

# The Politics of Loyalty

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## The Confessional and Ethnic Loyalties of the Kurds in Seventeenth-Century Eastern Anatolia

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to uncover the ways in which the Kurds of seventeenth-century Ottoman Eastern Anatolia defined themselves and how the imperial state defined them. This investigation reveals the web of labels and loyalties which defined the region and its people. Confessional and ethnic markers were used both by regional and imperial actors to demarcate the boundaries of imperial loyalty and rebellion. Moreover, this thesis forgoes the terminology of ‘identity’ and replaces it with a discussion of ‘loyalty’ which proves more valuable for a discussion of identifiatory labels in early modern empires. Furthermore, this discussion is in the context of the Ottoman-Safavid confrontation in the Eastern Anatolian borderlands in which self-fashioning and the ramifications of confessionalization are vitally important. To analyze these aspects, this thesis separates its narrative source base between imperial perspectives and regional perspectives on the Kurds. It is through this method that the multiform and varied nature of loyalty in the borderlands is revealed. The sources ranging from the travel account of Evliya Çelebi to a local translator’s introduction on the Kurdish language in his translation of the *Şerefname* provide evidence about the fluidity and political relevance of ethnic and confessional labels and loyalties in seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia.

## Notes on Transliteration and Pronunciation

For several names of books and authors throughout this text I use are written in the Modern Turkish or Anglicized forms. Here are the rules for pronouncing Modern Turkish.

C, c--- like *j* in English

Ç, ç--- like *ch* in English

ğ, ----- a ‘soft g’; it elongates the preceding vowel

I, ı --- an ‘undotted i’; pronounced like the *e* in *open*

İ, i --- like *ee* in the English *meet*

Ö, ö---like *ö* in German

Ş, ş--- like *sh* in English

Ü ü--- like *ü* in German

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not be possible without the help and support of a multitude of people, all of which cannot be mentioned here. I would first like to thank my professors here at Central European University, specifically Tijana Krstić and Tolga Esmer who have helped me along in this process with their wisdom, encouragement, and honesty. If it was not for these two guiding hands this thesis would have lost any semblance of coherency and depth, and therefore, I must admit that all faults found in this thesis are entirely my own. Secondly, I would like to thank all my fellow students in my cohort here at Central European University whose insightful comments, honest conversations, and endearing sarcasm have helped ease the pressure during my time here. Additionally, I would like to thank my family who have been nothing but supportive in my efforts to find a life in academia. Lastly, I wish to thank my extraordinary partner Jamie who has put up with my seemingly continuous rambling on Ottoman History along with an endless series of drafts to edit. Without her constant and concerted efforts to cheer me up in the process this thesis would have never been completed.

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## Map of Eastern Anatolia: Relevant Places

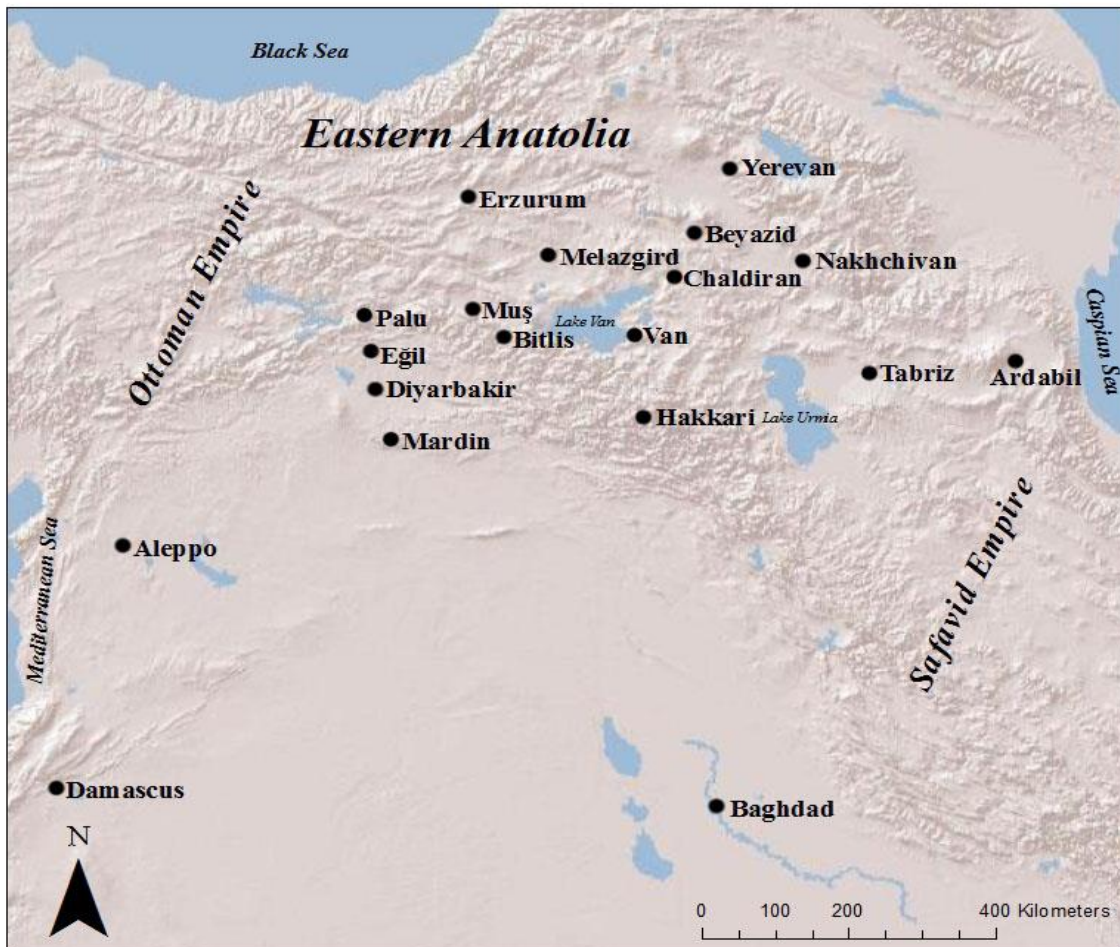


Figure # 1



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

The Ottoman intellectual Mustafa Ali in 1581 states that in Eastern Anatolia “there are certain communities among the various groups that are definitely not suitable for an imperial position.”<sup>1</sup> Among these communities are the “wicked Kurds...whose character is nothing but obstinacy and stubbornness... [and] if these [groups] are able to afford a military outfit, arms, and a horse, that is the finest [of] luck. To go beyond this [in honoring them] is unfathomable, and its result would be inexcusable like an evil deed.”<sup>2</sup> Despite its scathing tone that might lead one to think that the attitude of the Ottoman Istanbul-based elites towards Kurds was universally negative, a broader survey of Ottoman sources reveals that Mustafa Ali’s opinion is just one among many. The different meanings assigned to the label of ‘Kurd’ in the sources reflecting both imperial and regional perspectives were explicitly tied to the vicissitudes of inter-imperial and inter-confessional strife in Eastern Anatolia during the seventeenth century. From the perspective of the Ottoman imperial center, the label ‘Kurd’ became a discursive battleground mirroring the shifting relations, borders, and loyalties in Eastern Anatolia.

The changes in the term’s usage reveal how the Ottoman Empire sought to define and demarcate loyalty in a region described by one scholar as being “shaped by the experience of

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<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Ali, *Mustafa Ali's Council for Sultans of 1581*, trans. Andreas Tietze (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften, 1979), 63 (English translation), 158-59 (Transcription).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

imperial power and by the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the imperial usage, from the regional perspective, the label ‘Kurd’ was appropriated and used by local actors as a self-fashioning tool that highlighted the importance of ethnic labels for negotiating multifaceted political, social and religious boundaries in the early modern era. This thesis will discuss the various attitudes towards and uses of the label ‘Kurd’ from both imperial and regional perspectives under the rubrics of imperial-Kurdish relations, confessional boundaries, rebellion, and regional ethnic loyalty. The situation of the Kurds in seventeenth-century Ottoman Eastern Anatolia may seem trivial, yet upon further examination it may be discovered that the case of the Kurds provides a useful example of how regional and imperial networks defined themselves and others before the age of nationalism. This particular case provides insight into the language of imperial statecraft on the edge of empires and how both the imperial and regional networks sought to define and fashion each other in the face of the different circumstances of the seventeenth century.

## 1.2 Outline of Thesis

This thesis will first provide an historical background on the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Anatolia. This discussion will mainly describe the inter-imperial rivalry between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empire in both political and religious terms. After this brief historical background, the thesis will provide a detailed discussion of the important terminology concerning ‘identity’ and ‘confessionalization.’ After a thorough discussion of terminology, the thesis will present two research chapters focusing on imperial and regional perspectives on the Kurds during the seventeenth-century.

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<sup>3</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, “The Ottoman Frontier in Kurdistan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Ottoman World*, edited by Christine Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2012), 249.

The two research chapters will focus on the ways in which narrative sources from the period described the Kurds and how these labels were ingrained in the circumstances in which they were written. The first research chapter will explore various types of narrative sources written from the ‘imperial perspective.’ The ‘imperial perspective’ pertains to those authors who discussed the Kurds in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia but were not locals themselves. This includes both imperial chronicles and Ottoman travelers who actually set foot in the region. The second research chapter will examine sources written from the ‘regional perspective.’ These sources are ones that were written by individuals from Eastern Anatolia’s Muslim and Christian populations.

The comparison between the two perspectives of narrative sources from imperial and regional viewpoints will be reconciled in the conclusion. The conclusion following these two research chapters showcases the ways in which confessional and ethnic loyalties along with imperial and regional loyalties were expressed and co-opted by different actors through the narrative sources provided. The evidence provided in this thesis aims to describe the complexity and power of identifiatory labels and shifting loyalties in early modern Ottoman Eastern Anatolia.

### **1.3 Historical Background**

By the early sixteenth-century, Ottoman Eastern Anatolia was incorporated into the Empire and effectively served as the borderland between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the emerging Shi’a Safavid Empire in the sixteen and seventeenth centuries. During the seventeenth century, the region witnessed the development of a variety of sometimes conflicting and converging loyalties stemming from the diverse groups in Eastern Anatolia: Kurds, Turks,

Armenians, Sunnis, Shi'as, Sufis, urban elites, and rural tribal leaders. These interconnected groups, whose identificatory labels were only seemingly fixed, in reality negotiated their loyalties along the ever-shifting borders of the neighboring empires under the shadow of the inter-imperial and inter-confessional conflict between the Shi'a Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans. Examining the specific political and historical environment of the seventeenth century is crucial to understanding the dynamics in the region because within this century the Ottoman Empire reached its territorial peak while also confronting tremendous economic, social, and political strife.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ottoman Eastern Anatolia was defined by the inter-imperial Ottoman-Safavid conflict. In the middle of this ongoing political and military conflict were the Kurdish tribes, who played a critical role for the Ottomans in the war. The Ottoman-Safavid conflict exacerbated the new confessional loyalties (Shi'ite and Sunni) in both empires and, in turn, these confessional loyalties became imbued with imperial loyalties as well.

The conflict arose in tandem with the rise of the first Safavid Iranian ruler, Shah Ismail (r. 1501-1524), who took control of much of Eastern Anatolia from the collapsing Akkoyunlu Tribal confederacy during the first years of his reign. Shah Ismail rose to power in Northwestern Iran with the support of *Kizilbaş* tribesmen. The *Kizilbaş* were Turkoman tribesmen who were Twelver Shi'ite adherents of Shah Ismail. They believed that Shah Ismail was the Mahdi, an Islamic apocalyptic figure. By the early sixteenth century these *Kizilbaş* tribesmen and the Safavid Empire soon came to control much of Eastern Anatolia, including the lands of the Kurds. The Ottoman Sultan Selim (r. 1512-1520) struck back and launched a campaign into Eastern Anatolia against the *Kizilbaş* and Shah Ismail in 1514. Sultan Selim met Shah Ismail's army on the plain of Chaldiran and decisively defeated Safavid forces. Many Kurdish tribes who were

nominally Sunni joined the Ottoman vanguard and helped to secure much of Eastern Anatolia for the Ottoman state, including major cities such as Diyarbakir. This conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids continued intermittently with various peace agreements throughout the next century. It was only by the mid-seventeenth century that major conflict between these two empires in Eastern Anatolia died down.

The Ottoman-Safavid conflict heavily informed and polarized confessional relations and developments in both of what came to be the Safavid Twelver Shia state and the Ottoman Sunni state. This is particularly notable during the latter half of the sixteenth-century when each of these states sought to formalize and legalize Twelver Shi'ism and Sunnism respectively. While these policies did not result in a systematic persecution of the 'confessional other,' these new confessional discourses provided useful and powerful rhetoric in certain situations and were utilized by various actors.

An important figure for the Kurds in the context of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict was Idris Bitlisi. Bitlisi was born outside of Tabriz in the fifteenth century, though his family was originally from Bitlis.<sup>4</sup> He served as a high-ranking bureaucrat in the collapsing Akkoyunlu tribal confederacy until 1500 when he joined the Ottoman ranks.<sup>5</sup> This decision to join Ottoman service proved vital in the upcoming war against Shah Ismail. Bitlisi was sent on a diplomatic mission by Sultan Selim to the Kurdish notables of Eastern Anatolia in order to persuade them to become a part of the Ottoman Empire and join the war against the Safavids.<sup>6</sup> Idris Bitlisi's efforts proved fruitful as he successfully brought the Kurds under Ottoman sovereignty and into war against the Safavids and their *Kizilbaş* troops. Moreover, he also helped the Kurdish notables

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<sup>4</sup> Ebru Sönmez, *Idris-i Bidlisi: Ottoman Kurdistan and Islamic Legitimacy* (Istanbul: Libra, 2012), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 37-39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 63.

in obtaining many autonomous rights and positions as provincial administrators for the Ottomans.<sup>7</sup> These concessions on the part of the Ottoman state set the tone and relations between regional Kurdish elites and Ottoman imperial representatives for much of the early modern period.

