

## **STUDYING THE IMPACT OF RELIGIO-POLITICAL CONFRONTATIONS OF ISLAMIC EMPIRES IN KURDISTAN (FROM THE BEGINNING UNTIL THE END OF THE ISLAMIC CALIPHATE)**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to address the problem of historiography and perspective in Middle East studies concerning dominated ethno-nations, especially the Kurds, while examining the religio-political confrontations between the Islamic empires and their significant socio-political consequences in Kurdistan through a historical study (primarily) based on secondary sources. With the dominance of the early Islamic Caliphate from the 7th century, the political powers of the Kurds' ancestors were removed and the non-Muslim population severely declined. From the middle of the Abbasid Caliphate period (750-1258) Kurdish governments grew again. After the Abbasids, various Islamic sects gained power and Kurdistan gradually becoming the battlefield of various political powers. With the emergence of two empires, the Sunni Ottoman and Shiite Safavid (and its successors) in the 16th century, the internal conflicts in the Islamic world culminated and lasted until the early 20th century. Between the 7th and the early 20th century religio-political confrontations converging in Kurdistan have severely affected the land's socio-political situation. This article examines how the Islamic empires used religion politically as a means to fight each other, as well as engage with the Kurdish revolts.

**Keywords:** *Kurdistan; Ottomans; Safavids; Shiite; Sunni*

## **DAMPAK KONFRONTASI AGAMA DAN POLITIK DALAM KERAJAAN ISLAM DI KURDI (DARI AWAL SAMPAI AKHIR KEKHALIFAHAN ISLAM)**

### **Abstrak**

Artikel ini mencoba melihat persoalan historiografi dan perspektif dalam kajian Timur Tengah dalam kaitannya dengan etnis bangsa yang didominasi, terutama Kurdi, selain juga mencoba memeriksa konfrontasi politik-agama antar kerajaan Islam dan konsekuensi sosio-politik yang signifikan di Kurdi melalui studi sejarah berdasarkan sumber sekunder. Dengan adanya dominasi Kekhalifahan Islam awal pada abad ke-7, kekuatan politik Kurdi disingkirkan dan populasi non-Muslim menjadi menurun drastis. Pada pertengahan periode Kekhalifahan Abbasiyah (750-1258) pemerintah Kurdi tumbuh kembali. Setelah kekhalifahan Abbasiyah, berbagai sekte dalam Islam dan Kurdi secara bertahap menjadi medan pertempuran berbagai kekuatan politik. Dengan munculnya dua kerajaan, Utsmaniyah yang bermazhab sunni dan kerajaan Safawi yang bermazhab Syiah (dan penerusnya) pada abad ke-16, konflik internal di dunia Islam memuncak dan berlangsung hingga awal abad ke-20. Antara abad ke-7 dan awal abad ke-20 konfrontasi agama-politik yang bertemu di Kurdi telah sangat mempengaruhi situasi sosial-politik negeri itu.

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Artikel ini membahas bagaimana kerajaan Islam menggunakan agama secara politik sebagai sarana untuk melawan satu sama lain, serta terlibat dalam pemberontakan Kurdi.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kurdistan; Utsmaniyah; Safawi; Syiah; Sunni*

## Introduction

In Middle East studies, the history of multinational countries like Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria has usually been viewed through the lens of the dominant ethno-nations and their new states. The history of various dynasties and tribes who were sporadically dominant with a higher authority within an unclear and variable territory, is considered as part of the continuous history of the states in question and is attributed to the dominant ethno-nations. For example, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, different non-Persian dynasties like the Safavids, Afsharids, Zands and Qajars, with many other smaller dynasties and tribes, ruled and governed their relevant territories. From the beginning of the 1900s, this vague historical amalgam was presented as Persian/Iranian history to create a modern state with a single nation based on the Persian ethno-nation. In other words, the histories of other ethno-nations were removed

or minimized in formal discourse. One instance is *The Cambridge History of Iran*, in several volumes, written and edited by different scholars from 1968-1991, which was indeed an attempt to rewrite history in favour of Persian state nationalism. Unlike mainstream Arab, Turkish and Iranian studies which are affected by the politics of non-Kurdish states in the region, this article focuses on Kurdistan as the central point of analysis to offer a historio-analytical view that can be used to analyze political issues and the modern politics of the Middle East.

