opposite, implying that Selim faced divine wrath due to his injustice. The reason for this divine wrath was the curse of a relatively unknown Halvetî sheikh from Amasya. In this case, when the sultan and the sheikh were at odds, Celâlzâde sided with the sheikh. It is important to note, however, that Celâlzâde wrote this account nearly forty years after Selim's death, during his elderly years. Therefore, while Celâlzâde maintained loyalty to both Selim I and the Halvetî order, it is possible that over time, his commitment to the Halvetî order grew stronger while his loyalty to Selim waned.

32 Mustafa Âlî, 256b.

33 *Selimname*, 216b.

34 *Selimname*, 217a.

35 Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth Century Ottoman World*, 184.

Celâlzâde's Understanding of Sunni Islam

Celâlzâde's connection to the Halvetî Sufi order already points to his adherence to Sunni Islam, and the details of what kind of Sunni belief he followed can be understood through *Tabakat* and especially from the long religious discourse at the beginning of *Selimname*.

In *Tabakat*, Celâlzâde begins with a very traditional Sunni praise, extolling God, the Prophet, the four "rightly guided" caliphs, the Prophet's grandsons Hasan and Husayn, and the Ten Promised Companions of Paradise.[36] Each figure is praised in just a few sentences, followed by a couplet. Although the praise spans only a few folios, it is sufficient to reflect Celâlzâde's Sunni identity.[37] The introduction of *Selimname* opens with an even more exuberant praise for God, the Prophet, and the four Sunni "Rightly Guided" Caliphs, and Celâlzâde extends it to Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet and wife of Ali, along with their sons, Hasan and Husayn.[38] The eulogy also concludes with mentions of the Ten Promised Ones (*ʾaşere-i mübeşşere*) and the Prophet's distinguished companions (*aṣḥâb-i guzîn*).[39] While Celâlzâde's inclusion of the *Ahl al-Bayt* may not be particularly surprising in Sunni tradition of the time, it is important to recognize that given the period in which he wrote, this choice stands as a deliberate one.

What makes Celâlzâde's long religious introduction even more intriguing is his selection of hadiths to praise the first four caliphs, pushing the boundaries of what was typically accepted in mainstream Sunni Islam at the time.

At the beginning of the eulogy for Abu Bakr, Celâlzâde chooses to narrate a hadith claiming that the Prophet and Abu Bakr were created from the same soil, emphasizing that there could be no greater virtue than this.[40] Another hadith states that on the Day of Judgment, three golden thrones (*kürsî*) will be placed—one for the Prophet, one for Abraham, and one for Abu Bakr—implying that Abu Bakr's status is on par with the two prophets.[41] The third hadith suggests that there are no heavenly ranks for the Prophet that do not also belong to Abu Bakr, reinforcing the idea of their equal standing.[42] The section concludes with a hadith in which God commands that Abu Bakr, his followers (*muḥibbân*), and those who follow them (*muḥibbân-ı muḥibbân*) be admitted to heaven. Celâlzâde supports this with an intriguing anecdote about a Jew who, out of his love for Abu Bakr, sought only to gaze upon him. According to the hadith, God sent the angel Gabriel to inform the

36 *Tabakat*, 3b–8a.
37 *Tabakat*, 3b–5b.
38 *Selimname*, 1a–19b.
39 *Selimname*, 19b–20b.
40 *Selimname*, 17b.
41 Ibid.
42 *Selimname*, 18a.

Prophet that, because of this love, the Jew's name was erased from the lists of hell and inscribed in those of heaven.[43]

Celâlzâde begins his eulogy of Umar with a hadith stating, "If there were to be a Prophet after me, it would be Umar," signaling from the outset that, like Abu Bakr, Umar is portrayed as a prophetical figure.[44] The following hadith describes how Gabriel, overwhelmed by Umar's countless virtues, admits that he lacks the stamina to enumerate them. In another hadith, the Prophet says that he has two viziers in the heavens—Gabriel and Michael—and two on earth—Abu Bakr and Umar. In the account of the Prophet's night journey to Jerusalem and ascension through the heavens (*isrâ'* and *mi'râj*), the Prophet witnesses seventy thousand angels praying for the friends of Abu Bakr and Umar, followed by another seventy thousand angels cursing those who dislike them. There is little doubt that Celâlzâde, by using this hadith, is implicitly referring to the Qizilbash as the ones deserving of such curses. While Celâlzâde portrays Umar as a prophetical figure, he also emphasizes the hierarchy between Abu Bakr and Umar. For instance, according to Celâlzâde, Umar himself acknowledged that he was merely a single virtue among the many virtues of Abu Bakr. He is also quoted as saying, "I wish I were but a single chest hair of Abu Bakr."