By the start of the seventeenth century, two major conflicts between the Ottomans and the Safavids again affected the region. The first was the conquest of parts of Eastern Anatolia (areas in modern day Armenia) and of Iraq by the resurgent Safavid Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629). In 1590, Shah Abbas was forced to sign an unfavorable peace treaty with the Ottomans which forced Safavid Iran to give up much of its territory in Eastern Anatolia. After a reorganization of the Safavid army, Shah Abbas unleashed a new offensive into Ottoman lands in 1603 that would retake the lands lost by the Safavids. His troops successfully occupied Azerbaijan, Tabriz Nakhchivan, and Erivan (Yerevan). In 1605, Shah Abbas defeated the main Ottoman force near Tabriz and thusly secured his newly reconquered territories. Shah Abbas famously prevented any Ottoman counterattacks by using a scorched earth policy on the Eastern Anatolian frontier and by moving large populations of potentially loyal Ottoman subjects (Armenians and some Kurdish tribes) into the interior of the Safavid domains to keep them distant from Ottoman armies. In 1623-24, Shah Abbas conquered Baghdad and sacked Diyarbakir attacking deep into Ottoman Anatolia. While Diyarbakir was quickly retaken by the Ottomans, Baghdad remained in Safavid control.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For information on the campaigns in Eastern Anatolia of Shah Abbas I see Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 187-188 and see *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds. H.A.R. Gibb, H.H. Kramers, E. Levi-Provencal, and J. Schacht, vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 7-9. For information on the Ottoman-Safavid conflict see Rula Abisaab, *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), Roger Savoy, *Iran Under the Safavids*, (Cambridge: Cambridge

These conquests were later reversed by the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-1640). In 1635, Sultan Murad IV began a military campaign to retake Yerevan from the Safavids, as this would ensure a more secure border against them. In 1635, after the conquest of Yerevan, the sultan fell ill and returned to the Ottoman city of Diyarbakir via Bitlis where he came into contact with Abdal Khan of Bitlis who hosted the sultan. Yerevan soon fell back into Safavid hands but in 1639 Murad IV managed to conquer Baghdad and bring Iraq back into Ottoman domains. After this conquest, a peace treaty (Kasr-i Shirin) was agreed to by Safavid Shah Safi (r. 1629-1642) and Sultan Murad IV. This treaty stabilized the borders between the Ottomans and the Safavids for much of the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> The stories of these two campaigns highlight the nature of the inter-imperial conflict in Eastern Anatolia during the seventeenth-century and also the turmoil created by the inter-imperial rivalry in the region.

Beyond the imperial struggles in the region during the seventeenth century, this period is also known as ‘the seventeenth-century crisis’ in Ottoman historiography. The ‘seventeenth-century crisis’ was characterized by a series of religious and social unrests, famines, rebellions and unprecedented population movements in the region.<sup>10</sup> Much of the historiography on the Ottoman Empire in this period focuses on the endemic banditry and rebellion that ravaged Anatolia throughout the century, generally discussed as the ‘Celali rebellions.’ The ‘Celali rebellions’ resulted in widespread banditry that weakened Ottoman imperial control in much of Anatolia. Many of these bandits were soon imbricated in imperial networks which vied for

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University Press, 1980), Andrew Newman, *Safavid Iran: Rebirth of a Persian Empire*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> For further information on the campaigns in Eastern Anatolia of Murad IV see Finkel, *Osman's Dream*, 215-218 and see *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, eds, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat, vol. VII (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 597-599.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the ‘Seventeenth-Century Crisis’ in the Ottoman Empire see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 48-54. Also see Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

varying degrees of power and control.<sup>11</sup> The political, social, and economic turmoil caused by the ‘Celali rebellions’ helps to illustrate a larger context for the situation of the Kurds in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands. These circumstances demonstrate the fragile nature of the Ottoman imperial network’s control over the region and how individuals, such as Abdal Khan, could challenge Ottoman authority in the region.

#### 1.4 Literature Review

Much of the literature concerning Kurds in Eastern Anatolia during the seventeenth century explores the issue as background information to the more prominent discussion of Kurds in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The most important work concerning the early modern Kurds of Eastern Anatolia is *Agha, Shaikh, and State* by Martin van Bruinessen, which details the various political and social structures of the Kurds from the early modern period up until the end of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> The book’s sections on early modern Eastern Anatolia serve mainly as background for the book’s main focus on the Kurds in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nonetheless, Bruinessen provides important insight into the administration and political structures of the early modern Kurds, which offers a vital starting point for my investigation surrounding Kurds in early modern Ottoman Eastern Anatolia. The second notable work concerning the Kurds in the early modern period is *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State* by Hakan Özoğlu.<sup>13</sup> Özoğlu also treats the early modern period as background to the discussion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kurdish history. Yet, Özoğlu frames his

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<sup>11</sup> See Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats* for further information on the complicated relationship between the Ottoman state and bandits during this period.

<sup>12</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004).



discussion in the terms of an evolving group Kurdish identity.<sup>14</sup> While much of his investigation looks into historical conceptions and political borders of Kurdistan throughout history, he does briefly hint at the idea of a growing sense of “Kurdish identity” from the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth-century.<sup>15</sup> For his discussion of this period, he utilizes several of the main sources which this thesis uses, though he does so in a briefer manner.

An important work which deals with the early modern Kurds exclusively is an article by Djene Bajalan entitled “Şeref Xan’s Sharafnama: Kurdish Ethno-politics in the Early Modern World, its Meaning and its Legacy.”<sup>16</sup> Bajalan’s article provides a fruitful exploration of the significant Kurdish late sixteenth-century work written by Şerefhan. This article by Bajalan is one of the only works that seeks to discuss the Kurds in the context of the early modern period and not merely as a background for a discussion of the Kurds in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. There also an important monograph on early modern Kurds that focuses on the sixteenth-century figure of Idris Bitlisi.<sup>17</sup> This study, authored by Ebru Sönmez, does an excellent job discussing the life and works of the Ottoman Kurdish nobleman and historian Idris Bitlisi and his role in high politics during the sixteenth century. Another work, a book by Kamal Mirawdeli is a literary analysis and partial translation of the crucial Kurdish tragedy of Ahmed-i Khani from the seventeenth-century.<sup>18</sup> This book is very problematic, as it mainly presents the traditional Kurdish nationalist perspective on the early modern period, specifically concentrating on Ahmed-i Khani and his work in its relation to Kurdish ‘identity.’ While this book is useful for

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21-42

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>16</sup> Djene Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s Sharafnama: Kurdish Ethno-politics in the Early Modern World, its Meaning and its Legacy,” in *Iranian Studies*, 45:6, 2012, 795-818.

<sup>17</sup> Ebru Sönmez, *Idris-i Bidlisi: Ottoman Kurdistan and Islamic Legitimacy*, (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Kamal Mirawdeli, *Love and Existence: Analytical Study of Ahmadi Khani’s Tragedy of Mem u Zin*, (London: Authorhouse, 2012).

its many translations of the works of Ahmed-i Khani into English, Mirawdeli's discussion of these translations is biased and pushes a clear Kurdish nationalist agenda.

Most of the prominent works concerning the Kurds analyze the Kurds in the late Ottoman period. These include Sabri Ateş' *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914*, which explores the interaction between borderland Kurds and disparate imperial centers that sought to control the region.<sup>19</sup> There are two other works which also explore the precarious position many Kurds found themselves in during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first is an article by Selim Deringil which details state centralizing efforts on the Eastern Anatolian frontier at the end of the nineteenth-century.<sup>20</sup> The second study is *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* by Janet Klein.<sup>21</sup> Klein's book explores the Hamidiyye corps of Kurdish tribesmen in the employ of the Ottoman central state and the dynamic state-local relations in the Eastern borderlands during the close of the nineteenth-century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast, this thesis intends to further illuminate the history of the Kurds in Eastern Anatolia in the under-researched early modern period.

## 1.5 Terminology

This thesis' main methodological obstacle revolves around the debate surrounding the use of the term 'identity.' The aim of this section is to highlight the scholarly debate on 'identity'

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<sup>19</sup> Sabri Ates, *The Ottoman-Iranian Borderlands: Making a Boundary, 1843-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Selim Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': the Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 2 (2003), 311-342.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Palo Alto: Stanford University, 2011).

and to demonstrate how this has been addressed both in other historical fields and within the discourse of Ottoman historiography. Furthermore, this section will demonstrate how the politics of competing loyalties framework is the most suited for the context of borderland Eastern Anatolia in the early modern period. Beyond the issue of ‘identity,’ this section will position the ways in which this thesis addresses the methodological concept of ‘confessionalization.’

### 1.5.1 *Identity*

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper sought to push past the broad term ‘identity’ in their monumental article “Beyond ‘identity.’”<sup>22</sup> The centerpiece of their argument focuses on the frivolous nature of the term ‘identity’ and how it “tends to mean too much...too little...or nothing at all;” the usage of the term brings with it an overflow of connotations that render it meaningless.<sup>23</sup> This thesis aims to understand the ways in which local, regional, ethnic, and religious loyalties interacted and comingled with imperial politics in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia in the seventeenth century. The nature of this research surrounding Kurdish self-fashioning and imperial fashioning of the Kurds in the seventeenth century forces it to confront the all-encompassing term and question of ‘identity.’ Using Brubaker and Cooper’s seminal piece, this thesis uncovers and utilizes a term that relays the fluidity and complexity surrounding discussions of identity in seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia yet is more precise than the omnipresent term of ‘identity.’

Brubaker and Cooper attempt to provide new concrete terms that one could use to speak about identity. They explore a series of terms that they felt could be used as alternatives to identity. They first discuss the term ‘self-understanding’, though this term has limitations when

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<sup>22</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” In *Theory and Society*, v. 29 (2000), 1-47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1.

trying to describe others' understandings of different groups and also requires the individual to have a degree of cognitive awareness of the self.<sup>24</sup> These limitations make it difficult to expand the term of 'self-understanding' beyond the individual, especially when attempting to use the term in historical writing. This is because one would need an ego-document in which the author displays a cognitive awareness of their own self-understanding.

Brubaker and Cooper also explore the use of terms like "commonality, connectedness, groupness" to replace the weak and strong notions of identity.<sup>25</sup> These terms would be used to replace the term of 'identity' when dealing with "collective identities," a context more similar to the case of the Kurds in seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia.<sup>26</sup> The authors define this group of terms as meaning the "emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders."<sup>27</sup> Brubaker and Cooper make this distinction between the terms of collective identity and terms of self-understanding identity to highlight the problems in the broad meaning of identity and that show how terms may be used to help alleviate this hindrance.<sup>28</sup> The terms 'commonality', 'connectedness' and 'groupness' would be useful tools when attempting to discuss about 'collective identities,' but these terms also produce awkward English prose which hinder understanding. This is the primary reason why I wish to use a new term which still projects 'collective identity' but also fits conformably into written prose.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that this thesis does utilize the term 'identificatory' derived from the verb 'identification.' 'Identification' is also discussed by Brubaker and Cooper who explain

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> To see Brubaker and Cooper's reasons on choosing this terminology see *ibid.*, 19-21.

that in this form it “lacks the reifying connotation of ‘identity.’”<sup>30</sup> To them ‘identification’ is “intrinsic to social life’ while ‘identity’ “in the strong sense is not.”<sup>31</sup> Brubaker and Cooper link ‘identification’ with the idea of ‘categorization’ which is the reasoning behind this thesis’ use of the phrase ‘identificatory label,’ ‘labels’ being tools that local and imperial actors use to categorize society.<sup>32</sup>

‘Solidarity’ has been suggested as a term that could replace the term ‘identity.’ The Ottomanist Charles Wilkins presents seventeenth-century Ottoman Aleppo as a polity with a sense of ‘urban solidarity’ in his work *Forging Urban Solidarities*.<sup>33</sup> Wilkins introduces a new term for his case of Ottoman Aleppo in attempt to move beyond identity: ‘urban solidarity.’ Another prominent work that discusses ethnic and regional loyalties in Ottoman studies is a short article by Metin Kunt entitled “Ethnic-Regional (*Cins*) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment” written in 1974.<sup>34</sup> This piece, as demonstrated in the title, also utilizes the word ‘solidarity’ but does not do so in a way which was meant to replace the use of ‘identity.’ Throughout the article, Kunt uses the term ‘identity’ without qualifying or reconciling it with ‘solidarity.’<sup>35</sup> Solidarity is mentioned several times by Brubaker and Cooper when describing what the terms ‘commonality’, ‘connectedness’ and ‘groupness’ mean.<sup>36</sup> Solidarity has a well-known English meaning, while still maintaining fewer of the broad and misconceived notions that ‘identity’ carries with it. While I will occasionally use ‘solidarity’ in this thesis, I

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Wilkins, *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo 1640-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Metin Kunt, “Ethnic-Regional (*Cins*) Solidarity in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Establishment,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5 (1974): 233-239.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond “Identity”,” 19-21.

have found in my research that a term such as ‘loyalty’ is the most productive alternative term to ‘identity.’

### 1.5.2 *Loyalty*

The term ‘loyalty’ has not previously been used in Ottoman studies to replace the discourse of ‘identity.’ For my own research, ‘loyalty’ provides a fluid and flexible understanding of collective solidarities that is reflected in this thesis’ sources. The term also has a readily understood meaning which works well in English prose. It is flexible enough to encompass both the connotations of rigidity and unconditional-ness (as in, rigid loyalties) on the one hand, and fluidity (as in fickle loyalties) on the other, both of which are relevant for discussing Eastern Anatolia and its various webs of imperial, regional, ethnic, and confessional loyalties.

Furthermore, the term ‘loyalty’ is appropriate for discussions of early modern ‘identity’ especially within the context of the Ottoman Empire. The term ‘identity’ tends to bring with it connotations more appropriate for the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. In the era before nationalism, it is important to use different terminology to denote less of a personal connection between the subject and the state. This is an important difference to note because an individual must *identify* with a nation while a subject must only be *loyal* to an empire. The difference between these terms is significant because it demonstrates how ‘identity’ is tied to our modern conceptions of the individual’s relation with the nation; by using ‘loyalty,’ we can avoid bringing this anachronistic understanding to a discussion of the early modern period. This is similar to discussions of the difference between citizenship and subjecthood in the modern and early modern periods. It is important that this distinction be made because ethnicity in the seventeenth century has been anachronistically treated as a static and homogenous attribute of early modern

identities by Kurdish and Turkish nationalist historiography. With a discussion of loyalty and ‘ethnic loyalties’ in conjunction with ‘confessional loyalties,’ ‘tribal loyalties,’ ‘regional loyalties,’ and others this thesis aims to bring ethnicity back into the historical picture in an era before nationalism without its anachronistic connotations tied to the nation-state and nationalist struggles. This is because the sources demonstrate that ethnic loyalties along with all the other competing loyalties in the region played important political roles in regional and in imperial society at large.