Contemporary religio-political confrontations and conflicts in the Middle East between different religions, ethnicities, nations, nationalisms and states, especially between the Kurds and other ethno-nations, often have historical roots that can be traced back to troubles in the ancient and Islamic empires. Indeed, the Islamic powers, especially the Sunni

Ottoman and Shiite Safavid empires, used religion as a political tool to achieve their goals, which affected Kurdistan as a converging area. The modern nationalists and states, whether religious or secular, have continued in the same manner and used the function based on their societies. This article examines the effects of religio-political confrontations during the Islamic period on Kurdistan – as the historical site of such conflict – thereby presenting the consequences of such actions on the contemporary situation in the region.

The questions which this paper tries to answer are: how did the religio-political confrontations of the Islamic empires affect Kurdistan? How did they use their religion to extend their influence into Kurdistan? Through explaining the relationship between religion and politics in the Islamic period and the ways in which political powers used religion in their religio-political conflicts, the article shows the historicity of using the political function of religion in

Kurdistan. It also considers the socio-political impact of the conflicts on Kurdistan within the context of the political situation at the time. So, the emphasis here is on Kurds and Kurdistan.

To give a brief description of Kurdistan, it should be noted that the Kurds were well-known by their current name in early Islamic-Arabic sources such as the works of Dinawari (9<sup>th</sup> century), Tabari, Ibn Wahshiyah, Bayhaqi and so on. They have mostly lived in and around the vast mountainous area covering parts of Mesopotamia and the Zagros Mountain range, which since mid-medieval times, especially in the eleventh century during the Seljuk era (1037-1194), has been recognized and officially documented as ‘Kurdistan/Kurdewarî’, literally meaning the land of Kurds (see: Cheriff Vanly, 1992, 143; Nebez, 2004, 56; Zaki, 1931, 9-11; White, 2000, 15). According to Sharafadin Bitlisi (1597), Kurdistan covered the land between the Hormuz Sea, Ararat Mountains (Caucasus) and the Mediterranean Sea. Because of

the invasion of other peoples from four sides, assimilation and demographic changes, the borders of the Kurds' land have shifted over history. However, Greater Kurdistan is now a strategic region located between Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Moreover, there was a fifth part in the Soviet Union known as "Red Kurdistan", which was annulled by Stalin, causing a diaspora to Kurdish areas in other countries in the region (Nebez, 2004, 53).

Kurdistan has historically been a centre and a converging point of different religions, and also the scene of political confrontations by various powers who have used religion politically since the ancient period. During the Islamic Caliphate, the Muslim rulers used the political function of Islam to govern the land as they had done in other Islamic lands. Gradually, within the Caliphate, some Kurdish governments appeared. Later on, Kurdistan was affected by the appearance of different Islamic empires, especially those of the Ottomans and Safavids, with

different religions. The empires tried to attach some parts of Kurdistan to their own territories. The buffer Kurdish governments and principalities were in sway between them. However, religion played an important role and affected the empires' politics especially in Kurdistan.

To examine the religio-political confrontations between the empires and the significant socio-political consequences they wrought in Kurdistan, I have used the historical-descriptive method to report on the historio-political events and to describe the political state of affairs. Thus, I review the situation and study the phenomenon of the practical use of religion by different rulers and political powers in the period of Kurdish political history from the arrival of Islam to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As it helps to have an overview of the political function of religion and show how the empires used it against each other to extend their influence, the secondary data is gathered mostly from modern historians' works on this historical

period, and is used to investigate the impact of religio-political confrontations in order to answer the research questions. Since the history of the Middle East has often been affected by the politics of dominant ethno-nationalists and the current states' perspective, the findings of various references are considered to clarify the correct facts. Indeed, because of the lack of an independent Kurdish state and the unique political situation of Kurdistan, one possible way to conduct such research, particularly in the field of political science, is through the study of historical references that have portrayed different views about the region. In what follows, this paper offers an examination of the religious and political confrontations over the Islamic period from the arrival of Islam until the end of the caliphate in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and finally it discusses the impact of the conflicts on Kurdistan and modern politics in the contemporary Middle East.