Compared to the praises of Abu Bakr and Umar, the eulogy for Uthman, which begins with a hadith stating that "his gentleness and solemnity remind me of the Prophet Abraham," is relatively modest.[45] After mentioning another hadith that compares Uthman's heavenly light (*nûr*) to that of the sun, Celâlzâde concludes this brief section with an anecdote: the Prophet refrained from performing the funeral prayer for someone who harbored ill feelings towards Uthman.[46] Just as in the case of Umar, it is clear that the reference to those who dislike Uthman is directed at the Qizilbash. Furthermore, the Prophet's refusal to perform the funeral prayer for someone due to their animosity toward Uthman suggests that such a person is no longer considered part of the Muslim community. Following this logic, the exclusion of the Qizilbash from the Muslim community, solely for their dislike of Uthman, and the refusal to perform funeral prayers for them, are conclusions drawn from this hadith. What makes the Uthman section particularly interesting is that despite Celâlzâde's anti-Qizilbash rhetoric, the section is kept rather brief. Given the traditionally acknowledged religious rank of Uthman compared to Abu Bakr and Umar, this is not entirely surprising. However, what stands out is that the praise of the fourth caliph, Ali, is as lengthy and grand

43 *Selimname*, 18a.
44 *Selimname*, 18b.
45 *Selimname*, 18b–19a.
46 *Selimname*, 19a.

as the sections for Abu Bakr and Umar, despite Ali's lower spiritual rank in the Sunni tradition.

The eulogy of Ali begins with a reference to the *Tafsir-i Sûrâbâdî*, where it is stated that there are ten verses in the Qur'an about Ali.[47] After informing the reader that the selected reports about Ali are, in fact, limitless, Celâlzâde lists several highly praiseworthy hadiths. The first compares Ali's rights over the Muslims to the rights of parents over their children. The second hadith elevates this praise further, with the Prophet stating, "I am the lord of the Arabs (*seyyidi'l-Arab*), and Ali is the lord of humankind (*seyyid-i veled-i Âdem*)." Celâlzâde emphasizes the importance of loving Ali, stating that such love purifies Muslims of their sins "just as fire cleans out forests" (*nitekîm nâr ḥaṭabı ekl ider*). He also insists that loving Ali is not enough—this love must be openly proclaimed. Celâlzâde cleverly concludes this section by citing a report attributed to the eponymous founder of the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence, Abu Ḥanîfa. When asked what he thought of Ali, Abu Ḥanîfa replied: "What can be said about Ali? Most people became Muslim out of fear of Ali, whereas Ali became Muslim out of fear only of God."[48] Unlike the sections on the first three caliphs, the eulogy of Ali does not end with praise for him alone but continues with an intriguing anecdote about his wife, Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet. According to the story, narrated by Ishaq bin Meshad (?), when the people of heaven are enjoying its many blessings, a divine light will suddenly appear. Everyone will stop and say, "It must be time to see God." However, a voice from above will declare, "This is not the divine light of God, but the light that emanates from the smile of Fatimah, which in turn comes from the divine light of Ali."[49]

At the end of this section, where Celâlzâde praises the four caliphs of Sunni Islam and Fatimah, he includes a poem summarizing what he has said and why. In this short, eleven-couplet poem, he once again mentions the virtues of sending blessings and peace (*salât u selâm*) upon the Prophet's companions and family.[50]Likening the four caliphs to moons and the Prophet's companions to stars, in reference to the well-known hadith, "My companions are like stars; whichever of them you use as a guide, you will be rightly guided." He extols them as the pillars of Islam and the guides in the land of Sharia, before moving on to the praise of the Prophet's grandsons, Hasan and Husayn, born to Ali and Fatimah, his only surviving child.

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47 *Selimname*, 19a. *Tafsir-i Sûrâbâdî* refers to Abû Bakr 'Atîq ibn Muḥammad Sûrâbâdî's (d. 1100) commentary on the Qur'an.

48 *Selimname*, 19a–19b.

49 *Selimname*, 19b.

50 *Selimname*, 19b–20a.

In the section dedicated to Hasan and Husayn, Celâlzâde neither quotes a hadith directly nor recounts any historical anecdotes. Instead, he praises the Prophet's grandsons using titles and epithets derived from both prose and poetry.[51] He refers to the grandsons as the "two bright grandsons" (*sıbteyn-ı ezhereyn*), the "two divinely illuminated suns" (*şemseyn-i envereyn*), and the "light of the eyes of the ruler of both worlds" (*nûr-ı dîde-i sulṭân kevneyn*). He does not stop there, lauding Hasan as the "lord of the pious" (*sulṭânı'l-muttekîn*) and Husayn as the "lord of the martyrs of Karbala" (*şâh-ı şehîdân-ı Kerbala*). The section concludes with a nine-couplet poem extolling the legacy of Hasan and Husayn as the "lords of the youth and all Muslims in heaven." Despite all the praise given to Ali, Fatimah, Hasan, and Husayn, it is evident from the structure of this section that, unlike his contemporary Ramazanzâde, Celâlzâde does not count Hasan among the "rightly guided" caliphs.[52]

This long religious treatise by Celâlzâde ends with a mention of the Ten Promised Ones (*'aşere-i mübeşşere*) and the rest of the selected companions of the Prophet.