This new methodology, built in response to the call of Brubaker and Cooper to move ‘beyond identity,’ will help illuminate the competing loyalties and networks of seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia. It is important to note that there could be misunderstandings in the use of ‘loyalty’ as there are with the term ‘identity,’ but these shortcomings are outweighed by the usefulness of ‘loyalty’ for the particular circumstances of the imperial seventeenth-century context. It is my belief that using the term ‘loyalty,’ also at times combined with ‘solidarity,’ will best reflect what scholars now term ideas of ‘group identity’ in the early modern period.

### 1.5.3 *Confessionalization*

‘Confessionalization’ is an important analytical term in this thesis. At first sight, this might seem odd since the concept of confessionalization was first developed in the context of German historiography by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard in the late 1970s/early 1980s.<sup>37</sup> Reinhard wanted to go beyond the dichotomous historiographical discourse of Reformation versus Counter-Reformation and find a concept where social processes related to

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<sup>37</sup> For a general overview of the development of the ‘confessionalization paradigm’ see Ute Lotz-Heumann, “The Concept of ‘Confessionalization:’ a Historiographical Paradigm in Dispute,” *Memoria y Civilización* 4 (2001): 93-114.

each could be compared and connected.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Schilling wished to depart from the dichotomy between Calvinism versus Lutheranism during the Reformation period in Northern Germany.<sup>39</sup> In order to do this they both built the concept of ‘confessionalization’ based on the theory of ‘confession-building,’ developed by Walter Zeeden in 1958.<sup>40</sup> From ‘confession-building,’ which only highlighted developments within religion and the church, the new concept of ‘confessionalization’ encompassed the entire “social and political system.”<sup>41</sup> Schilling and Reinhard viewed ‘confessionalization’ as a social process which “enabled states and societies to integrate more tightly” through the standardization of confessional churches and social disciplining.<sup>42</sup> While the concept was initially developed and applied to early modern Germany, Schilling suggests the possibility of utilizing the term in regions outside of Germany including the Islamic world.<sup>43</sup> This thesis attempts to build on recent scholarship related to the topic of ‘confessionalization’ that expands and reorients the focus of Schilling’s and Reinhard’s paradigm of confessionalization by deemphasizing the role of the state as the main agent in confession-building and highlighting the various local and regional actors who utilized confessional discourse. These new perspectives on the phenomenon of confessionalization have led to the concept’s application to fields beyond German historiography, including Ottoman historiography.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-96. Also see Heinz Schilling, “Confessionalization: Historical and Scholarly Perspective of a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Paradigm,” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1550-1700—Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, eds. J. Headley, H. Hillerbrandt, and A. Papalas (Ashgate, 2004), 23.

<sup>42</sup> Lotz-Heumann, “The Concept of Confessionalization,” 97. Also see Schilling, “Confessionalization,” 24.

<sup>43</sup> Schilling, “Confessionalization,” 27.

<sup>44</sup> See Marc Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque: Religious Identity in Southwest Germany, 1550-1750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mack Holt, “Confessionalism beyond Germanies: The case of France” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1550-1700- Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 257-74; Tijana Krstic, *Contested Conversion to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Derin



Recent literature in the field of Ottoman history has suggested that the Sunni-Shii polarization that developed in the early sixteenth and seventeenth century matured into well-differentiated confessional blocks that coincided with the territorial boundaries of the Ottoman and Safavid empires. This resembled the phenomenon of ‘confessionalization’ in the contemporary Habsburg territories. The inter-imperial borderlands of Eastern Anatolia became the confessional battleground of these two competing empires and soon led to confessional loyalties becoming indistinguishable from imperial loyalties. Confessional markers became vital for the imperial understanding of the region. Under the rubrics of confessional loyalty the Kurds were viewed either as loyal Ottoman subjects or treacherous heretics. It is therefore important to understand what the concept of confessionalization is and how it manifested itself in both the Ottoman and Safavid Empires.

The confessional contestation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia by the Ottoman and Safavid Empires has been demonstrated by two prominent authors, Derin Terzioğlu and Rula Abisaab. Derin Terzioğlu, discussing the Ottoman case, describes the Empire-wide efforts at Ottoman ‘sunnitization.’ Terzioğlu chronicles the ways in which a state of “partial metadoxy eventually gave way to a state-enforced Sunni orthodoxy.”<sup>45</sup> This process of Ottoman ‘sunnitization’ was enacted by both state and local actors.<sup>46</sup> While Terzioğlu rejects the notion that Ottoman ‘sunnitization’ resulted solely from the Ottoman imperio-confessional conflict with the Safavids, she does note the important role the confessional conflict played in the

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Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion,” *Turcica* 44 (2012-13): 301-38.

<sup>45</sup> Terzioğlu, “How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization,” 303.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 304-305.

Eastern Anatolian borderlands.<sup>47</sup> She explains that “the persecuting impulse [of the Ottomans] peaked in the border areas and at times of war with the Safavids.”<sup>48</sup> Rula Abisaab, detailing the Safavid case, describes several processes of state confession-building which could be characterized as part of a process of Safavid Twelver Shia confessionalization.<sup>49</sup> Abisaab describes a process, much like Terzioğlu, in which a state supported metadoxy is slowly transformed into a standardized Twelver Shi’ite orthodoxy, which in turn helped to provide state legitimacy and a closer bond between the state and religion.<sup>50</sup> Also of note, it was the *Kizilbaş*, the confessional rivals of the Kurds in Eastern Anatolia, who initially supported the group of Twelver Shi’ite scholars who helped to shape and discipline the new confessional Safavid state.<sup>51</sup>

Recent scholarship thus suggests that confessionalization was an important social process in Eastern Anatolia due to its fundamental role in the Ottoman-Safavid imperial rivalry. The competing processes of confession-building came to a head in the contested region of Eastern Anatolia. Due to this, for the groups caught within this inter-imperial borderland notions of imperial loyalty became inexplicitly linked to confessional loyalties, though, as will be seen in the following chapters, confessional labels were used not to reflect the reality of religious belief in the borderlands but rather the degree of political loyalty.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 305, 312.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>49</sup> Rula Abisaab, *Converting Persia*.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 141.

## 2 The Imperial Perspective

The aim of this chapter is to analyze how imperial elites perceived the Kurds and assigned meaning to the identificatory label of ‘Kurd.’ As it will be argued, these perceptions were explicitly tied to the vicissitudes of regional inter-imperial and inter-confessional strife in Eastern Anatolia. From the perspective of the imperial center, the label of ‘Kurd’ became a discursive battleground mirroring the shifting relations, borders, and loyalties in Eastern Anatolia revealing how the empire sought to define and demarcate loyalty in a region described by one scholar as being “shaped by the experience of imperial power and by the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry.”<sup>52</sup> In order to shed light on various meanings of the “Kurd” in Ottoman imperial discourse, this chapter will examine the contexts in which Kurds appear in various narrative sources authored by individuals who can be described as members of the imperial elite. The chapter will discuss these contexts under the rubrics of imperial-Kurdish relations, confessional boundaries, and loyalty and rebellion.

### 2.1 The Imperial Relations with the Emirs of Kurdistan

The Kurdish relationship with the Ottoman state begins with the conquest of Eastern Anatolia by Sultan Selim I (r. 1512-1520) in 1514 after the decisive defeat of the Safavid Shah Ismail.<sup>53</sup> The initial Ottoman spread into Eastern Anatolia against the Safavids was met with great cooperation from the Kurdish tribes in this region, who were brought into the Ottoman fold by the Kurdish intermediary to the Ottoman state, Idris Bidlisi (1452-1520).<sup>54</sup> The Ottomans granted the Kurdish tribes autonomy in local affairs if they joined the Ottomans to fight against

<sup>52</sup> Nelida Fuccaro, “The Ottoman Frontier in Kurdistan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Ottoman World*, edited by Christine Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2012), 249.

<sup>53</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 47-51.

<sup>54</sup> Ebru Sönmez, *Idris-i Bidlisi: Ottoman Kurdistan and Islamic Legitimacy* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2012), 63.

the Safavids in the borderlands.<sup>55</sup> Later in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans had secured the region against the Safavids and sought to lessen the autonomy they had granted the Kurdish emirates because the tribes were not considered as vital to Ottoman imperial conflicts.<sup>56</sup> This attempt by the Ottomans to curtail Kurdish autonomy may have influenced Mustafa Ali's discriminatory opinions on the Kurds, as referenced in the introduction. In the early seventeenth-century, the Safavids gained the upper hand in the region again prompting the Ottomans once again to tolerate Kurdish autonomy until the inter-imperial situation changed again the mid-seventeenth-century.<sup>57</sup> Thus, Kurdish autonomy was only guaranteed when the Empire required their services against the Safavid threat.

The autonomy of the emirates stemmed from the empire's practical need to tolerate local elites in light of the threat of the Safavid Empire in the borderlands. The local elites closest to the borderlands with Safavid Iran therefore initially enjoyed a great degree of autonomy.<sup>58</sup> As the sixteenth-century progressed, various previously autonomous territories were brought under tighter imperial administration, including Van and Erzurum.<sup>59</sup> In the seventeenth century, Bitlis was the only major autonomous entity in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia surrounded by imperial centers.<sup>60</sup> The relationship between the rulers of Bitlis and the Ottoman state demonstrates the dynamics of the inter-imperial borderland of eastern Anatolia. It is this contested and changing relationship that is described in this chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>56</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 51-59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 51-59.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 57. Also a major Ottoman center, Diyarbakir was quickly placed under Ottoman imperial control from its inception into the empire and only held autonomous status during the first few years of conquest.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 59.

The volatility of the imperial relationships with the Kurds is also reflected in Safavid sources. Eskendar Beg Monshi, the chronicler of Shah Abbas I, mentions the Kurds several times throughout his vast and impressive chronicle. He first mentions a case of treachery by the Kurds in the border region. He explains that a group of Kurds who lived between Van and the Azerbaijan border would “attach themselves to the saddle straps of one of the rulers in the area and claim to be his retainers, but their real motive was to stir up trouble.”<sup>61</sup> These men professed loyalty to the Safavid Shah Isma’il II (r. 1576-1578) upon his rise to the throne, but after his death, they saw the distress of the Safavid realm and went to Van to incite the Ottomans to strike and start a war.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the rest of his narrative of this event the Kurds are always referred to as untrustworthy, treacherous, and dishonorable.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear through these accounts that the frontier politics of the Kurdish tribes frustrated both of the imperial centers, as both Eskendar Beg Monshi and Mustafa Ali express similarly negative sentiments towards the Kurds in their texts. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that some prominent Kurds served the Safavid state, including Şerefhan Bitlisi, only to later defect to the Ottoman state. Şerefhan was granted the title of ‘Supreme commander of the Kurds’ by the Safavid Shah Isma’il II, entitling him to be the one “responsible at the royal court for representing all the princes and rulers of Kurdistan, Luristan and Guran as well as the Kurdish tribes.”<sup>64</sup> After this post, Şerefhan was appointed the Safavid governor of Nakhchivan, but only three months later he defected to the Ottomans, with the help of the Ottoman governor of Van, to

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<sup>61</sup> Eskendar Beg Monshi, *History of Shah ‘Abbas the Great*, Volume I, trans. Roger Savory (Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), 347.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 347-349.

<sup>64</sup> Djene Rhys Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s Sharaḥnama: Kurdish Ethno-Politics in the Early Modern World, Its Meaning and Legacy,” in *Iranian Studies*, 45:6, 801.

serve in his ancestral home of Bitlis.<sup>65</sup> It appears that Şerefhan was politically astute to defect at a time in which the Safavid future was uncertain since the Ottoman state was on the rise. This is perhaps the incident that Eskendar Beg Monshi references, and it illustrates why some people in the Safavid court distrusted Kurdish loyalty.

### 2.1.1 *Abdal Khan of Bitlis and the Empire*

The city of Bitlis was ruled by the khan of Bitlis as a *Hükümet*, the term used to denote an autonomous government within the empire.<sup>66</sup> A *Hükümet* differed from other provincial structures in that it “neither paid taxes to the Ottoman state nor provided regular military forces.”<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, a *Hükümet* had freedom in its internal affairs, and all the Ottoman state required in return for autonomy was imperial loyalty of the regional population in its clash with the Safavids.<sup>68</sup>

In the seventeenth century, the first major episode in imperial relations with the khan of Bitlis occurred when the Ottoman sultan visited Bitlis while on military campaign. Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623-1640) personally led his army on a campaign to retake Yerevan and Baghdad from the Safavid Empire beginning in 1635 and ending with the final conquest of Baghdad in 1638.<sup>69</sup> It was in 1635 that Sultan Murad IV visited Bitlis and met with khan of Bitlis, Abdal khan.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State...*, 57.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>69</sup> A.H. De Groot, “Murad IV,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol VII, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, Ch.Pellat. (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 597-598.

<sup>70</sup> This meeting is cited in two accounts. The first is a small note in Kara Çelebizade Abdülaziz Efendi, *Tarihçe-i Feth-i Revan ve Bağdad* [A Short History of the Conquest of Yervan and Baghdad], Transcribed by Nermin Yıldırım (Istanbul: Master’s thesis at Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Univeristy, 2005), 14. The second is Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatname* [Book of Travels]. See *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname*, Ed. Trans. Robert Dankoff (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 61, 157-159.

This meeting is recorded in passing by the contemporary author Kara Çelebizade Abdülaziz Efendi who wrote a chronicle of Murad IV's Yerevan and Baghdad campaigns.<sup>71</sup>

This connection is important because it provides further information, albeit minute, on the empire's interaction with Abdal Khan, an individual about whom almost all of the information comes from one source. That source, which constitutes the basis of this chapter, is the *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) by the Ottoman Istanbulite traveler Evliya Çelebi (1611-1682).<sup>72</sup> Evliya Çelebi's *Book of Travels* provides a vivid glimpse of the Ottoman Empire during the mid-seventeenth-century. What is important for this study are Evliya's descriptions of his time in Eastern Anatolia, particularly his encounters with Abdal Khan.<sup>73</sup> In this account, Evliya Çelebi first writes about the meeting between Abdal Khan and Murad IV, information that was relayed to Evliya Çelebi by his patron Melek Ahmed Pasha. Melek Ahmed Pasha witnessed the meeting while he was in the retinue of the sultan during the sultan's visit to Bitlis in 1635.<sup>74</sup>

Evliya Çelebi explains that when Murad IV was returning from conquering Yerevan, he stopped in Bitlis and stayed with Abdal Khan.<sup>75</sup> He details how the Sultan was so pleased with his stay with the khan that he granted Abdal Khan more lands so that the khan would be able to collect taxes.<sup>76</sup> The favor that Sultan Murad IV showed to Abdal Khan stands in stark contrast to later episodes between the khan and the sultan. This moment of their relationship presents an

<sup>71</sup> Kara Çelebizade Abdülaziz Efendi, *Tarihçe-i Feth-i Revan ve Bağdad* [A Short History of the Conquest of Yervan and Baghdad], Transcribed by Nermin Yıldırım (Istanbul: Master's thesis at Mimar Sinan Güzel Sanatlar Univeristy, 2005)14.