### **From the Arrival of Islam until the end of the Abbasids (7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century)**

In ancient times, the war between two of the empires with two different religions severely affected the old Kurdistan, as their battlefield, and its buffer kingdoms. With the invasion of Kurdistan by Muslim Arabs, the influence of the last of the ancient empires and their religions gradually ended. Kurdistan was conquered either by force (see: al-Tabari, 1970, V. 4, p. 186-7) or by peace. Arabs first defeated Zoroastrian Sasanians in 636 at Qadisiyya and finally through Kirmaşan, the then provincial capital of Media, in 642 at Nihavand in Media (see: al-Khalil, 2011, 120; Frye, 1975, 16-19). Notwithstanding, some tracts of Kurdistan remained the battlefield between Islamic and Byzantine empires until the 11<sup>th</sup> century when the frontiers of the Islamic Caliphate moved away from Kurdistan, especially after defeat of the Byzantine emperor by the Seljuks in Manzikert (Malâzgird/Melezgir) in eastern Anatolia in 1071. At the time, the Kurdish governments and Emirates

were subject to Seljuk rule (Imber, 2019, 3; Boyle, 1968, 44-5; Zaki, 1931, 137).

Thus, Kurdistan became attached to the Islamic Caliphate. Nevertheless, the Kurds had resisted Arab rule and Islamization for centuries. In 642 a devastating war was waged between Kurds and Arabs in Sharezur. Later, they sometimes revolted against Muslim Arab governors during the first centuries of Islam. The revolts of Mir Jafar Kuri Hesse (Jafar bin Faharjas) from an Êzîdî/Dasni<sup>1</sup> Kurdish dynasty in Mosul around 840 and the revolt of Muhammad Kuri Bilal from the Hazbani/Hezaban tribe in 906 (Zaki, 1931, 125-129, 238 and 278) were the largest rebellions. In the twelfth century there were still adherents of older religions in the region including 'Cult of the Angels', Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism (Nebez, 2004, 26;

Barkey & Fuller, 1998, 67); some of them still being there.

Up until the end of the Abbasid Caliphate all Islamic emirates and governments in Islamic lands, including present-day Iran, were either under the direct authority of the caliphate or recognized by it under the Arab, Turkish and Kurdish Sultanates – Turkish Seljuks and Kurdish Ayyubids<sup>2</sup> etc. were rulers affiliated to the caliphate. The different parts of Kurdistan, for about three centuries, were under the direct control of the caliphal governors, including Arabs and non-Arabs. For example, in 792 the Abbasid Caliph al-Rashid made al-Fadl b. Yahya al-Barmaki governor of the Jibal (Kurdistan), Tabaristan, Damavand and Armenia for three years. Then, gradually Kurdish Amirs/governors grew in number and were recognized by the caliphate. In this period the Kurds still lived totally within Media territory including

<sup>1</sup> The followers of Êzîdî/Izidi, an indigenous religion, are also known as Dasni, since they live around the mountain of Dasni.

<sup>2</sup> The founder of the Ayyubids was Salah al-Din Ayyubi. They ruled a vast area including

Egypt and Syria during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Afterwards, their descendants governed the emirate of Hassankeyf (See: Bitlisi, 1597/2005; Bruinessen, 1992, 135; Zaki, 1931, 143).

upper/small Media/Azarbaijan, so that some historical sources mention Kurdish dynasties, Kurdish chiefs and Kurdish warriors in the region up to Caspian sea coastlands (see: Frye, 1975, 70-83, 163, 226-236; Zaki, 1931, v. 2).