Ottoman-Safavid Qizilbash: Their Nature, Beliefs, and Divergence

The portrayal of the Qizilbash in Celâlzâde Mustafa's writings is emblematic of the broader anti-Qizilbash sentiment that pervaded sixteenth-century Ottoman historiography. Like other prominent figures such as İdrîs-i Bidlîsî, Kemalpaşazâde, and Lütfi Pasha, Celâlzâde used a range of derogatory terms to describe the Qizilbash, highlighting both the religious and political threat they posed to the Ottoman state.[53] In his works, Celâlzâde consistently characterizes the Qizilbash as impious, deceitful, and heretical, reflecting the entrenched hostility between the two rival empires. His narrative aligns with the broader effort by Ottoman elites to not only delegitimize the Safavid claim to religious authority but also to depict the Qizilbash as a fundamental threat to the established Sunni order. This section examines the key terms and stories Celâlzâde uses to describe the Qizilbash, focusing on the intersection of religious and political arguments that underpin his account.

The adjectives Celâlzâde uses for the Qizilbash, and his anti-Qizilbash prejudices mostly overlap with the works of the previous historians in the sixteenth

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51 *Selimname*, 20a–20b.

52 Ramazanzade Mehmed Çelebi, *Tarih-i Nişancı* (Istanbul: Tabhane-i Amire, 1862), 52–55; Hüseyin Ongan Arslan, "Varieties of Sectarian Consciousness among the Ottoman Elite: Sunni and Shiite Identities in Ottoman Historiography, 1450s–1580s" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University, 2020), 155–169.

53 Arslan, "Varieties of Sectarian Consciousness among the Ottoman Elite: Sunni and Shiite Identities in Ottoman Historiography, 1450s–1580s."

century Ottoman historiography, namely İdrîs-i Bidlîsî (d. 1520), Kemalpaşazâde (d. 1534), and Lutfi Pasha (d. 1563). The derogatory terms Celâlzâde deployed for describing the Qizilbash included but were not limited to: *fesâd-engîz* (mischief-maker); *fâsıḳ* (impious); *ehl-i tezvîr* (deceitful); *günâh-kâr* (sinner); *ḥiyel-bâz* (fraudulent); *şer-efrûz* (evil-doer); *muṣirr olmuş günâha* (addicted to sin); *żalâlet-me'lûf* (deviant).[54] Celâlzâde's stand on the issues related to the Qizilbash appear most obviously in the section of the Alqas Mirza affair. At the beginning of this section, Celâlzâde introduced the Qizilbash as "*meẕâhib-hirâşlar* (those who tear the sects), *fir'avn âdaşlar* (those named after Pharaoh), *bî-dînler* (unbelievers), *nâ-terâşlar* (uncultivated people), *mefâsid-endîşler* (those who think villainy), *küfr-fâşlar* (those who are well known for their blasphemies), *bed-kîşler* (impious), *dil-rîşler* (those who are wounded to the hearts), *evbâşlardır* (rabble)."[55]

Alqas Mirza, the brother of Safavid Shah Tahmasb, was defeated by him in 1547.[56] Seeking refuge with the Ottomans, he incited them to attack the Safavids. Although initially it seemed logical to the Ottomans to place Alqas Mirza on the Safavid throne, his actions soon eroded their support. Ultimately, Alqas Mirza surrendered to his brother Tahmasb in 1549. It appears that Celâlzâde never trusted Alqas from the start, as he consistently sprinkles anti-Qizilbash epithets before and after every mention of his name. He draws a parallel between Tahmasb and his brother Alqas and the Quranic story of Cain and Abel, suggesting that the two sons of Shah Ismail followed the disgraceful innovation (*bid'at-ı nâ-maḥmûd*) inherited from the brothers of Prophet Joseph.[57] As Şahin aptly summarizes, Celâlzâde viewed Alqas as "a manipulative individual who sought refuge with the Ottomans for his own personal gain," and thus someone who "deserved to be wiped off the face of the earth."[58] Although Celâlzâde reluctantly acknowledges the failure of the Ottomans' attempt to install Alqas on the Safavid throne, he does not

54 *Tabakat*, 384b, 399–400a. Derogatory terms used to describe the Qizilbash can be found throughout Celâlzâde's work.