<sup>72</sup> For the explanation on the life of Evliya Çelebi see Rhoads Murphey, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman: Melek Ahmed Pasha (1588-1662) As Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), "Historical Introduction," 2.

<sup>73</sup> See Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

image of a grateful patron and a loyal subject; this image corresponds to several depictions to be discussed further in the chapter.

Also in his writing, Evliya Çelebi describes the degree of autonomy that the khan of Bitlis maintained after this imperial visit. He states that the khan of Bitlis had an “independent governorship” and that “instead of (having) imperial domains granted by the sultan, he has his own private resources.”<sup>77</sup> Additionally, he states that for Abdal Khan Bitlis “is wholly his autonomous governorship...and he has a very large territory.”<sup>78</sup> These accounts support the assumption that Bitlis was a powerful autonomous polity during the mid-seventeenth century, while ultimately still remaining under the control of the Ottoman sultan. In essence, the picture painted during this period surrounding Murad IV’s campaign against the Safavids is one of a harmonious relationship between the autonomous khan and his imperial patron.

### 2.1.2 *The Autonomy and Power of Bitlis*

In order to better locate the khan of Bitlis within historical sociopolitical/religious/cultural context, it is important to discuss the various local dynamics that the Empire faced in the seventeenth-century. In Bitlis, the Rojeki tribes of Kurds were the elite within the city. They were known more for their intellectual abilities than for their warfare, as observed by Evliya Çelebi.<sup>79</sup> While the Rojeki were not known for their courage or military might, they held sway over other regional Kurdish tribes. Their power extended over other tribes such as the Mordki, a tribe that came to constitute the military power of Bitlis.<sup>80</sup> The complex web of relations among

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>79</sup> I use the term ‘tribe’ here due to lack of another word used in the literature. It is utilized by both Bruinessen (see his *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*, 164) and Özoğlu (State-Tribe Relations.)

<sup>80</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992) 164.



the tribal confederation in control of Bitlis led to inter-tribal conflicts over emirate succession.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, this intra-confederation strife was mitigated in the mid-seventeenth-century due to the political strength of Abdal Khan who was a member of the Rojeki tribe.

The khan of Bitlis controlled a large sum of wealth due to the various taxes he was able to collect in his region. These taxes, after the addition of more land granted by Sultan Murad IV, amounted to more than the whole tax revenue of the imperial province of Van, which was close to Bitlis and nominally responsible for Ottoman influence in Bitlis.<sup>82</sup> Receiving so much money due to these taxes created an issue that eventually led to imperial intervention later in the seventeenth-century. As the khan functioned as a locally autonomous leader, it was his opinion that he was able to impose any taxes he desired. Abdal Khan collected the usual head tax (*cizye*) from the non-Muslims within his region, but he also created road tolls from caravans passing through as Bitlis, a major trade corridor.<sup>83</sup> These multiple sources of tax revenue caused friction in the region especially through his collection of taxes from regional sheep herders.<sup>84</sup> These acts brought him into conflict with imperial authorities in the region. The confrontation between the khan and the empire became a struggle for regional authority, be it imperial or local. This is because many of these pastoral groups with flocks were migrating between Bitlis and the Ottoman imperial provinces of Van and Erzurum, thus their respective jurisdictions' in matters of taxation became unclear.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Abdal Khan's excessive taxing stood in the face of imperial authority.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>82</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 59.

<sup>83</sup> Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 167.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

What is more striking is that in order for Abdal Kahn to collect his taxes from these regional pastoral groups, he would have them chased them down by his soldiers even if the chase entered into Ottoman imperial provinces.<sup>86</sup> One tale recounted by Evliya Çelebi describes how ten thousand of Abdal Khan's men moved into the region of the Kurdish emir of Melazgird.<sup>87</sup> This city was under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman province of Erzurum, yet Abdal Khan's men reportedly took forty thousand sheep from the region and killed three hundred of the emir's men.<sup>88</sup> When Abdal Khan was informed of this by the governor of Van, he plainly stated that he was collecting taxes on flocks.<sup>89</sup> Evliya Çelebi recounts that the khan would even later claim that "this is Kurdistan, it is a law of the house of Abbas [the Abbasids from which the khan claimed his authority] to raid our neighbors."<sup>90</sup>

This example demonstrates the various issues that arose between the Ottoman Empire and the autonomous emir of Bitlis, Abdal Khan. The khan's autonomy extended further than simple tax collecting rights. As the Ottoman state also ceded control of Islamic judicial matters to the khan. The khan of Bitlis was able to personally appoint the *kadi* (local judge) of Bitlis, a highly unusual right for a governor because the *kadi* was normally appointed by the imperial authorities.<sup>91</sup> In the rest of the empire, the *kadi* enjoyed a large degree of independence from local officials in their decision-making. In Bitlis, however, this was not the case; the *kadi*'s salary was even controlled by the khan.<sup>92</sup> This degree of influence meant the local judge was entirely at the whims of the khan of Bitlis.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. And see Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 165-167.

<sup>89</sup> Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 167.

<sup>90</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 175-177.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

When it came to how and which religious laws were interpreted in the courts, the khan of Bitlis also had an impressive degree of autonomy in his relation to the empire at large. The Ottoman state endorsed the interpretation of Islamic law according to the Hanafi School, one of the four accepted schools of Islamic law which was popular in Western Anatolia and the Ottoman Balkans.<sup>93</sup> In other cities in the empire, where the majority of the population was non-Hanafi, the legal experts (*mufti*) could follow the rulings of any of the other three schools in some cases.<sup>94</sup> This is what makes Bitlis remarkable because the emirate was allowed greater local autonomy in its judicial authority and legal school when compared to other major non-Hanafi locals in the empire as in Egypt or Syria. This is further mirrored by the fact that the local legal expert (*mufti*) followed the Shafi'i school.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the executive, judicial, and religious matters in Bitlis were under the jurisdiction of the khan of Bitlis, and when the khan extended these powers outside of his domain, he came into conflict with the Ottoman Empire.

The strenuous relationship between the Kurdish emirate of Bitlis and the Ottoman Empire highlights two important issues. Firstly, the emirate and the collection of Kurdish tribes that made up the political and military structure of Bitlis were powerful enough to maintain large degrees of autonomy in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands due to their importance as the bulwark of Ottoman authority against the Safavids. Secondly, the fact that the Ottomans recognized and accepted this degree of autonomy demonstrates the level to which they needed these local centers of power to maintain control in the dynamic borderlands with the Safavids. These two reflections help to contextualize the elite imperial perspective on the Kurds, who represented both the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

burgeoning local power that needed to be stemmed and also the steadfast co-religionists who were the bulwark against the Safavid Empire.

## 2.2 Confessional Boundaries

In the late sixteenth century (around 1593), the court historian Talikizade enumerated some twenty qualities of the Ottoman dynasty which proved its supremacy over other states.<sup>96</sup> One of these many points states that the Ottoman sultan rules over a “multiconfessional empire” and that “no other sultanate possessed a capital assembling such a variety of religions and races.”<sup>97</sup>

Beyond this rosy view of Ottoman confessional relations, one must assume that this description does not include a space for intra-confessional competitors. This passage thus begs the question: how did the imperial center view the intra-confessional rivalry in Eastern Anatolia between the Ottomans and Safavids, and how were each of these groups seen by the empire in relation with one another?

The label of ‘Kurd’ was often juxtaposed with the label of ‘*Kizilbaş*’ in the seventeenth century. The *Kizilbaş*, literally meaning ‘red head’ in Turkish, were called thus because they wore distinctive red turbans that had twelve points on them.<sup>98</sup> The twelve points represented the main tenet of Twelver Shi’ism, which only recognizes the legitimacy of twelve Imams who were divinely ordained leaders. Another tenet of Twelver Shi’ism was the belief that the twelfth Imam went into hiding and would return at the end of times.<sup>99</sup> With the rise of the Safavid

<sup>96</sup> Gülrü Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 30.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>98</sup> Roger Savory, “Kizil-Bash,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. V, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 243-244.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 243-244. See also P. Darley-Doran, “Safawids,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VIII, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 777.

Empire in the early sixteenth-century, Twelver Shi'ism gained political legitimacy.<sup>100</sup> The main Safavid military units in Eastern Anatolia who fought against the Ottoman Empire were the *Kizilbaş* tribes.<sup>101</sup> While the Kurds had a more ambiguous relationship with the Safavids and the *Kizilbaş*, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, the imperial narrative of Kurdish Sunnism was present even at the onset of Ottoman-Kurdish relations. This narrative was constructed by Idris Bidlisi in the sixteenth century in order to present the Kurds in such a way that would allow the Kurdish emirates to enjoy some degree of autonomy due to this perceived ingrained loyalty to the Sunni Ottoman state.<sup>102</sup>

### 2.2.1 Aziz Efendi: Religion, Empire and the Kurds

Aziz Efendi, an Ottoman bureaucrat, wrote a *Nasihatname* (mirror for princes literature) for Sultan Murad IV in 1632-1633. There is little known about the details of Aziz Efendi's life beyond his name and his profession. One third of his *Nasihatname* deals specifically with the status and state-sponsorship of the Kurdish emirs in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>103</sup> He states that the Kurds are a “strong barrier along the victorious frontier against the redheads [*Kizilbaş*].”<sup>104</sup> Aziz Efendi then places the Kurds in the imperial narrative of the Ottoman state by claiming that when Sultan Selim I came to Diyarbakir, and sent a message to the Kurds of the city that said “you, while being of true descent and believers in the Sunni creed, had no greater enemy than the hell-bound heretics and the irreligious hypocrites” and that “the Ottoman Sultan...shares your religion and

<sup>100</sup> P. Darley-Doran, “Safawids,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VIII, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 765-766, 777.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 765-766.

<sup>102</sup> Ebru Sönmez, *Idris-i Bidlisi*, 81-85.

<sup>103</sup> Aziz Efendi, “Kanun-Name-i Sultani Li 'Aziz Efendi [Aziz Efendi's Book of Sultanic Laws],” in *Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures*, ed. Şinasi Tekin and Gönül Alpay Tekin, trans. Rhoads Murphey (Harvard: Office of the University Publisher at Harvard University, 1985), vii.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

belongs to the same sect.”<sup>105</sup> Through this example, it is clearly demonstrated that Aziz Efendi constructed a story of how the Kurds were loyal, not just to the Sultan but also to the Sunni doctrine of the Ottoman state. This depiction of the Kurds was specifically vital in the conflict with the Twelver Shi'a Safavid state in the seventeenth century.

Aziz Efendi used his arguments of Kurdish Sunni and political loyalty to urge the Ottoman state to grant more autonomy and restore balance to Ottoman-Kurdish relations in order to prevent Kurdish emirs from rebelling and turning to the Safavid state.<sup>106</sup> His account provides a striking example of how administrators of the Ottoman state saw the Kurdish tribes as being Sunni. It also demonstrates how confessional loyalty was directly related to imperial loyalty. Thus, the label of ‘Kurd’ went together with label ‘Sunni’ and loyalty to the Ottoman state while the label ‘*Kizilbaş*’ implied a “Shi’i” allegiance and loyalty to the Safavid state.

### 2.2.2 The Kurd and the *Kizilbaş*

An interesting account is recorded in the seventeenth-century chronicle of Ibrahim Peçevi (1572-1650), who was from the city of Pécs in modern-day Hungary. The story, written around 1640, presents two opposing parties: a Kurd and a *Kizilbaş*. These two men are only described in this story by these labels. The narrative is particularly striking for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates that, from the central Ottoman perspective, a Kurd and a *Kizilbaş* are oppositional categories. Secondly, the account favors the Kurd and is critical of the *Kizilbaş*. While the story does not specifically mention religion as a feature in this oppositional relationship, it is implied through the labels used. In essence, the story is a morality tale written amidst Peçevi’s discussion

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 36-38.

of the *Kizilbaş*. It is a tale to warn those who cross the lines of imperial and confessional loyalty, and provides a script for the appropriate response to those who are labeled as *Kizilbaş* or Kurd.

The story presented by Ibrahim Peçevi describes how a “Kurd together with his beautiful wife became the captives of a *Kizilbaş*” in the city of Mardin.<sup>107</sup> The account revolves around the relationship of the wife with both the Kurd and the *Kizilbaş*. Peçevi starts the tale by highlighting the bravery of the Kurds, thereby casting a positive light on the Kurdish protagonist. As the story progresses, the Kurd and his wife are separated by the *Kizilbaş*. The Kurd is taken away, and the *Kizilbaş* takes the Kurd’s wife to bed. At this point in the story, Peçevi writes that the wife consented sexually to the *Kizilbaş*. This part of the story presents the wife as being complicit in the *Kizilbaş*’ crime, and thusly, knowingly betraying both her religious and communal loyalties. The Kurd is unaware of this betrayal and returns at night to rescue his wife while the *Kizilbaş* was away fulfilling his military duties. When he arrives, his wife tells him that she slept with the *Kizilbaş* under duress. The reunited couple leaves together, stealing the *Kizilbaş*’ horse and his food. When the *Kizilbaş* returns home, he finds that the Kurd has taken back his wife and vows to kill the Kurd and take back the woman. When he catches up with the Kurd, they fight. During the ensuing battle, the wife joins the side of the *Kizilbaş*. The Kurd still manages to win the struggle and kills the *Kizilbaş*. Upon this victory, the Kurd takes his wife back to the Kurdish tribes where he relays his story. With this news, “all the tribes of the Kurds” gather and decide to execute the wife in the “most severe way.”<sup>108</sup>

The story of the Kurd and the *Kizilbaş* reveals many things about the imperial perceptions of these two labels and confessional boundaries. This is most obviously demonstrated in the fate

<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim Peçevi, *Peçevi Tarihi* [The History of Peçevi] (317b-351a), Transcription of text by Zuhay Kayayurt (Istanbul: Masters Thesis at Marmara University, 2005), 35-36.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 36.

of the wife who transgressed these boundaries and was subsequently punished by the respective community for her ‘crime.’ This account demarcates the boundaries of confessional communities by pointing out the confessional other (the *Kizilbaş*) and warning those who cross the boundaries (the wife). It also is a story of praise of the courageous Kurd, who is assumed to be Sunni and wins the day by defeating the *Kizilbaş* and bringing his wife to communal justice for her transgressions of these boundaries. Additionally, the story also demonstrates the belief that following the *Kizilbaş* will lead to defeat and death at the hands of a true believer, in this case a Kurd. In this way, the story also acts as a way to reaffirm Sunni superiority over the heretical *Kizilbaş* in the context of Peçevi’s discussion of the *Kizilbaş*.