The Caliph and rulers didn't administrate directly, so Kurdistan with its emirates was left mainly under local executors. Indeed, the Caliphs in Baghdad gradually lost the power to exert their policies, so the caliphate became a symbol and the Caliph a spiritual leader. Sultans and rulers executed the real power, their states/sultanates including many dynasties and emirates, and autonomous tribes. With the political changes, some Kurdish dynasties thrived and became their own sultanate, others remained and gave their allegiance to the non-Kurdish sultans: some were destroyed and new ones emerged. Mostly, the Kurdish chiefs formed a coalition with the caliphs and supported sultans with their troops,

as important religious warriors. Sometimes there were political marriages between non-Kurdish sultans and the Kurds. The caliphal governors used marriage ties to make an alliance with dynasties, former ruling families and Kurdish chieftains during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, the caliph Marwan was born of a Kurdish mother. He and his father were the Wali/Vali (viceroy) of some parts of Kurdistan and then the Kurds helped him to reach power as Caliph (see: Boyle, 1968, 44-62, 121-132, 168-200 and 245; Frye, 1975, 233-236; Zaki, 1931, 127).

Though the Islamic Caliphate imposed one religion and through it the Arabic language, it gradually opened up to the participation and influence of different peoples politically. Before the growth of the Kurdish Emirates, and because of their proximity to Baghdad, some of the Kurds like the Hadhbanis (Frye, 1975, 234) and the Buyid dynasty<sup>3</sup> gradually influenced and played a

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<sup>3</sup> The Buyid dynasty and Dailamites/Dolomites were descendants of ancient peoples of Kurdistan like the Karduchoi/Charduhis (White, 2000, 44). Indeed, the Dailamite domain (between Zagros,

Tabaristan and Gilan) was an important part of old Kurdistan so that according to Minorsky (1972, 21, quoted by White, 2000, 45), including Amed/Diyarbakir, it was pacified by the Dailamite Adud al-Daula from the Buyid dynasty

role in the Caliphate system so that there was even religio-political competition among the Kurds. Against the influence of the Buyid dynasty, which was under the old and indigenous religions like Yarsan or Alevi in Kurdistan, Baz Kuri Dostak (Shabaz), the founder of the Dostak government (or Marwanid) in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, tried to reinforce the authority of the Caliph (Zaki, 1931, 238). The Kurds then grew politically and from the 10<sup>th</sup>

to the 13<sup>th</sup> century recreated their own kingdoms and emirates/principalities.<sup>4</sup> Some Kurdish governments during the Abbasid Caliphate and the periods that followed tried to act independently. They struck coins and in some places, along with the name of the Caliph, the names of Kurdish sultans or governors were mentioned in Friday sermons like some of the Marwanid kings/Amirs (see: Boyle, 1968, 23; Zaki, 1931, V.

in 977. According to some scholars like Mehrdad Izady, some of the Dailamites reached north of present-day Iran, also called Dailam (Izady, 1992, 91). The Dailamite domain was one area of Media territory which afterwards, because of the settlement of Turks in Azerbaijan, was separated. Even the current languages there, Gilaki and Taleshi, are close to Kurdish. Dailamites were probably the ancestors of Zaza Kurds (Gunes, 2012, 13). Now the Zaza in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan) call their own dialect Dimili, which indicates a possible connection with Daylam/Dailam (Olson, 1989, 95; White, 2000, 44-5). Moreover, Buyids attributed themselves to Sassanids, who were from Kurdish ancestry; there was a relationship between the Buyids and Kakuids (see: footnote n. 4) and also there is religious similarity between them and the Kakaiy Kurds.