55 *Tabakat*, 381a. Demirtaş's edition of this passage reads: "*meẕâhib-hirâşlar, âyîn-i İslâm'a mu'ârizlar, ṭarîḳa-ı ehl-i sünnet ve cemâ'ate muhâlifler, bida' u ilḥâd ile râfż u fesâda sâlikler olub,*" (the enemies of the religion, antagonists of the Islamic rituals, opponents of Sunni Islam, those who carry on the path of innovation and deviance, heresy, and divisions within the Muslim community), see Funda Demirtaş, "Celâlzade Mustafa Çelebi, Ṭabaḳâtu'l-Memalik ve Derecatu'l-Mesalik" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Kayseri, Erciyes University, 2009), 306a.

56 For a more detailed account about Alqas Mirza in the broader Ottoman-Safavid rivalry, please see Posch, Walter. *Osmanisch-Safavidische Beziehungen 1545–1550: Der Fall Alkâs Mîrzâ*. 2 vols. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013; Şahin, Kaya. *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth Century Ottoman World*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 116–122.

57 *Tabakat*, 381a.

58 Şahin, *Empire and Power in the Reign of Süleyman: Narrating the Sixteenth Century Ottoman World*, 117–118.

attribute Alqas' return to the Safavids to this failure. According to Celâlzâde, the reason behind Alqas' betrayal was not the Ottomans' missteps but rather Alqas' inherently Qizilbash nature. The justification he offers centers around Alqas' attempt to visit the shrine of Imam Husayn. According to the account, when Alqas tried to enter, the gatekeepers denied him access and accused him of being *Yazîd*, the Umayyad caliph responsible for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, and a rebellious transgressor (*merîd*) for seeking refuge with the Ottomans.[59]

Following this account of Alqas' betrayal, which Celâlzâde attributes to his Qizilbash nature, Celâlzâde seizes the opportunity to intensify his anti-Qizilbash discourse with a popular anti-Qizilbash story.[60] This story, a modified Sufi narrative with Sunni sectarian markers, recounts how a repentant sinner seeks guidance from a sheikh, who gives him a dry branch as a symbol of his repentance. The branch is to bloom if his repentance is accepted. In the story's climax, the repentant sinner witnesses a man attacking and destroying the silhouettes of the first three Sunni caliphs—Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman—before ultimately attacking Ali as well. The man in the story, who represents the Qizilbash, interrogates and destroys the silhouettes of the first three caliphs, accusing them of denying Ali's rightful leadership.[61] Despite initially praising Ali, he also attacks Ali, accusing him of failing to claim his rightful position and causing grief among his followers.[62] The repentant sinner, unable to tolerate these attacks, kills the man and experiences increasing remorse for his actions. Upon returning to retrieve his belongings, he finds that the dry branch has transformed into a fruitful fig tree, symbolizing divine forgiveness. This leads him to embrace Sunni Islam and recognize the legitimacy of all four caliphs. Celâlzâde concludes the story with a couplet, praying to God to keep him far from the *Revâfiż* (*Râfiżî*, i.e., the Qizilbash) who do not recognize the first three caliphs.[63]

Celâlzâde's story underscores the "absurdity" of the Qizilbash's "extreme" religious positions by showing that even their revered figure, Ali, is not spared from their criticism. The man, representing the Qizilbash, in this story accuses the first three caliphs of usurping Ali's rights, but in an exaggerated twist, he even turns on Ali, whom he ostensibly defends. Celâlzâde thus caricatures the Qizilbash, portraying their religious position as absurd and extreme. By having the Qizilbash attack Ali, Celâlzâde delivers a subtle message to those who prioritize Ali without

59 *Tabakat*, 399a–399b.
60 *Tabakat*, 399b–401a.
61 *Tabakat*, 400b.
62 *Tabakat*, 400b–401a.
63 *Tabakat*, 401a.

harboring enmity toward the first three caliphs.[64] Through this narrative, Celâlzâde seeks to show that true love for Ali requires love for his friends—Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman—and this is precisely what Sunni Muslims practice: they love Ali as well as the first three caliphs.

At first glance, it may seem that Alqas Mirza's betrayal triggered Celâlzâde to recount such a harsh portrayal of the Qizilbash. However, this would underestimate the extent of his resolute anti-Qizilbash and anti-Shi'a attacks. Even in sections dedicated to the peace negotiations between the weary adversaries, the Ottomans and Safavids, Celâlzâde praises the virtues of peace while maintaining a relentless barrage of anti-Qizilbash rhetoric. This persistent anti-Qizilbash sentiment is evident in the three successive popular stories he recounts, which reflect the views of the Ottoman elite on the Qizilbash, whom they had been battling for nearly half a century.[65]

These three popular anti-Qizilbash stories present an intriguing shift in Celâlzâde's usual writing style. Despite serving as the empire's chancellor for nearly a quarter of a century and exemplifying the learned Ottoman elite, the stories he chose to embed in his work are strikingly vulgar.[66] While the details of these stories warrant a separate discussion, it is important to highlight the recurring central theme: the Qizilbash reject and disrespect the first three caliphs, and as a result, are deemed deserving of severe punishments, ranging from mockery to death. The narratives also emphasize that Ali and the first three caliphs are inseparable; claiming to love one while hating the others is impossible and is evidence of not truly loving any of them. Loving the Prophet and Ali while hating their friends is presented as not only outrageous but absurd enough to make even a "non-believer" laugh.