In Ottoman sources, the confessional loyalty of the *Kizilbaş* in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands marked their place in the inter-imperial conflict. Yet their negative depiction in some of the Ottoman imperial narratives of the region seems to have been related not only to their confessional loyalty but also to their geographic position in the volatile and uncertain borderland between the two empires. This is evidenced by the relationship between the Ottomans and other Shi’a groups that have been characterized differently in the more stable region of Ottoman Lebanon and also in the more autonomous regions surrounding Ottoman Baghdad.<sup>109</sup> It is claimed that the Ottomans “did not seek to suppress [Shi’ism] in regions where the majority of the population was Shi’a.”<sup>110</sup> It has been argued that this is because the Empire preferred peace and security rather than “enforcing religious conformity on its Muslim subjects.”<sup>111</sup> This brings up the question of why the language of confessional strife was so important in making sense of the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands of Eastern Anatolia.

<sup>109</sup> Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30-31.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. For more information on Shiites in the Ottoman Empire see- Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule: 1516-1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



### 2.2.3 Evliya Çelebi and Kurdish Confessional Loyalty

The examples from Aziz Efendi and Ibrahim Peçevi demonstrate the importance of confessional loyalty in Ottoman Eastern Anatolia from the imperial perspective. Evliya Çelebi's account adds a deeper layer to the discussion. The account of Evliya Çelebi cites not only the Sunni nature of the Kurds but also the Shafi'i bent of the population as well. Evliya Çelebi describes the Rojeki tribe of Kurds in Bitlis as people who "practice the Shafi'i rite, and all are pure in faith and practice," adding that they are "men of learning and culture."<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the Rojeki "use henna on their hands and feet and beards, following the practice of the Prophet," thus implying a degree of piety.<sup>113</sup> While Evliya Çelebi provides these various praises of the Kurds' piety and details how they follow the Shafi'i school of Islam, he provides several other passages decrying their lack of knowledge when it comes to religious practices.

While traveling through Diyarbakir, Evliya exclaims that "this is Kurdistan; there are not many people who know the Quran by heart, as is the case in Arabia."<sup>114</sup> Their knowledge of Islam is furthermore brought into question in an interesting way: a game of polo. Evliya Çelebi tells a story about groups of Kurds and Persians who were fond of the game of polo (*çevgan*).<sup>115</sup> He explains that the game was "strictly forbidden," and the practitioners of Islamic law in the other regions of the Ottoman Empire disapproved of the game.<sup>116</sup> Polo was considered to be disrespectful to the martyrs of Karbala in the Islamic tradition. He states that Caliph Yezid, the villain of the Karbala story, martyred Imam Huseyn and others on the plain of Karbala and

<sup>112</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 152-153, 63.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>114</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Diyarbakir: The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname*, Ed. Trans. Martin van Bruinessen and Hendrik Boeschoten (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 145.

<sup>115</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 150-151.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 150.

then took their heads and rolled them on the ground with mallets from their horses and started to play polo.<sup>117</sup> This story is used to highlight the reason why the game is disrespectful. He then explains that other regions in the empire understand the level of disrespect. To illustrate this, he mentions that in 1680, the governor of Egypt ordered a great memorial gathering on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Karbala to commemorate the tragic event, and Evliya Çelebi emphasizes that polo was strictly forbidden in Egypt because they have respect for Karbala.<sup>118</sup>

Evliya Çelebi cites that “the story is recorded quite explicitly in several Arab chronicles” and that “the Persians and the Kurds are not familiar with it, and so they indulge in polo.”<sup>119</sup> This episode is fascinating for two reasons. The first being that in modern Shi’ism, the martyrdom at Karbala is one the most important memorialized events, and Karbala has served as an important place for Shi’a pilgrimage.<sup>120</sup> For Evliya Çelebi to state that it is the Sunni Ottomans who respect the martyrs more than the Shi’a Persians (Safavids) should push scholars to look deeper into the early modern Sunni-Shi’a battleground for religious memory in the age of confessionalization and examine how the Sunni doctrine ‘was not going to let’ Shi’ism have an immediate monopoly on various important Islamic figures or events, such as Ali or the plain of Karbala.

Secondly, and more importantly for this study, Evliya Çelebi explains that the Kurds depart from standard Ottoman Sunni practice in this instance because they are not familiar with the appropriate texts in Arabic which discuss the offensive nature of polo. This lapse is presented as a passive mistake, more due to a lack of learning in Islam, just as with not memorizing the Quran. Here the Kurds are not presented as active heretics but rather as victims of an improper

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 150-151.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>120</sup> *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. VII, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 464.

education. These descriptions provide a more nuanced glimpse into how the Kurds were viewed by elites from the imperial center. They demonstrate that even though the confessional boundaries were very much tied to ethnic labels during this period, the need to discipline through confessional education was still vital in order for these groups to practice Islam in the ‘proper’ way. These groups had diverged from standard practices due to a lack of understanding and not due to active heresy, like the *Kizilbaş*.

#### 2.2.4 What Did Confessional Loyalty Mean?

The Ottoman imperial chronicles essentially demonstrate that the conflict in the borderlands became simplified from the imperial perspective: if you were a *Kizilbaş*, then you were Shi’a and therefore loyal to the Safavids, but if you were a Kurd, then you were Sunni and loyal to the Ottomans. What is important here is not what the local realities of these terms were but how the imperial elites used these labels to navigate and denote the web of loyalties with which the empire interacted. For imperial agents saw the region through the dichotomy of rebellion and loyalty. Thus, the labels they used were defined by either the notion of loyalty or by the notion of rebellion (disloyalty).

### 2.3 Loyalty and Rebellion

#### 2.3.1 *The Rebellion of Abdal Khan*

In the year 1655, Evliya Çelebi reports that Abdal Khan, Khan of Bitlis, rebelled against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>121</sup> This rebellion was the watershed moment that brought the past crimes of Abdal Khan against the Ottoman state to light. Evliya Çelebi’s narrative builds a case against

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<sup>121</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 171-175.

Abdal Khan that lists his past transgressions, culminating in a confrontation between the Ottomans and Abdal Khan in 1655. Abdal Khan's disloyalty challenged the imperial fiction of the Kurds as the bulwark of the Sunni Ottoman Empire in the east.

In fact, the story of Abdal Khan's insubordination and suspect loyalty to the Ottomans begins almost immediately after he is first encountered in the chronicles. After the 1635 occasion where he hosted Sultan Murad IV in Bitlis and was greatly rewarded for his service, he managed to insult the Ottoman sultan some three years later, according to Evliya Çelebi. He explains that while Murad IV was returning from his victory in Baghdad, he stayed in Diyarbakir, a city close to Bitlis. Because he was close to Bitlis, the sultan expected Abdal Khan to travel to pay his respects to the victorious sultan, but Abdal Khan did not come.<sup>122</sup> Sultan Murad IV was offended by this snub and saw it as an act of treachery. The sultan ordered the newly appointed governor, Melek Ahmed Pasha, the patron of Evliya Çelebi, to "take vengeance upon" Abdal Khan. In this instance, Abdal Khan sent a large bribe of gold to Melek Ahmed Pasha and so he "turned a blind eye."<sup>123</sup>

The list of transgressions goes further as it is claimed that Abdal Khan moved into Erzurum province and raided sheep from a Kurdish pastoral group claiming he was collecting a "toll."<sup>124</sup> In this event, a warning was sent to the khan of Bitlis and he replied that he was not in Ottoman jurisdiction, so he was free to do as he pleased. This event led Melek Ahmed Pasha, then governor of Erzurum, to march against the khan. Just as Melek Ahmed Pasha was about to begin the journey towards Bitlis, he was transferred from his governorship. After this second incident, the rebellion of 1655 is described by Evliya Çelebi. At this point, Melek Ahmed Pasha

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

had been appointed as governor of Van, which is significant because the province had official oversight over the emirate of Bitlis and Abdal Khan. Melek Ahmed Pasha was now in a position to strike at the khan after not being able to punish Abdal Khan for his previous offenses, at least as described by Evliya Çelebi, Melek Ahmed Pasha's protégé.

It is within the context of this rebellion that Evliya Çelebi's description of the Kurds begins to change, just as their loyalty to the state in the narrative begins to shift. While talking to Abdal Khan, Evliya Çelebi exclaims that "this is Kurdistan, and your subjects are the rebellious Rozhiki [Rojeki] tribe."<sup>125</sup> It is at this time that the 'rebellion' begins. After hearing about several transgressions, Melek Ahmed Pasha sends a letter to Abdal Khan telling him that he hopes the khan's "Kurdish obstinacy" will not get the better of him.<sup>126</sup> The khan of Bitlis sent his reply boldly stating that "our horses do not drink the water from Van!"<sup>127</sup> This is an illustration of how Evliya Çelebi relates the symbolic disloyalty of the rebellious leader of Bitlis. For both of these symbolic actions of loyalty, using the water of Van for their horses and paying respects to a passing sultan, had rebellious implications; it was through these symbols of loyalty that the empire controlled and monitored the borderlands.

Melek Ahmed Pasha decided to consult the notables of Van and other Kurdish emirs on the actions of Abdal Khan.<sup>128</sup> They complained about Abdal Khan saying he "is a heretic deserving of execution—a Shi'i and Hurufi." During this meeting, a courier from Erzurum province arrived in Van and proclaimed that "the khan of Bitlis, that Shi'i, who is under your jurisdiction, conducted a surprise raid...[on the] emir of Melazgird...decree a campaign against that rebel bandit." Suddenly with Abdal Khan's disloyalty on full display, he is labeled as a Shi'i

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

and a rebel bandit. It is here, in its clearest form, that the connection between loyalty and confession in the Ottoman borderlands becomes apparent. Abdal Khan is disloyal towards the imperial authority, and he is also seen as disloyal toward the confessional order and as such, is labeled as a Shi'i heretic.

These labels of disloyalty went beyond the individual of Abdal Khan, and soon the ideas about loyalty of the Kurds and their association with Sunni Islam are revised. Evliya Çelebi depicts the Kurds following Abdal Khan as the “impure Yezidi Kurds, stained with rebellion and corruption...who have exited from the four (Sunni) schools and mingle with the errant sects.”<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, he claims the Rojeki were among these tribes of Yezidi Kurds, which is contrary to his description of them as pious Sunni Muslims before the rebellion erupted.<sup>130</sup> The use of the label “Yezidi” is important here as this religious sect was prominent among Kurds and was considered heretical.<sup>131</sup> The Yezidi religion is described as syncretic, incorporating many Christian, Islamic, and ancient Persian beliefs, which led to their persecution and association with heresy.<sup>132</sup>

Finally, Melek Ahmed Pasha led the “Muslim army of Van” against the “Rozhiki [Rojeki] Yezidi rabble.”<sup>133</sup> The battle was confusing as “both the Khan's and our own Kurdish rabble wore the same kind of multi-colored headbands and motley shapiks (jackets), like the red-headed *Kizilbaş*.”<sup>134</sup> This is interesting because it demonstrates that on the local level, the visual distinctions between a supposedly heretical Kurd and a *Kizilbaş* became almost indecipherable.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> P.G. Kreyenbroek, “Yazidi,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. XI, eds. P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, (Leiden: Brill, 2002) 313-316.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 313-314.

<sup>133</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis*, 177.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 245.

The confusion highlights how incompatible these strict imperial distinctions were but also how flexible these imperial distinctions could be.

Beyond this confusion, Evliya Çelebi recounts how the Khan's troops "fell prey to the sword at the hands of the Hanefi Muslims...[and] all the Yezidi brigands had their heads cut off."<sup>135</sup> Here, we can see that the Hanefi School of Islamic law was used as a loyalty marker; perhaps, this is a hint at how the Ottoman elite saw the unique autonomous Shafi'i courts in Bitlis prior to the rebellion. After this the Ottomans install Abdal Khan's son Ziyaeddin as khan of Bitlis.<sup>136</sup> However, soon afterwards, Abdal Khan escapes and then returns.<sup>137</sup> Soon after Abdal Khan returned to Bitlis his astonished son begged for forgiveness from his father, ultimately allowing his father to resume his position as khan.<sup>138</sup> However, ten years later, in 1665, Abdal Khan is removed from office as recorded later in the seventeenth century by Ottoman court chronicler Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha.<sup>139</sup> He explains that after this new context of rebellion in 1665, the governor of Van, Seyyid Yusuf Pasha, removed the "ruler of Bitlis who is the villain and robber Abdal" and one of Abdal Khan's other sons, Bedreddin, was appointed as khan of Bitlis.<sup>140</sup>

The detailed account by Evliya Çelebi on the fate of the khan of Bitlis tells a fascinating story of how the Ottoman state viewed loyalty in Eastern Anatolia and how this concept changed over time. It shows how ethnic labels such as 'Kurd' acted as 'demarcators of loyalty' and were changed frequently due to the imperial-local relationship at hand. Moreover, the explicit

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 245, 247.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 277, 343.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha, *Abdurrahman Abdi Paşa vekayinamesi: tahlil ve metin tenkidi* [The Chronicle of Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha: Analysis and Textual Criticism], transcribed by Fahri Çetin Derin, (Istanbul: Thesis at Istanbul University, 1993), 199.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

relationship between imperial loyalty and identifiatory labels, showcased in Evliya Çelebi's work, demonstrates the real power these labels had in society. Overall, these accounts illustrate that these markers of loyalty were vital for the legitimization of force and conquest within the Ottoman Empire

## 2.4 Chapter Conclusion

The imperial relationship with the region of Eastern Anatolia in the seventeenth century was a difficult one. Imperial power revolved around maintaining the loyalty of many of the groups aligned with the empire in the region. When this loyalty turned to rebellion, the empire had to respond either by co-opting local elites or by crushing any transgression before it spread. This changing relationship is revealed in how identifiatory labels were used in both moments of peace and moments of imperial vengeance. What is more fascinating than this is how these various labels came to represent the multilayered and enmeshed loyalties of the region, specifically in the context of confessional loyalty. Ethnic terms, such as 'Kurd,' were associated with two extremes of confessional loyalty, either the steadfast Sunni or the rebellious Shi'a, and these extremes coincide with various groups' positions in the imperial borderlands.