11<sup>th</sup> century in ancient Adiabene including Lake Van and Urmiya, Marwanids (983-1096) in Amed/Diyarbakr Akhlát, and Malázgird, Ayyarids/Shadhanjanids (AD 1040), Ayyubids (see: footnote n. 2), Kakuyids (1007-1051) in another part of Median territory from Hamadan and Dinawar to Isfahan (based on their relation with Buyids and Dailamites, the religious and nominal similarities with Yarsan/Kakaiy Kurds and their almost same area of residence, they are probably related to the Kakiys that still are in Kurdistan as a religious community), Kakuyid Atabegs (1051 to 1141) in Isfahan and Yazd, Fadilwayhids/Shiwankara'i Kurds (1030-1355) in Luristan's Şiwankaran, under Amir Fadluye, who originally came from Sham, Atabegs of greater Lur/Hezar Aspan (1095-1424), Zanginas/Atabegs of lesser Lur (known as Khurshidi because of its founder Shojae al-Din Khorshidi) (1174-1598) in Khurramawa, Luristan (which many times changed its homage to the Ottomans and Safavids so that eventually Shah Abbas killed their leader Shah Werdi Khan. Then the grandchildren of Shah Werdi retained a smaller government in Pusht Kuh that lasted to the time of Reza Shah) (see: Frye, 1975, 238-304; Boyle, 1968, 24-117 & 261; Zaki, 1931, v. 1, 131-140 and V. 2; Bitlisi, 1597/2005; Bruinessen, 1992, 161-75; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 4).

<sup>4</sup> For example, the governments of: Shaddadids (951-1175) in Arran and Dvin in upper Media, Hasanwayhids//Barzakanids (959-1015) in Hamadan and Kirmashan, Annázid dynasty (991-1117), the successors of the Hasanwayhids in Kirmashan, Ilam, Dinawar and Hulwán, Rawwádids (955-1071) a Kurdicized dynasty (through integration and marriage ties with Kurdish dynasties in Hadhbans) in a part of upper Media (today Azarbaijan), Hadhbani Kurds in the first half of



2; Bitlisi, 1597/2005; Bruinessen, 1992, 161-75; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 4).

### **From the Mongol Invasion to the Advent of the Safavids and Ottomans (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century)**

With the weakening of the Abbasids, Kurdistan was again faced with the invasion of another empire. The Mongol invasion in 1258, led by the Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan, came from the East, to Baghdad via Kurdistan, and brought about the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate and also the Kurdish Sultanate of Ayyubids. The Mongols' campaigns covered almost the whole of Kurdistan, and the political structure of Kurdistan was again damaged. The autonomous Kurdish emirates, such as the Shiwankara'i Kurds, after more than 100 years of

acting more or less independently, like other Islamic governments compulsorily became subjugated to the Mongols and then Timur. Under Hulagu's Ilkhanid system, the Mongols ruled Kurdistan. Nevertheless, some small parts of the larger Kurdish dynasties, like the remnants of the Ayyubid rulers, and some smaller dynasties and chieftains who offered their allegiance to the Mongols, remained. For example, the Mongols approved the Ardalan/Erdelan government<sup>5</sup> founded probably at the end of the Abbasid Caliphate. The Emirate of Jizir/Botan, founded during the Buyid's time (10-11<sup>th</sup> century), after the invasion of the Mongols and then Timur in the early 1400s was revived and remained extant until the revolt of Bedir Khan Beg in 1847, when it was removed

<sup>5</sup> The origin of the Ardalan dynasty can be traced back to before the Islamic period and also the Marwanids. They governed their land for six and half centuries, until the 1860s. For a while they even had independence (from around the early 14<sup>th</sup> century during the end of the Ilkhanids to the early Safavid era, about early 16<sup>th</sup> century) and struck coins and recited Friday sermons with the name of their governors (See: Kurdistani, 1946, 5-6; Bitlisi, 1597/2005; Zaki, 1931, V.2). The persistent government of Ardalan for long time strengthened the status of Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan, especially during the time of Khasraw

Khan and then Aman-Allah Khan Ardalan, the powerful Kurdish leader (1800-1824), the Qajar government counted on it and considered them important. Aman-Allah Khan as a prominent figure sought to apply European methods to train his troops (Avery et al, 1991, 151 & 172). Although the people of Ardalan territory have mostly been Sunni, from the time of the Safavids, the family of the Ardalan governors gradually, and at first nominally, became Shiite because of their political relations and marriage with central governments. It gradually affected their autonomy.