These sections, where Celâlzâde describes the Qizilbash—their "nature," their "absurdities," and the punishments they deserve—are certainly not all he has to say on the matter. The rest is found in the depictions he makes while striving to protect the established order and build its legitimacy on one hand and portraying the Qizilbash as the primary threat in this context on the other.

Defending the Established Order, Defining the Primary Threat

In Celâlzâde's narrative, the religio-cultural and political challenge posed by the Qizilbash to the established Ottoman order is a constant presence—at times intense and at others more subtle. His position becomes increasingly evident,

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64 For a more detailed analysis of this subtle message, see Arslan, Hüseyin Ongan. "Taming the Qizilbash and Quelling Their Echoes: Ottoman Appropriations of ʿAli." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Forthcoming.

65 *Tabakat*, 483b–497b.

66 *Tabakat*, 483b–497b.

particularly in the sections describing the period leading up to the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514, a time when the Ottoman elite felt the threat posed by the Qizilbash most acutely and were unsure how to respond to its unfamiliarity. In his account of this period, Celâlzâde not only offers a brief history of the Safavids and the rise of the Qizilbash, but he also attacks them with religious arguments. While explaining why and how the Ottoman order was caught off guard by the Qizilbash threat, Celâlzâde simultaneously constructs a pro-Selim narrative. He conveys to the reader that Selim's chief rival, Ahmed, lacked the capacity to comprehend and eliminate the Qizilbash threat, whereas Selim had understood the issue from the outset—perhaps even more astutely than his father, Bâyezîd II—and had taken proactive steps to address it since his time as a prince. With Selim's ascension to the throne, Celâlzâde then shifts to emphasize the necessity of a campaign against the Qizilbash, underscoring its urgency, and works to convince his readers that the Qizilbash were even worse than infidels.

Before proceeding further into Celâlzâde's historical works, it is important to highlight an example that demonstrates the seriousness with which he undertook the task of establishing a religio-cultural and political front against the Qizilbash. Upon his return from Egypt in 1525, Celâlzâde Mustafa was promoted to the position of chief secretary (*re'isülküttab*). He seized the opportunity to showcase his creativity and mastery in the art of letter writing (*inshâ'*). One notable example is the peace treaty (*'ahdnâme*) sent by Süleyman I to the Polish king, Sigismund I (r. 1506–1548), dated October 18, 1525.[67] This treaty, composed by Celâlzâde, differed from previous letters in two key respects. First, the letter was written in Turkish. Yılmaz suggests that Celâlzâde may have been one of the initiators of this shift in the language of Ottoman official documents (Yılmaz, 2006, 184). Second, and more critical to our focus, is the change in the *formula devotionis* of the letter. In addition to the customary glorification of God and the Prophet Muhammad, the letter now included another element: the companionship of the Four Friends—namely, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali.[68] This innovative addition clearly emphasized Sunni identity, which the Ottomans

[67] The letter is published in Turkish and English in Dariusz Kolodziejgzyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century): An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), 222–226, and For a detailed analysis of the use of *'ahdnâmes* in Ottoman diplomacy, please see the discussion "Ahdnames: Capitulations or Peace Treaties" in ibid., 3–7; For the Arabic script text of the letter without the formula mentioned above, see: M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, "Venedik Devlet Arşivindeki Vesikalar Külliyatında Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Devri Belgeleri," *Belgeler* 1, no. 2 (1964): 131–132.

[68] Kolodziejgzyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century): An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents*, 222. Kolodziejgzyk also traces the evolution of the Ottoman formula *devotionis* between 1489 and 1699, see Dariusz Kolodziejgzyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century): An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents* (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 2000), 11–14.

strategically deployed in their opposition to the Safavids. As Ménage rightly points out, Celâlzâde's inclusion of this distinct sectarian marker can be seen as a response to the Safavids' use of "*Yâ 'Alî*" in their decrees.[69] Thus, it is accurate to assert that Celâlzâde took on the responsibility of constructing an anti-Qizilbash front across all possible spheres.