The unique position occupied by many Kurdish groups in the borderland region highlights the need of the Ottomans to maintain the loyalty of these groups in order to maintain the borderlands. The concessions by the imperial center are apparent in the degree of autonomy enjoyed by many of the Kurdish emirates, specifically the khanate of Bitlis. This autonomy could only be maintained if loyalty to the empire was reflected in appropriate confessional affiliation. Confessional affiliation, in light of the Safavid and *Kızılbaş* challenge to Ottoman hegemony in religious sphere, came to be a demarcator of loyalty and a tool by which the Ottomans could assess the complicated situation in the Eastern Anatolian borderlands. In the example of Aziz



Efendi, confessional loyalty is conflated with ethnic labels, and in the story told by Ibrahim Peçevi, the ethnic label of ‘Kurd’ appears to be juxtaposed with the socio-confessional label of ‘*Kizilbaş*.’

These various examples converge in the tale of Abdal Khan told by Evliya Çelebi. His story demonstrates how these confessionally charged ethnic labels were more flexible than the other examples demonstrate. The account of Abdal Khan shows the two sides of the imperial relationship with Eastern Anatolia. It demonstrates how the confessional loyalty of a particular group comes into question precisely when they show their disloyalty to the empire. The empire was not concerned with our modern ideas of ‘identity,’ but rather, with the symbols and demarcators of loyalty.

### 3 The Regional Perspective

The imperial perspectives on the aspects of ethnic, imperial, and confessional loyalties for the Kurds of Eastern Anatolia only tell half of the story. This chapter aims to uncover how regional and local actors from Eastern Anatolia describe and utilize ethnic, confessional, and imperial labels of loyalty in the seventeenth century. While the imperial chapter could not shed any light on how Kurds fashioned their own loyalties, this chapter will explore the works of seventeenth-century Kurdish authors in order to understand how they saw themselves and the ethnic label of “Kurd” in the context of the inter-imperial struggle. As we will see, the regional practices of fashioning self and others are even more complicated than the imperial use of identificatory labels when describing the region.

#### 3.1 Armenian Perceptions of the Kurds and Confessional Loyalty

Before analyzing the Kurdish authors, it is vital to first discuss how Eastern Anatolian Armenians discussed the Kurds in terms of ethnic, imperial, and confessional loyalty, as their accounts provide a local perspective neither Kurdish nor imperial. The early-seventeenth-century Armenian chronicle by Arak’el is an important source that describes the changing loyalties of the Kurdish emirs and their relationships between the Safavids and the Ottomans. For example, Arak’el describes the defeat of an Ottoman army that attacked the Safavid Shah Abbas and mentions a high-profile Kurdish defector in Shah Abbas’ army, Ulemaoğlu Haybat Bey.<sup>141</sup> He also details how Ghazi Khan of “the Kurdish people” and a “grand prince” of the Kurds requested the Shah to save him and promised him loyalty because the Ottomans “wanted to kill

<sup>141</sup>Vardapet Arak'el, *The History of Vardapet Arak'el of Tabriz*, trans. George Bournoutian (California: Mazda Publishers, 2005), 19.

him and rule over his principality.”<sup>142</sup> This disloyalty to the Ottoman state prompted the Ottoman governor Ali Pasha to march against Ghazi Khan in Tabriz, but this campaign ultimately failed.<sup>143</sup> However, Arak’el also comments on the loyalty of several Kurdish leaders to the Ottomans. He states that the “great prince of the Kurds, whom they call Mir Sharaf” gathered with the Ottoman army at Erzurum to help the Ottomans fight the Shah.<sup>144</sup> Another more interesting example of how confessional loyalties could be confused or changed is demonstrated when Ottoman troops surrender the city of Nakhichevan to Zu'l-Faqar Kahn, a general of Shah Abbas.<sup>145</sup> Arak’el states that during the surrender “the soldiers, who had come to the Khan, swiftly took off their Ottoman uniforms, cut off their long beards, put on *Kizilbaş* uniforms and began to resemble regular *Kizilbaş*.”<sup>146</sup> Whether these Ottoman soldiers were Kurds or not, this anecdote demonstrates the ambiguity of these groups when it came to confessional, imperial and possibly ethnic loyalty.

Arak'el further explains that after Shah Abbas in 1606 took the region of Ganja from the Ottomans, there lived a Kurdish tribe called the “Jekirlu.”<sup>147</sup> He describes how “they followed the religion and customs of the Ottomans, called the Sunni. The Shah ordered that they all be gathered...the Shah then ordered all of them be killed, men and women, old people and children. Even the infants were cut and slaughtered with sharp swords.”<sup>148</sup> This is a contradictory picture of the cross-confessional mobility demonstrated in the previous examples and therefore helps to further depict the complicated implications of confessional loyalties; at one moment a confession is a death warrant for a whole community, and at another, a mere change of clothes.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

This ambiguous nature of confessional loyalty is also briefly mentioned in the seventeenth-century Armenian merchant journal of Zak'aria of Agulis. He highlights several cases in which Armenians would convert to Islam (described as “turning Turk” and “turning Kurd”), including one story where the individual converted but still “behaved like an Armenian, and was buried in the Armenian rite.”<sup>149</sup> Another interesting case is that he mentions an individual named Aghamir K'rdunts who was Armenian, but the author states that “Aghamir was known as the Kurd.”<sup>150</sup> This may be the case that he converted from the Armenian rite to Islam (or the other way?). Nonetheless, it demonstrates the confused nature and ever-changing landscape of confessional and ethnic loyalty in Eastern Anatolia in the seventeenth century.

Another Armenian chronicler of the seventeenth century, Zak'aria of K'anak'er, suggests that the Kurdish emirs were typically more inclined to side with the Ottomans. He notes that when the Shah sent an army against the Kurds and captured some of them, the Shah “gave such a harsh punishment to disgrace the Kurds, because they were the same faith as the Ottomans.”<sup>151</sup> These accounts demonstrate how varied and individualized the relationship between each Kurdish emir and the Safavid and Ottoman states were. It also alerts us to the issue of confessional loyalties which worked in conjunction with imperial and ethnic loyalties.

### 3.2 Vani Mehmed and Feyzullah Efendi

The works of two important seventeenth-century Ottoman intellectual and religious scholars from Eastern Anatolia, Vani Efendi (d. 1685) and his student Feyzullah Efendi (d. 1703), offer a very different—one could say “hybrid” imperio-regional perspective—on Kurdish loyalties. Vani Mehmed Efendi was one of the most influential mosque preachers in the Ottoman

<sup>149</sup>Zak'aria Agulis, *The Journal of Zak'aria of Agulis*, trans. George Bournoutian (California: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 95, 108.

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 128, 99.

<sup>151</sup> Zak'aria of K'anak'er, *The Chronicle of Deacon Zak'aria of K'anak'er*, trans. George Bournoutian (California: Mazda Publishers, 2004), 117.

capital during the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>152</sup> He was born in Van and gained prominence after being brought to Istanbul by Grand Vizier Fazil Ahmed who heard Vani's preaching while in Erzurum and became impressed by it.<sup>153</sup> From Vani's origin in Van and the fact that Ottoman chroniclers included him among the 'religious scholars of Kurdistan,' one can assume that he was likely Kurdish.<sup>154</sup> He states in one of his works that the Turks, often coupled in his narrative with the Kurds, were "victorious over the Arabs" and that the Turks inherited the task of fighting the Christians because the Arabs failed to do so.<sup>155</sup> He also highlights that with the help of the Kurds, the Turks were chosen by God after the successive failures of the Arabs; this is particularly noted in a section discussing the defeat of the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert.<sup>156</sup> Here, we see the labels of 'Kurd' and 'Turk' used to highlight a geographic, as well as confessional, loyalties and superiority in contrast to another label that mixes geographic, life-style and religious implications, that of 'Arab.' It is important for the discussion of confessional loyalties to emphasize that Vani Efendi was one of the central figures of the Kadizadeli movement that paid particular attention to the issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the seventeenth century and was thus more in tune with larger confessional discourses.<sup>157</sup>

Vani's student and son-in-law, Feyzullah Efendi, who also served as the chief jurisprudent of the Empire between the years 1695-1703, provides an interesting perspective on Ottoman relations with the Kurds and their relationship with Islam. Feyzullah Efendi was born and raised

<sup>152</sup> See Mark David Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 209. Also see Vani Mehmed Efendi, '*Ara'is al-Kur'an wa Nafa'is al-Furkan* [Ornaments of the Quran and the Valuables of the Testament], Suleymaniye Library, Yeni Cami 100. 543a-548b. In the original text Vani Mehmed Efendi uses 'ترك' and 'کرد' respectively for Turk and Kurd.

<sup>156</sup> Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, 209.

<sup>157</sup> For discussions of Vani Mehmed Efendi see Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam*, and Derin Terzioğlu, 'Man in the image of God in the Image of the Times: Sufi Self-Narratives and the Dairy of Niyazi-i Misri,' *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002), 139-165.

in Erzurum, a city that played a major role in Eastern Anatolian inter-imperial and intra-imperial dynamics.<sup>158</sup> Feyzullah Efendi's roots may have influenced an intriguing *fetva* (religious opinion) that he issued during his tenure as the chief jurisprudent of the Empire in 1703.<sup>159</sup> The question addressed to Feyzullah stated that there was a "group from the Kurds" on the frontier of the Ottoman Empire who "slanders the wife of the Prophet" and blasphemes other important figures.<sup>160</sup> It is said that this was due to the influence of heretical *Acem* (a term used for Iran). The inquirer then asked if this group should be allowed to continue to follow their heretical practices, to which Feyzullah answered in the affirmative. It is only when the inquirer poses the question of what to do with this group under Sharia law if the sultan orders an attack against them that Feyzullah's tone changes. Feyzullah writes that when the group is in opposition to the Ottoman state, the leading dignitaries of the group should be killed without mercy, while their women and children should be "forced into Islam" rather than enslaved. It is perhaps Feyzullah Efendi's intimate relationship with the region that allows him to grant a degree of confessional ambiguity for populations on the frontier who are Shi'a or who have come directly under the religious influence of Safavid Iran. It is only when the question of disloyalty of this Kurdish group to the Ottoman sultan is raised that the full consequences of apostasy are to be unleashed on the aforementioned population.

This seemingly unique perspective may be influenced by Feyzullah Efendi's background; being an individual from Eastern Anatolia, he understood the practical requirements of imperial inclusion and advocated persecution only when imperial disloyalty has been established.

<sup>158</sup> For an outline of the life of Feyzullah Efendi see Mordtmann, J. H.. "Faizullāh," *Encyclopedia of Islam, First Edition (1913-1936)*. Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Brill Online, 2013.

<sup>159</sup> Şeyhülislam Feyzullah Efendi, *Fetava-yı Feyziye: Şeyhülislam Feyzullah Efendi* [Religious Opinions Pertaining to God's Favor: Şeyhülislam Feyzullah Efendi], Transliterated from Ottoman Turkish by Süleyman Kaya (Istanbul: Klasik, 56. Osmanlı hukuk kitapları; 4. Osmanlılarda hukuk ve toplum; 2, 2009).

However, it is important to note that by the end of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman-Safavid front had stabilized. So, Feyzullah Effendi may be merely reflecting a new imperial prerogative due to the changed circumstances which were less threatening to the state.

### 3.3 Ahmed-i Khani

The famed seventeenth-century Kurdish poet, Ahmed-i Khani provides tantalizing evidence about how ethnic and confessional loyalties were defined by a regional actor. Ahmed-i Khani was born in 1650 in Hakkari, but he spent much of his life in Bayezid and also reportedly lived in other cities of Eastern Anatolia, such as Bitlis, throughout his life.<sup>161</sup> He is particularly famous for three works. The first is the famed versed tragic love story of *Mem u Zin* (1690), which will be discussed here. The other two works include an Arabic Kurdish rhymed glossary and a Kurdish text on the articles of faith.<sup>162</sup> It is through Ahmed-i Khani's *Mem u Zin* that the demarcations of ethnic loyalty reveal themselves at the regional level. In fact, the expressive language used by Ahmed-i Khani is the reason why his work has been continuously and anachronistically cited by modern Kurdish nationalists as evidence of an age-old Kurdish national identity.<sup>163</sup>

The story of *Mem u Zin* has often been compared to Shakespeare's tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. The tragedy of *Mem u Zin* revolves around two lovers, Mem and Zin, and describes how due to the intrigues of an evil advisor of the local lord, whose name is Bekir Mergewer, they are forbidden to marry. Mem is then thrown in prison and eventually dies there. When Zin finds out

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<sup>161</sup> Kamal Mirawdeli, *Love and Existence: Analytical Study of Ahmadi Khani's Tragedy of Mem u Zin* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2012), 1, 38.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>163</sup> For a Kurdish nationalist perspective on how what Ahmed-i Khani writes is evidence of nationalism see Kamal Mirawdeli, *Love and Existence* and his chapter 'Part II: Chapter I: Khani's Theory of Kurdish Nationalism.'

about his fate, she goes to his grave and dies clinging to it.<sup>164</sup> In this work, Ahmed-i Khani includes several prologues to the story explaining why he wrote the work in Kurdish and describes the place of the Kurds in relation to other groups of Eastern Anatolia. It is this section of his work that yields many interesting aspects to a discussion of ethnic loyalties from a regional perspective.

Ahmed-i Khani explains that his choice to write in Kurdish is an innovation (*bida'*) and is “contrary to what is customary,” but he is doing so because it needs to be done for “communal solidarity.”<sup>165</sup> He then goes on to fashion himself in various ways saying “I am a Kurd [*Kurmancim*]<sup>166</sup>, a mountaineer [*kuhi*] and a frontiersman [*kenari*].”<sup>167</sup> Here, it is clear that Ahmed-i Khani defines himself along ethnic and situational loyalties. He fashions himself as a Kurd and ties that to being from the mountains of Eastern Anatolia. He also describes himself as being a product of the borderlands, which, as we have seen, includes navigating the shifting power relations within the region. The intriguing issue is that we see no mention of confessional loyalty, provoking the question of whether this means that confessional loyalty was imbued with the term Kurd or not. Nevertheless, Ahmed-i Khani defines his own loyalties by these three labels (“Kurd,” “mountaineer,” “frontiersman”) highlighting the importance of terms like these in the Eastern Anatolian discourse of self-fashioning. After this brief discussion of himself,

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<sup>164</sup> For a detailed summary of the plot of *Mem u Zin* see Kamal Mirawdeli, *Love and Existence* and his chapter ‘Part IV: Chapter I: The Dramatic Structure of the Tragedy (As a Play).’