by the Ottomans. There was the Khizan Emirate from the time of the Saljuks to the Ottomans. The Hassankyf Emirate remained as a residual of the Ayyubids. Chamishgazk during the Mongol, Timurid and Qaraqoyunlu regimes kept itself alive. The above cases indicate that some Kurdish governments during the Mongol invasion survived through giving their homage to the Mongols. Moreover, like the nomad tribes of the Mongols, Turks etc., the Kurdish tribes also made up one part of the Ilkhanids' military aristocracy (see: Boyle, 1968, 78, 347-392 and 514; Zaki, 1931, 153 and V.2). During the Ilkhanid rule, and that of the Timurids, Qara-Qoyunlu and Aq-Qoyunlu that invaded and occupied, or whose authorities covered, areas of Kurdistan until the emergence of the Ottomans and Safavids, the Kurdish emirates gradually grew again.

Thus, while important political changes were going on at the level of the dominant powers, there were many Kurdish emirates/principalities on a lesser

scale with their own administration in Kurdistan. They took part in politics and some of them tried to extend their governments and gain independence. The above-mentioned empires and states, whether through campaigns or mutual relations, obtained the deference of the Kurdish emirates and attached them nominally to their rule. For example, Amir Sharafadin Bitlisi acquiesced with Timur to retain his emirate. After Timur, Amir Shamsadin Bitlisi helped the Qaraqoyunulu to reestablish their government which led to their recognition of the Emirate of Bitlis, though afterwards conflicts between the Kurds and Qaraqoyunlu developed because of religious beliefs (Zaki, 1931, 157-9). Indeed, the existence of some semi-Shiite convictions among the Qaraqoyunlu led to their close relationship with the Safavids, while most of the Kurds supported the Aq-Qoyunlu and then the Ottomans. Thus, with the emergence of the Ottomans from the north and the Safavids from the east

and their religious war, Kurdistan was again faced by two big powers.

### **Kurdistan between the Safavids and Ottomans (1501-1722)**

Unlike the Ottomans as Sunni Turks with a history of ruling from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, different myths surrounded the origin of the Safavids.<sup>6</sup> However, from the time of their ancestor, Sheikh Safi, until Shah Ismail I (1487-1523) gradually the Safavid line became religiously Shiite and ethnically Turkmen. However, it was not until Ismail I, as the first Safavid leader, that the Shah overtly announced his faith as Shiite. Whether Sheikh Safi was Kurd or Arab, Shah Ismail grew up among Turkmen and their military

and administrative aristocracy. The Safavids had relations with Qara and Aq Qoyunlu to the extent that their leaders Junayd and Haydar married into Uzun Hasan's family – the ruler of the Aq Qoyunlu dynasty in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. There were some similarities with the Shiites in Anatolia, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan among a small number of Qaraqoyunlu and Kurds, which paved the way for a change in the religious line of the Safavids. Moreover, the Shiite minority in the north and then other parts of the present-day Iran supported Shah Ismail. Thus, the mystic order of Safavids, over time, adopted Twelver Shia beliefs to take advantage of the creed's

<sup>6</sup> According to some narrations, the ancestor of the Safavids, Sheikh Safi-e-Din Ardabili (C. 1252-1334), was a Kurd and his religion like the majority of the Kurds was Shafei Sunni (Bruinessen, 1992, 138). Indeed, until the coming of Seljuk Turks in 11<sup>th</sup> century, the people of 'Media Atropatene' (present-day Azerbaijan) were also Kurdish (Farrokh, 2011, 10). Later, they were gradually removed. He had an association with Kurdish and Sufi-Sunni personalities such as Sheikh Saedi (see: Footnote n. 17). It is also possible that he and his descendants had a connection with Yarsan/Ahl-I Hagh/Ali-u-Allahi and Alevi (also known as Qizilbash) Kurds who were an important community at the time and had mysticism and Ali, the fourth Sunni Caliph and first Shia Imam, and for them is a most important personage (the present Alevi in Bakur is similar to Yarsan, a Kurdish indigenous religion in Rojhelat, both of which are syncretic religions and Pseudo-Muslim.