In the section covering Selim's princely-governorate years in Trabzon, situated on the empire's eastern frontier, Celâlzâde briefly touches upon the Qizilbash issue while outlining the political landscape of Iran. According to Celâlzâde, the Akkoyunlu dynasty's downfall resulted from their disregard for Islamic Sharia and the Prophet Muhammad's tradition.[70] After a period of relentless internal conflicts among various factions, Shah Ismail emerged as the victor and ascended the throne. Celâlzâde introduces Shah Ismail somewhat positively, describing him as a descendant of Sheikh Ṣafî, a saint with hidden knowledge (*ṣâhib-i râz-i ẖafî*) and a protector of other saints (*velâyet-penâh*), and of Sheikh Haydar, who fought the Ajam Shahs for kingship.[71] However, after this relatively favorable introduction, Celâlzâde quickly enumerates the "evildoings" attributed to the Qizilbash: permitting alcohol and adultery, inventing new practices in Islam, cursing the Prophet's companions, converting mosques into barns, and killing those who adhered to the "pure" sect of Sunni Islam.[72]

Celâlzâde's concise narration of Safavid history offers valuable insight into how a member of the Ottoman elite viewed the world around him.[73] According to Celâlzâde, for seven or eight centuries, the lands of Iran had been an abode of Islam (*Dâru'l-İslâm*), where the correct laws of the Prophet (*âyîn-i şer'î ḳavîm-i nebevî*) were respected, sermons were delivered in mosques and sanctuaries, and the people observed the distinguished rituals of Islam, including veneration of the four rightly guided caliphs (*çâr yâr-i güzîn*). However, during the reigns of the Akkoyunlu dynasty, incapable sultans failed to govern these lands effectively, paving the way for the rise of Shah İsmail, the son of Sheikh Haydar. With the support and intimacy of ignorant Turks (*etrâk-ı bî-idrâk*), who were accustomed to the devil's misguidance (*iblîs*), Shah İsmail deviated from the "right path" of his ancestors and the Islamic order that had been established and maintained by the former kings of Iran. He adopted the way of the corrupted deviants (*ẓalâl-u fesâd*), whose craft was heresy (*râfẕ-ı ilẖâd*). Under his rule, mosques and sanctuaries of the true faith were desecrated and turned into barns. Furthermore, Shah İsmail began cursing the

69 Victor Louis Ménage, "On the Constituent Elements of Certain Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Documents" 48, no. 2 (1985), 300–301.

70 *Selimname*, 42b–43b.

71 *Selimname*, 43b.

72 *Selimname*, 44a.

73 *Selimname*, 120b–121b.

Prophet's chosen companions and openly declared his adherence to the "false (*bâṭıl*) and immoral path (*sebîl-i şenî'â*)" of the sect known as Shi'a.[74]

Celâlzâde embarks on an explanation of the state of the Ottoman Empire when Shah Ismail's movement emerged and why many Ottoman Muslims migrated to Iran to join this newly founded political entity. According to Celâlzâde, during the final years of Bâyezîd II's reign, incompetent statesmen had brought the empire to the brink of disaster. He explores how the once well-functioning *timar* (fief) system became corrupted, particularly across much of the empire's Asian territories (*vilâyet-i Ânâṭoli ve Ḳaramân ve Rum*), thereby alienating those who were truly deserving of *timar*-holding positions.[75] In explaining the increasing number of Ottomans who became Qizilbash and migrated to Iran, Celâlzâde suggests that after the Safavids eliminated the oppression and injustice imposed by the Akkoyunlu in Iran, the Qizilbash—who had already migrated from Anatolia to Iran—learned of the oppression and instability (*meẓâlim ve meḫâyif*) in the Ottoman realm.[76] Consequently, they invited their kin still living under Ottoman rule to join them in Iran.

Celâlzâde portrays Selim as the only figure truly aware of the empire's precarious situation and the looming Qizilbash threat.[77] Prince Selim, depicted as a highly capable leader, not only halted the Qizilbash expansion into Anatolia with his attack on Erzincan but also took strategic measures to undermine their manpower.[78] As the princely governor of Trabzon, a city close to Iran, Selim was well-informed about the migration of Ottoman subjects to Iran and its root causes. According to Celâlzâde, the once merit-based Ottoman system had been corrupted by incompetent statesmen, which drove the local population (*ehâlî-i memleket*) to seek refuge with the "enemy."[79] To counter this migration, Selim introduced specific measures, including announcing a planned campaign against the Georgian infidels in order to attract those considering leaving for Iran. This plan seems to be partially successful, and Celâlzâde notes that Selim personally met with the leaders of the groups inclined to migrate, assuring them that, unlike the Ottoman center's preference for Christian-born servants (*ḳul ṭâ'ifesi*), he valued brave and loyal Muslim soldiers who were dedicated to the Ottoman dynasty. He requested these leaders to convey his sincere intentions to their people and encourage them to