<sup>165</sup> Kamal Mirawdeli, *Love and Existence*, 93-97. “Communal solidarity” is taken from the word “te’essub” which he explains is derived from ‘*e’sab*’ which is related to the term ‘*esabiyye*’ which is developed by Ibn Khaldun and then Mirawdeli claims that this “expresses a sort of ‘communal solidarity.’” Furthermore, after some discussion Mirawdeli claims that this term also denotes “national solidarity” but suggests “communal solidarity” or “tribal kinship/solidarity” are other possible means. I disagree with his argument for translating these words as meaning “national solidarity” so I have opted to “communal solidarity” which is what he claims the original related term by Ibn Khaldun means.

<sup>166</sup> *Kurmanc* or *Kurmanj* is described by Bruinessen as a label denoting certain Kurdish tribes who are the “purist of Kurdish blood” and also as an ethnic label for Kurds who speak the northern dialect which happens to be the area that Ahmed-i Khani is writing from. See Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 119-121.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 93.



Ahmed-i Khani continues to describe the place of the Kurds (*Kurmanc*) in the world by lamenting how “the Kurds among the states of the world have, for what reason been deprived... These Rums [Ottomans] and Ecem [*Acem*, Safavids] are shielded by them.”<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, he states that “each tribe of them [the Kurds] is a barrier, a wall [between] this sea of Rum [Ottomans] and the sea of Tajik [Safavids].”<sup>169</sup> In this part of his work, we see Ahmed-i Khani define the Kurds in their relationship between empires as borderland peoples who act as a barrier, similar to the words of Aziz Efendi mentioned previously, between the two empires of the Ottomans and the Safavids.

Instead of claiming loyalty to one side or another, Ahmed-i Khani explains that “whenever they [the Ottomans and the Safavids] start out and move [the] *Kurmanc* [Kurds] are stained with blood.”<sup>170</sup> The stark realism about the cost of war and of being a borderlander between two large empires highlights the political realities that Kurds faced and what produced the need for flexible loyalties in terms of ethnic, imperial, and confessional markers. Out of this, Ahmed-i Khani longs for someone to “appear among us [as] a king” and that “if we had a Mir [lord] who would see himself worthy of a crown” then “these Rum [Ottomans] would not have had a sway over us [and]...[we] would not have been ruled by the Eliyyis (Safavids) and thieves, subjugated and made obedient by the Turks and Tajiks.”<sup>171</sup> These words wish for the Kurds to be led by a Kurdish lord who would end their vassalage status among the Safavids and Ottomans. While this section of the work has been used by some to explain that Ahmed-i Khani was pushing for a Kurdish nation-state, it is important to reexamine how ethnic labels existed and carried political

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 102-103. Mirawdeli claims that the word Eliyyis, also written in the original transcription as “*‘eleyhi*,” is a word for the Safavids. While I have no other evidence to support this, the second phrase referencing the “Tajiks” is definitely in reference to the Safavids.

meaning, and also how these terms were intertwined with many other loyalty markers, such as imperial and confessional ones. It is anachronistic to declare that Ahmed-i Khani saw the Kurds as a monolithic ethnic group, which sought to free itself from the Turks and the Persians, two opposing domineering ethnic groups. For many other networks of loyalty were involved and to discuss it in these terms simplifies the complexity of the situation on the ground.

For much of the prologue Ahmed-i Khani gives various labels to describe the Ottomans (*Rum*, Turk) and the Safavids (*Acem*, Tajik). These terms are meant to define diverse imperial endeavors and the ethnic loyalty markers which are tied to these opposing imperial and confessional ideologies. When he states that the “Rum and Ejem [*Acem*] have power over us, although to be their subordinate is a shame, this shame belongs to the notable people,” it is once again not an expression of nationalist ethnic competition.<sup>172</sup> Many have argued that Ahmed-i Khani envisioned a world in which each nation (ethnic group) has its own nation-state and ethnicity is basis for territorial legitimacy and authority. Yet this is problematic, as has been demonstrated in the case of the rebellion of Abdal Khan of Bitlis and his claims of Abbasid lineage. There were other efforts in the seventeenth century in which Kurdish lords wished to break from their autonomy within the Ottoman Empire and create their own independent state on the borderlands. Therefore, it was the issue of Kurdish noble lineage and the autonomy of Kurdish lords that served as the basis for Ahmed-i Khani’s beliefs rather than some sort of understanding of the national prerogative of a people. In comparison to Abdal Khan’s claims, Ahmed-i Khani’s views are not considerably different, as he also sees imperial lordship over the lands of the Kurdish emirs as problematic. Ahmed-i Khani is not suggesting a monolithic Kurdish state, rather a state ruled by Kurdish lords who could secure power if backed by all the

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 107.

Kurdish tribes. This was not a nationalist endeavor pursuing the same mono-ethnic aims of a modern nationalist movement but instead a contestation of imperial claims to lordship over this region especially as some Kurdish lords, like Abdal Khan of Bitlis, sometimes claimed greater lineages of authority than the Ottomans themselves.

Ahmed-i Khani goes on to explain why this independent state has not come to pass. He laments that the Kurdish tribes are “always without agreement, always having rebellion and discord” and if they “all together had followed one leadership, Rum [Ottoman] and Arab and A’jam [Safavid, *Acem*] all, would have become servants to us.”<sup>173</sup> This would “have completed the religion and the state.”<sup>174</sup> First of all, these final words from Ahmed-i Khani mirror the Ottoman and Safavid discourse on Kurdish disunity and disloyalty in the borderlands. Secondly, he positions the Kurds in relation to other ethnic loyalty markers and highlights the lost potential of the Kurds. His claim is that if the Kurds had united they would have been able to rule over all other ethnic solidarities mentioned here. In addition to this, they would have “completed the religion,” pointing out the religious purity of the Kurds as seen presented in the Ottoman sources.<sup>175</sup>

The intriguing and provocative words of Ahmed-i Khani demonstrate the prominent role ethnic labels played in seventeenth-century Eastern Anatolia from the perspective of local actors. While his work has been continuously used to demonstrate the origins of Kurdish nationalism, it is most useful to examine the text in its seventeenth-century context. As will be the case with several other texts in this chapter, this text demonstrates the real political and social role that ethnic labels played in self-fashioning and loyalty in this period. It also demonstrates how these

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> The ‘purity of religion’ is surely in reference to purifying Islam with some form of Sunnism as Ahmed-i Khani was a Sunni Sufi and not a Shi’ite.

labels do not perform the same exclusivist function that they do in the form of modern nationalism. The laments of Ahemd-i Khani for the borderlander Kurdish people are striking for their explicit discussion of ethnic loyalty, and they also help to further analyze local understanding of ethnic labels and loyalties.

### 3.4 Şerefhan Bitlisi: The *Şerefname*

The first major text written by a Kurdish author about the Kurds exclusively is the *Şerefname* (1596) by Şerefhan Bitlisi, who was the Khan of Bitlis and grandfather (father?) of Abdal Khan of Bitlis.<sup>176</sup> The work is written in Persian, most likely influenced by the fact that the author was born in Safavid Iran and grew up in the Safavid court of Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576).<sup>177</sup> Şerefhan was later appointed the Safavid governor of Nakhchivan, and during his tenure there, he defected to the Ottomans due to intrigue of the Ottoman governor of Van and the Kurdish lords of Hakkari. He was granted his family's ancestral lands of Bitlis and given right to rule as an Ottoman autonomous governor.<sup>178</sup> The Safavid upbringing of the author is not only noticeable in the language chosen for composition, but it has also been noted that the *Şerefname* cites heavily from the Persian literary epic of *Shahnama* by Ferdowsi.<sup>179</sup>

The *Şerefname* itself chronicles the dynastic lineages of the great Kurdish tribal families and records their history up until the time of the *Şerefname*'s writing. These lineages are important because they connect many of the Kurdish ruling families back to the Abbasid and Umayyad families, tying them to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>180</sup> This is important because lineage was a vital tool of authority in the early modern world, and some ruling dynasties, such as the

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<sup>176</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 27.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 29. For Further information on the life of Şerefhan Bitlisi also see Bajalan, "Şeref Xan's Sharafnama," 800-802.

<sup>179</sup> Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 30.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 31.

Ottomans, could not claim these same links. Thus, the tying of the Kurdish lords to this sort of lineage becomes a powerful legitimizing force.

Another important feature of the *Şerefname* is that it also includes accounts of the formation of the Ottoman and Safavid dynasties and how they came to be imbricated with the various Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia.<sup>181</sup> This account explicitly ties the efforts of Şerefhan's grandfather who worked with Idris-i Bitlisi, to the successful Ottoman conquest of Eastern Anatolia in the early sixteenth century. The work even claims that Idris-i Bitlisi managed to bring some twenty Kurdish lords to the Ottoman side before the initial Ottoman invasion of Eastern Anatolia.<sup>182</sup> The account on how vital Idris-i Bitlisi was in the successful Ottoman conquest of Eastern Anatolia is not unique to Şerefhan's work, as it is also presented as such in almost every Ottoman account on the conquest of Eastern Anatolia.<sup>183</sup> Nonetheless, the *Şerefname*'s emphasis on Kurdish help in the Ottoman endeavor in Eastern Anatolia combined with the prestigious lineages recounted in the text provided a textual basis for Kurdish rulers to demonstrate Kurdish legitimacy for autonomous rule and Kurdish loyalty to the Ottoman state.

The *Şerefname* presents a case for Kurdish autonomy as well, which would be in the immediate interests of its author. Şerefhan notes how “mighty kings and great monarchs” have been content merely to require tribute from the Kurdish territories and not rule the land directly.<sup>184</sup> His account warns that when “kings have tried and endeavored for the conquest and occupation of the lands of Kurdistan, they have suffered untold pain and torment.”<sup>185</sup> This warning by Şerefhan references the initial context of the conquest of the region by the Ottomans.

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<sup>181</sup> Bajalan, “Şeref Xan's Sharafnama,” 800.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 803.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 803-804.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 806.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

In this account, he describes how the Safavids wished to control directly the region and took away the rights of the Kurdish lords, whereas, the Ottomans were able to accommodate the Kurdish lords' interest in autonomous administration and therefore won them over to their side.<sup>186</sup>

The most fascinating feature of the *Şerefname* is the way in which the Kurds are discussed as a group and attached to individuals in Persian myth. The most notable case is when Şerefhan claims that Rostam bin Zal of the *Shahnama* was in fact of Kurdish origin. He states that “the name ‘Kurd’ was given to them [The Kurds]...due to the great degree of their bravery... for example, the famous hero Rostam bin Zal who lived at the time of Kayqubad was one of them.”<sup>187</sup> He then goes on to cite evidence for this by saying “the *Shahnama*’s writer Ferdowsi introduces him as Rostam the Kurd.”<sup>188</sup> It is noted by some scholars that this last phrase is an intentional misreading of the *Shahnama* by Şerefhan. This is because it is generally understood that in the *Shahnama* text the word is actually *gord* (hero) and not *kord* (Kurd), which are spelled the same in Persian.<sup>189</sup> This misreading helps Şerefhan to aggrandize the legacy of Kurds in the popular mythic history of Persianate literature and culture. It also demonstrates the importance of ethnic labels in order to legitimize and place the Kurds within the prominent cultural mythic epics popular in the region.

Şerefhan’s history reassures the Ottoman authorities that the Kurdish lords are loyal to the Ottoman state, yet warns of any incursions by outside powers that would hinder Kurdish autonomy. The life of Şerefhan and his seminal work also reflect the inter-imperial dynamics in the region at the turn of the seventeenth-century. Şerefhan’s experience with the Safavid court in

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 803.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 807.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 808.

Persian literature represents the strong political and cultural influence of Iran on the Kurdish elite in the region. On other hand, the content of his life and work demonstrates the changing loyalties of the Kurds and their new found intimacy with in the Ottoman state.

### 3.5 The *Şerefname* in Translation: Changing Dynamics

Eighty-seven years after the original *Şerefname* was penned by Şerefhan Bitlisi, a copy and translation was produced in 1684. The scribe of this work was named Şam’i and it is stated that he was commissioned to translate the work from Persian into Ottoman Turkish for the Kurdish lord of Eğil, Mustafa Bey.<sup>190</sup> This work is particularly interesting because Şam’i added an appendix to the direct translation of the text that includes the local histories of the principalities of Palu and Eğil for the period between the years 1597-1684. Moreover, Şam’i describes the purpose of the text and the merits of the Kurdish language in an introduction to the text. These additions to the text, coupled with the work’s translation into Ottoman Turkish, provide an interesting case of Kurdish self-fashioning during the seventeenth-century.

Şam’i titles his work *A Translation in Turkish of the History of Şeref Han*, while later calling it a translation of the *Histories of Şeref Han*.<sup>191</sup> In this work, Şam’i recounts how he attended a meeting in Eğil where there were many leaders of that region. In this meeting, the history of Şerefhan was recited by people from the group and “the important details became evident and understood.”<sup>192</sup> After this, he notes that because the *Şerefname* was in Persian (*Farsi*), some of them “did not pay attention” to it.<sup>193</sup> It is from this instance that “the leaders of the state made orders for this humble one [Şam’i] to translate this book [*Şerefname*] into the

<sup>190</sup> Bajalan, “Şeref Xan’s Sharafnama,” 815.

<sup>191</sup> Şam’i, *Tercümanin târîh-i şeref hân turkî ve el-cuz ve el-evvel min târîh el-mass ‘ûdî* [A Translation in Turkish of the History of Sharaf Han and the portion and the first from the History of Good Blessings], British Library, Ms. Add. 18547, 1a-1b.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 2b.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. “mukayyed olmadı”

language of the Turks.”<sup>194</sup> This is intriguing because Şam’î describes the changing language dynamics of the seventeenth century, as well as the importance of the *Şerefname* to Kurdish lords a few generations after its composition. Eastern Anatolia was very much a Persianate literary culture until the time of the composition of the *Şerefname* in 1597. As the *Şerefname* was originally composed in Persian, it may be assumed that many Kurdish lords in the region understood and readily used Persian. However, with the increasing Ottoman centralization efforts in Eastern Anatolia in the seventeenth century, the prominence of Ottoman Turkish rose significantly. Thus, by the late seventeenth century, many of the Kurdish lords present at this meeting in Eğil, just north of the Ottoman imperial node of Diyarbakir, were more comfortable with Ottoman Turkish rather than Persian. Understanding this, it is logical that they would have commissioned this work by Şam’î.