Though they have some aspects of Shia Islam, they are not a Shiite sect like the Alewitte Shia in Syria, which is also closer to Sunni than Twelver Shia. They are not accepted by both Sunnis and Shias. Even in Iran they have better relations with Sunnis than Shias). Buyid, Yarsan and Alevi Kurds have similar beliefs and Kurdish dialects (Gorani and Zaza). They are related to Dailimite (see: Footnote n. 2). Moreover, based on some other narrations of the Safavids especially during Shah Ismail's time, on the one hand, as Sayyid, Sheikh Safi's lineage goes back to Ali and he had Arab ancestry. On the other, he was introduced as a Turk (see: Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 39, 195, 214, 620 & 630-3). The last narrations is more likely a political fiction. For example, in his book about the history of the Safavids, Iskandar Beyg Monshi at first connects Shaikh Safi to Ali and then mentions him as a "young Turk" (Monshi, 2003, 9-12). Monshi as a Turkman in the Safavid court had a political view.

appeal to the associated masses (Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 135-200, 306-345, 620 and 631). Indeed, "Shah Ismail converted the Shaikhiyat/spiritual position to the Sultanat throne", in Zaki's words (1931, 257).

In order to attain power, however, the Safavids gradually changed their religion and made Shia the religion of state (Kedouri, 1992, 338). This change attracted the political-military power of Kizilbash/Qizilbash<sup>7</sup> which needed to find a different religious legitimacy against the new and growing Sunni Caliphate. They needed the same legitimizing symbols as those used by the Ottomans. However, neither the creed of Qizilbash nor providing Sunnite training for the realm's notables were capable of providing a religious justification to strengthen the foundations of the Safavid Empire. So, the Safavids tried not only to convert Sunni

believers, mostly for political gain, but also to present a special sect of Shiism compatible with politics. At the time of Shah Ismail, the Safavid realm was predominantly Sunni; to convert the people, he used force and introduced himself as a direct descendant of the Shiite Imams and defender of the Shiite sect. He established Twelver Shia as the official faith of his realm, in contrast to the Ottoman's Sunnism, and made it mandatory. To promulgate the Shiite sect in the land, the Safavids reinforced the Shiite Ulama/scholars by importing Twelver clerics, especially from Arabic-speaking Shiite minority lands like Iraq, Bahrain and Syria. To create a special sect, Shah Ismail with the help of Twelver clergy focused on a special Ulama from Syrian Jabal Amil (present-day South Lebanon), known as Amilis, who amended and modified the political theory of Shia to link the usually non-political traditional

<sup>7</sup> Qizilbash/Kizilbash believed in the Imamate and spiritual kingship of the Fourth Caliph Ali and his descendants. When the Safavid Sufis wore the Haider cap/*taj-i haidart*, a distinctive red cone-shaped twelve-pleated hat as the sign of Twelver Shia Imams, they became

known as "Kizilbash." Haider was the byname of Ali and the name of Shah Ismail's father (see: Howard, 2017, 78-9; Newman, 2006, 2; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 195 & 207; Abisaab, 2004, 8).

Shiism to power, and to transform it to a state-operated religion. Amilis, who were themselves a minority among Shias<sup>8</sup>, not only religiously but also politically, were firmly against the Ottomans and advocated a Shiite empire (see: Farrokh, 2011, 10-22; Newman, 2006, 2-24, 65 & 107; Abisaab, 2004, 139).

Meanwhile, the Ottomans as the conquerors of Constantinople considered themselves as the seat of the Islamic Caliphate and announced their dominion. According to Rhoads Murphey (1999, 146), the distinction between religion and religiosity was more important during the Ottoman Empire than previous Caliphates. Indeed, exploiting religion in state ideology and using religious sentiments to justify extending its territory was the

Caliphate's internal motivation. By using religious identity, the Empire provided for its political needs that were different from an individual's religious faith. The growth of a Shiite state was a danger for the Caliphate, since the Safavids established it to offset the power of the Sunni Ottomans. So, in the Islamic world the Ottoman caliph's use of religious propaganda targeted the Safavids first. Thus, apart from the desire to expansion of their territory, religion was a major factor which caused tension between the Ottomans and Safavids. The Ottomans as defenders of Sunni faith, and the Safavids with a claim to being Shiite and the inheritors of Ali and the Prophet, saw themselves as those who should govern Muslims. There was a contest between the Caliph/Sultan as the