74 *Selimname*, 121a.
75 *Selimname*, 47a–53a.
76 *Selimname*, 53a–53b.
77 *Selimname*, 43a–45b.
78 *Selimname*, 43a–45b.
79 *Selimname*, 53b.

abandon their affection and inclination toward the Qizilbash (*Ḳızılbâş cânibine meyl u muḥabbetten vâz gelsünler*).[80]

While Celâlzâde portrays Selim, even during his princely years, as a capable statesman who was fully aware of the Qizilbash threat and proactive in countering it, he depicts Selim's rival, Prince Ahmed, as an inept figure, particularly through his account of the Şah Kulu Rebellion. Celâlzâde leaves no doubt about the rebellion's connection to the Qizilbash, introducing Şahkulu as one of the "rabble followers of the Qizilbash, Şeytankulu" (*tevâbi'-i Ḳızılbâş evbâşdan Şeyṭânḳulu*).[81] He then situates the rebellion within the larger context of the Ottoman succession struggles, emphasizing Ahmed's inability to suppress the uprising. According to Celâlzâde, following Selim I's arrival in Rumelia to request a "visit" with Bâyezîd II, Prince Ahmed began recruiting soldiers in Amasya and then moved to Karaman. Upon hearing of Ahmed's movements, Prince Korkud left his post as governor of Teke for Manisa, while Şah Kulu Baba Tekeli—described as "full of malice and marked by heresy" (*żalâlet-şi'âr müfsid-i fesâd-meşḥûn*)—revolted against the Ottomans with his followers, including wicked Turkmens (*eşirrâ' ve Etrâk*) and cunning soldiers (*levend u naḥsend u çâlâk*).[82] Although Celâlzâde continues to recount the rebellion's developments, his main focus remains on highlighting Prince Ahmed's incompetence and the failures of the pro-Ahmed statesmen.[83] This critique becomes even more pronounced in the section detailing Ahmed's arrival in Maltepe, where he was waiting to ascend the throne. Here, Celâlzâde recounts how the Janissaries blamed Ahmed for failing to defeat enemies of Islam, i.e., the Şah Kulu Baba rebels[84]. In the final stages of the power struggle between Selim and Ahmed, Celâlzâde intensifies his criticism of Ahmed by emphasizing how he sought Qizilbash support by aligning his son, Murad, with them. Celâlzâde condemns this move, stating, "they made him abandon the path of Islam by placing a red crown on his head" (*bâşına tâc-ı surḫ giyüb âyin-i İslâmı terk etdürdüler*).[85]

In the section where Selim's contentious ascension to the Ottoman throne and his desire to launch a military campaign against the Qizilbash are discussed, Celâlzâde dedicates considerable space to explaining why a campaign against the Safavid Qizilbash was necessary and why they were considered worse than infidels. Celâlzâde's need to justify why the Qizilbash were deemed more dangerous than the infidels suggests the diverse nature of the Ottoman elite and indicates that some within this group were still questioning the reasoning behind a military

80 *Selimname*, 54a–55b.
81 *Selimname*, 64b.
82 *Selimname*, 65a–66a.
83 *Selimname*, 69a–70b.
84 *Selimname*, 83b.
85 *Selimname*, 93a–93b

campaign in the east, especially when so many infidel enemies remained in the west. To support the decision for such a campaign, Celâlzâde offers a rationale that highlights the following logic: the Muslim lands were surrounded by enemies on all sides. While attacking the infidels in the west was a long-standing and beneficial custom of Ottoman sultans, and the corrupted ways of the "disastrous Mamluks" (*Çerâkise-i nâḫise*) were evident, there was no need to rush against them. The immediate and more pressing threat, according to Celâlzâde, was posed by the Qizilbash Safavids.[86]

At this point, Celâlzâde seizes the opportunity to quote Selim I on why the Qizilbash were worse than the infidels. According to Selim, who had spent enough time as governor of Trabzon to "reveal" the true nature of the Qizilbash, the beliefs of the infidels were clear, and their only sin was polytheism (*şirk*). In contrast, the Qizilbash aimed to contaminate (*iḍḫâl-i çirk*) the pure essence of Islam (*âb-ı nâb-ı dîn-i pâk*). [87]Selim further argued that the greatest sin of the infidels was their denial of Muhammad as a prophet, while the Qizilbash's error—leading them into heresy—was their hostility toward Abu Bakr, the Prophet's companion in the cave, and the other selected companions. The crime of the infidels was their rejection of the Quran, while the Qizilbash's crime was their rejection of Islam itself. Where the infidels sought to uphold the teachings of their holy book, the Qizilbash's main objective was to corrupt the teachings of the Quran. While the infidels hoped for the enforcement of their religious laws, the Qizilbash desired to destroy and defy the religion of God. Selim warned that if the Qizilbash gained power, they would eradicate both the Islamic order and Muslims from the face of the earth. Since they persisted in these beliefs without repentance, Selim concluded that they were, without a doubt, worse than infidels in every regard.[88]