Furthermore, while the imperial dynamics changed the utility of certain languages in the region for the Kurds, introduction by Şam’î also demonstrates the continued political importance of the *Şerefname*. His anecdote demonstrates that the *Şerefname* was recited within the circles of local Kurdish political elites. Similarly, as noted in the previous chapter, Evliya Çelebi cites that he read the *Şerefname* in the library of Abdal Khan of Bitlis. The local proliferation of the text amongst Kurdish notables is vital because the *Şerefname* has important ethno-political claims in it. The work served to legitimate Kurdish autonomy and highlight imperial loyalty. The work also warned those imperial powers who encroached too far upon the rights of the Kurdish lords. In light of these aspects of the *Şerefname*, it can be seen that it could have been an important tool in Abdal Khan’s legitimation for rebellion in 1655.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. “sāhib-i devlet bû kitābī zebān türkī-ye tercūme eylemeğe bû hakīre emirlerī oldī”



The work may also have been translated into Ottoman Turkish for another reason. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the work of Aziz Efendi utilized the traditional Kurdish story of Sunni loyalty to the Ottoman state in order to push for greater Ottoman support for the Kurdish lords. Having the work translated into Ottoman Turkish meant that any new Ottoman administrators in the nearby imperial node of Diyarbakir could read or hear this text that boasted the story of Kurdish loyalty. Moreover, it would also reinforce to a non-Kurdish or Persianate audience various claims of Kurdish authority based on lineage. In essence, the translation of the *Şerefname* into Ottoman Turkish in Eğil in 1684 may have served these two purposes. The first being to make the work legible to a new generation of Kurdish lords that were more familiar with Ottoman Turkish. The second being to make Kurdish claims of loyalty and legitimacy available and legible to Ottoman administrative elites.

The introduction by Şam'î also includes a fascinating discussion about language, which gives insight into local understandings of ethnic differences based on linguistic lines and also ways of local Kurdish self-fashioning. Şam'î starts his discussion of languages by citing the Quranic Surah: “And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations of your languages and your colors.”<sup>195</sup> He then goes on to list the languages of the world in what may be order of importance. He states that “some of them [languages] are Arabic, some Farsi [Persian], some Kurdish, some Turkish, Rumi [Greek?], Hindi, and Afghan.”<sup>196</sup> Şam'î comments further that beyond these there are “many strange tongues and wondrous languages.”<sup>197</sup> He then reiterates that “from all the languages the highest and most articulated is the Arab language since it is the language which was received in the great Quran and after this

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 2a. also Surah Ar-Room Chapter 30, Verse 22. English Translation from *The Qur'an: Translation*, trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Elmhurst: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1995), 265.

<sup>196</sup> Şam'î, *Tercümanin târîh-i şeref hân*, 2a-2b. “b'azîsî 'arabî ve b'azîsî fârsî ve b'azîsî kürdî ve b'azîsî türkî ve rûmî ve hindî ve avgânî dir”

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 2b.

[in importance] is the Persian language.”<sup>198</sup> Şam’i states that after a number of years which were dominated by these two languages people began to “elevate their own languages.”<sup>199</sup> This is a remarkable statement and serves as a precursor to Şam’i’s discussion and the legitimization of the Kurdish language which is done while simultaneously writing the text in Ottoman Turkish so that everyone may understand.

Şam’i explains that the Prophet Muhammad along with “many great *ulema* [religious scholars] and noble men of virtue preferred the Kurdish language and deemed it acceptable”<sup>200</sup> Here, Şam’i illustrates the exterior motive of his work: to legitimize the Kurds and the Kurdish language to others within the empire. Şam’i proclaims that the Kurdish language was granted divine acceptance and furthermore demonstrates that influential people, divine and worldly, accept and even prefer the use of the Kurdish language. This push by Şam’i to have the Kurdish language be deemed acceptable coupled with a translation of the *Şerefname*, demonstrates the importance that ethnic and linguistic loyalties played in the region during the seventeenth century. These were markers which, as seen in the imperial context, could serve as tools to demarcate loyalty in a volatile region. This was done both for the regional actors who wished to elevate the connotations of their own ethnic loyalties and for imperial actors who wished to demarcate understandable boundaries in an ever-fluid region.

After Şam’i’s surprising statement about the Prophet Muhammad’s preference for Kurdish, he shifts away from a linguistic discussion to one that is more bound to ethnicity. He states that within “the Islamic community [*millet*] the most brave and generous is the Arab clan

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. “cumle dillerden a’lā ve efsah a’rab dīlī dir ki korān a’zīm el-şān ol lugatla nāzıl olmuşdur ve bündan sonra fārsī dīlī dir”

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. “her bir kavm kendū dīllerīn i’lā tūtmuşlar”

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. “u’lamā-i a’zām ve fazlā-i kırām kürd dīlinī iktiyār edüb makkbül tūtmuşlar”

[*kabile*].”<sup>201</sup> He goes on to say that “after [that] there is the Kurdish clan [*kabile*].”<sup>202</sup> Şam’i therefore places the Kurds as only second to the Arabs in his ranking of the various peoples of the world. The provocative prologue by Şam’i demonstrates the importance of ethnic loyalties and labels in early modern Eastern Anatolia and suggests that these labels were not only utilized by imperial actors but also by regional elites who frequented the small Kurdish courts of Eastern Anatolia, such as the small court of Eğil.

After this introduction Şam’i includes an addition to the original text which includes the local histories of Eğil and Palu which cover the recent events of the seventeenth century for these two emirates. This section mainly details the exploits of the two rulers of Eğil and Palu, Mustafa Bey (Şam’i’s patron) and Mehmed Kucar Bey respectively. The account describes how Mustafa Bey and Mehmed Kucar Bey answered the call of the governor of Diyarbakir Kaplan Pasha in 1676 to join the Ottoman campaign to Chyhyryn in modern-day central Ukraine.<sup>203</sup> The story recounts how they set off on the campaign to Chyhyryn castle together with the Ottoman army playing drums and instruments along the road.<sup>204</sup> The date corresponds to the start of the Russo-Ottoman war of 1676-81 in which the Ottoman Cossack vassal Hetman Petro Doroshenko who controlled the area known as ‘Right-Bank Ukraine’ with his capital at Chyhyryn defected from the Ottomans and pledged loyalty to Russian Empire due to the increasing unpopularity of his pro-Ottoman position.<sup>205</sup> The Ottomans then sent a large army north to take Chyhyryn castle and besieged it by 1677 and captured it by 1678, after which they destroyed it.<sup>206</sup> The account by Şam’i claims that the Ottoman forces faced “an accursed battalion of the three or four hundred

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 59b. Chyhyryn is spelled *Çehrin* in the text.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 60b.

<sup>205</sup> Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 282. The Russian Empire is referred to as the “Kingdom of Moscow” in the text, see Şam’i, *Tercümanin tārīh-i şerefhān*, 60b.

<sup>206</sup> Finkel, *Osman’s Dream*, 282.

thousand infidels” with the Russian commander Romodanovsky on the other side of the river from Chyhyryn.<sup>207</sup> He then states that their battalion under the command of Kaplan pasha received an order from commander Grand Vizier Mustafa Pasha that they were to fight the Russian troops.<sup>208</sup> It is in this moment that Şam’i highlights how the “honorable lord of Eğil, Mustafa Bey, and the honorable lord of Palu, Mehmed Kucar Bey, fought as brave men!”<sup>209</sup> This brief section highlights two important points. The first is that it highlights that the Kurds were loyal to the Ottoman state and answered the call of the Sultan and the Ottoman governor of Diyarbakir and served bravely in the far away campaign of Chyhyryn. The second is that it points out the ways in which the two brothers in arms (they were perhaps actual cousins) and lords of the *Hükümet*s of Eğil and Palu were brave and valiant in their service to the Ottoman state. It is the fact that this was written in Ottoman Turkish that points to the possibility that one of the audiences for this text were local Ottoman imperial officials to whom this text would demonstrate the loyalty of its Kurdish patrons.

### 3.6 Chapter Conclusion

Şam’i’s elevation of the Kurds to amongst the greatest of Muslim groups is similar to claims made in Ahmed-i Khani’s work, the *Şerefname*, and statements made by Vani Mehmed Efendi and rulings by Feyzullah Efendi. These five (presumably) Kurdish authors bring a regional voice to the discussion of ethnic, confessional, and imperial loyalties. While these five sources come from regional elites, all of their works were disseminated to the non-literate population of Eastern Anatolia through oral culture. The two versions of the *Şerefname* were recited orally; Vani Mehmed Efendi was a mosque preacher and was known for his popular

<sup>207</sup> Şam’i, *Tercümanin târîh-i şeref hân*, 60b. Romodanovsky written “Ramdansko” in the text.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

sermons; Feyzullah Efendi responded to judicial questions from local officials; and Ahmed-i Khani's work was a popular oral folk epic. While the sources for a discussion of local and regional views of the Kurdish ethnicity in the early modern Eastern Anatolia appear to be isolated to the literate elite of the region, it is important to remember the oral culture in which these works existed and could reach non-literate populations.

The diversity of opinions expressed in these works highlights the various motives for each of the authors' use of ethnic loyalty markers. Generally, the elevation of the ethnic identifiatory marker of 'Kurd' helped legitimize local autonomy for the Kurdish lords of the Eastern Anatolian borderlands. The term also helped to demarcate the boundaries between groups that benefited from different power structures, such as Turks and Tajiks or *Rumi* and *Acem*. As demonstrated by the Armenian observers at the beginning of this chapter, these ethnic markers were easily changed, creating the possibility of the conundrum of Kurdish-speaking *Kizilbaş*. Despite the fine line between groups drawn out by these local Kurdish writers, it is important to remember that the loyalties associated with these ethnic terms remained consistent for certain circles. That is to say, ethnic labels were important political tools in early modern Eastern Anatolia for both imperial and local actors but the makeup of these loyalties was in constant negotiation between imperial and regional narratives of ethnic labels. Therefore, ethnic loyalties played a vital role in self-fashioning in early modern Eastern Anatolia. Ethnicity did not only come to the political stage during the rise of nationalism, but rather changed its function with nationalism becoming a tool for which an individual could *identify* with the state.

## 4 Conclusions

The examples presented in this thesis highlight the ways in which the Empire was not concerned with our modern ideas of ‘identity,’ but rather with the symbols of loyalty. However, the flurry of conflicting and competing loyalties associated with the Kurds demonstrates that loyalty in the early modern period was expressed through two important labels, confessional and ethnic. While ethnic and confessional labels were important for both the regional and imperial narratives about Kurds, these labels gained meaning and political relevance within a discourse of imperial loyalty rather than by themselves. This was particularly the case because of the Kurds’ physical presence in the borderlands between the two confessionally and militarily opposed empires. The imperial perspectives, which seem detached from the regional realities represent the ways in which the Ottoman imperial elites used these labels to navigate and denote imperial loyalty in the ‘contact zone.’ When a group displayed disloyalty to the empire their ethnic labels were quickly conflated with terms of confessional ‘othering.’ This demonstrates how the imperial actors were active players in the new confessional landscape of the early modern world. On the other hand, the local actors’ ‘ignorance’ of these new confessional boundaries showcases the ways of local resistance to the imperial confessional paradigm. The local actors prioritized ethnic loyalty, with less confessional connotations compared to the imperial perspective, and this ethnic loyalty helped to legitimate local autonomous rights against the imperial confessional discourse which supported greater imperial control in the borderlands.

Mary Louise Pratt's conception of a borderland as a 'contact zone' effectively describes the imperial imagination of the Eastern Anatolian borderlands.<sup>210</sup> Pratt describes 'contact zones' as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other."<sup>211</sup> Pratt's definition of the 'contact zone' implies that on each side of the border there are two separate monolithic entities and while this is not true on the local level for Eastern Anatolia it is definitely the way in which imperial actors viewed the Eastern Anatolian borderlands. Due to this, imperial actors defined the imperial loyalty of ethnic groups along confessional lines in this region.

Conversely, throughout the seventeenth century on the regional level, confessional labels were more malleable and less emphasized due to the changing imperial dynamics in the region. In the regional discourse confessional markers of loyalty to the Empire were either nonexistent or secondary to examples which tried to link ethnic labels explicitly to imperial loyalty. For regional actors utilized examples of past and present service to the Ottoman state to demonstrate their loyal service rather than overemphasizing their Sunni credentials, which is what imperial sources attempt to do. Furthermore, when regional actors demonstrate disloyalty to the Ottoman state they emphasize their ethnic loyalty and the lineages that give them the right to local power.

The thesis cannot address every issue regarding imperial, ethnic, and confessional loyalties in Eastern Anatolia. Therefore, one of the limitations of this work is that it focused on the Kurds in the seventeenth century and does not look into the longer term connotations and developments of Kurdish loyalty. Furthermore, this work utilizes only narrative sources and does not investigate how these labels of loyalty manifested themselves in bureaucratic records, such as court records. Further research along these avenues will give important insight into the purchase

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<sup>210</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, "Criticism in the contact zone," in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 4.

these labels had in society at large. For the written sources can only tell us what the literate actors had to say on the nature of loyalty. Another question which should be further explored is how tribal loyalty interacted with the growing confessional divisions within society and how these tribal loyalties interacted with a state structure which seemed to view the Kurds as a monolithic whole. Lastly, further research should look into the ways in which the Safavid state reconciled the imperial and confessional loyalty of the Kurdish tribes in Safavid territory given their steadfast loyal depiction in the Ottoman narrative. What this research can uncover is the ways in which different conceptions of the borderland on the imperial and regional levels influenced their respective articulations of imperial, confessional, and ethnic loyalties.

This thesis demonstrates how *loyalty* and not *identity* was the defining factor in early modern self-fashioning. The framework of ‘loyalty’ should be used to discuss the dynamics in research beyond that of Eastern Anatolia, such as pre-nationalist European historiography. It is through a discussion of loyalty that the complexity of the early modern world may be understood and social processes, such as confessionalization, may be observed in regions previously thought not to have experienced them. Lastly, a discussion of loyalty showcases the ways in which ethnicity functioned in a time before nationalism and the nation state.



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