Following Selim's address, according to Celâlzâde, everyone present agreed with his assessment, and some even suggested that an Islamic legal opinion (*fatwa*) be obtained to formalize the Sultan's decision. The clerics promptly issued the necessary fatwa, aligning it with the Sultan's conclusion.[89]

Conclusion

Celâlzâde Mustafa's historical writings provide a critical lens through which to understand how the Ottoman elite navigated the complex relationship between religion and state during a period of profound transformation. Serving at the highest levels of the Ottoman bureaucracy for nearly a quarter of a century,

86 *Selimname*, 120a–120b.

87 *Selimname*, 121a–121b.

88 *Selimname*, 121a–121b.

89 Arslan, "Varieties of Sectarian Consciousness among the Ottoman Elite: Sunni and Shiite Identities in Ottoman Historiography, 1450s–1580s," 30–31, 93–100.

Celâlzâde offers invaluable insights into how the elite articulated their Sunni identity, defined the Qizilbash, and defended the established order during the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry. His works illustrate how religious, cultural, and political narratives were intricately woven together to justify Ottoman imperial policies and maintain legitimacy.

Celâlzâde's depiction of the Qizilbash highlights the multifaceted threat they posed to the Ottoman state, both militarily and religiously. He portrays the migration of Ottoman Muslims to Shah İsmail's Qizilbash state as a direct consequence of corruption and incompetence within the Ottoman system, which drove subjects to seek alternatives. This migration, according to Celâlzâde, not only undermined the empire's military dominance but also threatened its religious and cultural legitimacy. His response to this challenge was multifaceted, with his descriptions of the Qizilbash being highly derogatory, portraying them as heretical and irrational. Through this portrayal, Celâlzâde reinforced the legitimacy of Sunni beliefs, particularly the veneration of both Ali and the first three caliphs, positioning Sunni Islam as the antidote to the Qizilbash threat.

At the same time, Celâlzâde's defense of Ottoman Sunni Islam was not without its complexities. His selection of hadiths to praise the first four caliphs, and his broader interpretation of Sunni Islam, pushed the boundaries of what was considered mainstream at the time. His version of Sunni Islam was not a static orthodoxy but an evolving concept shaped by the political and cultural needs of the empire. The post-Mongol influence on religious identities is evident in his writings, as he incorporated unconventional elements into his Sunni framework, even while critiquing the Qizilbash for their perceived deviations.

Despite his loyalty to Sultan Selim I, as reflected in the pro-Selim tone of *Selimname*, Celâlzâde's narrative takes a surprising turn by implying that Selim faced divine punishment due to his injustice, supposedly brought on by the curse of a Halvetî sheikh. This duality—praising Selim while suggesting divine retribution—reveals the intricate balancing act Ottoman elites had to perform, navigating their loyalty to the sultan while maintaining their personal religious commitments. Over time, as Celâlzâde's devotion to the Halvetî order deepened, his unwavering support for Selim may have softened, reflecting the tension between state power and spiritual authority.

Celâlzâde's writings also serve to legitimize Ottoman policies against the Qizilbash, particularly leading up to the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514. As tensions with the Qizilbash escalated, he crafted a narrative that not only explained the empire's initial unpreparedness but also depicted Selim as the sultan who recognized the threat early on and took decisive steps to counter it. In contrast, Selim's rival, Ahmed, is portrayed as lacking the vision to address the Qizilbash challenge. Celâlzâde justifies Selim's ascent and subsequent campaign against the Safavids, positioning the Qizilbash as a more immediate threat than Christian enemies in the West.

By examining Celâlzâde's treatment of the Qizilbash and the broader political implications of his works, this study underscores how Ottoman historiography was not merely a record of events but an active tool in shaping the empire's ideological and religious framework. Celâlzâde's legacy offers valuable insights into how historical narratives were employed to confront both internal and external threats, reinforcing the idea that the survival of the state and the protection of Sunni Islam were inextricably linked in the minds of the Ottoman elite. Ultimately, Celâlzâde's role in these religious and political debates serves as a reminder that the relationship between religion and state in the early modern Ottoman Empire was far from static. His works reveal that Sunni identity was continuously negotiated and reshaped in response to internal and external pressures. By intertwining religious, political, and cultural narratives, Celâlzâde helped define Ottoman Sunni Islam, justify military action against the Qizilbash, and solidify the empire's identity during a time of significant transformation. His dual allegiances to the Ottoman state and the Halvetî order, alongside his complex portrayal of Selim and the Qizilbash, provide a nuanced understanding of the tensions that defined his era.

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