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<sup>8</sup> At the time, the Shiite majority didn't participate in politics and rejected the temporal rule of a Shiite sovereign during occultation of their Imam. They did not have Islamic political symbols like Friday sermon, which from the beginning of Islam had been a manifestation of authority and legitimacy. The Safavids needed legitimizing symbols such as those used by Sunnite rulers. So, they used Amilis who unlike Qatifi, Bahraini, and Iraqi Shiite scholars agreed with Shiite as a state religion. The Safavids needed such a form of Shiism to confront the Ottomans. To prove their state formation and

imperial sovereignty, they advocated the socio-political role of the clergy and used the Amilis' approach towards new interpretations of Tradition and rational inference of legal precepts (Ijtihad). The Amilis' Ijtihad about performing Friday prayer and sermons/Khutba led to the authenticity of Shiism and the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Shiite rulers. Thus, Shiism was for the first time instituted and tailored to Statehood by the early Safavid shahs (Abisaab, 2004, 4-21, 51, 139).

vicar of God and the Shah as the shadow of God. For the Ottomans, Shiism was a heretical sect which led them to announce holy war against the Safavids, and Shiism became a main factor motivating Safavid troops against the Ottomans. Eventually both sides locked horns in Kurdistan (Howard, 2017, 86; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 135-200, 306-345 & 620-631).

When Shah Ismail started to force conversion of the people and either killed or exiled the Sunni clerics (Ward, 2009, 43), the Ottoman Sultan, Bayezid II, advised him to stop destroying the worshipping places of Sunni Muslims. Nevertheless, being anti-Sunni, Shah Ismail continued to spread Shia faith by force. The rebellion of the Anatolian Qizilbash and the traffic of Safavid adherents between the two realms led to the dissatisfaction of the Ottomans. After Bayezid II, Sultan Selim, who was even more anti-Shia, became tough with the Shia Turkmen (Ward, 2009, 44; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 219 & 223). The tension

between the two powers eventually resulted in a long war. Based on the Fatwa/Fetva of the Sunni Muftis against unbelievers and heretics, Sultan Selim attacked the Safavids and defeated Shah Ismail in Chaldiran, Kurdistan (Howard, 2017, 89). Within the Empire, also, the Ottoman rulers, based on the Fatwa of the Sunni theologians, pronounced Alevis as heretics and infidels (Vorhoff, 2003, 94). In 1548 Sheykhul-Islam Ebussuud Efendi declared them as heretics, thereby killing them was permissible by Islamic law. The Alevi/Kizilbash Kurds and Turks were persecuted. Unlike the non-Muslim minorities, there were no legal regulations specific to Alevis, so they were treated as Sunnis (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2003, 55).

These changes profoundly affected Kurdistan which again, as in the times of the ancient empires, became a region subjugated by the incursion of two empires and two religions. From the arrival of the Safavids, parts of Kurdistan were contested between the Ottomans and Safavids. By removing the Sunni

Aq-Quyunlu, Kurdistan at first was almost annexed to the Safavids' realm. When the Safavids did not follow the Ottoman Caliphate, they were attacked by the Ottomans. As a result of the war between the Ottoman and Safavid Empires in 1514, Kurdistan was divided between both. The division was formalized by the Zuhab/Qesrshirin treaty of 1639, and the larger part of Kurdistan was annexed to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, each part of Kurdistan was affected by the religious policy of the relevant empire (see: Ghassemlou, 1993, 104; Hassanpour, 2003, 118; Newman, 2006, 76; al-Khalil, 2011, 235). This religio-political war had a very negative effect on the future of Kurdistan and the unity of Kurds. After the division, both empires used different Islamic sects to forge an internal union between different lands and ethnicities. On the one hand, Kurdish leaders were affiliated to the Sunni Caliphate because of their religion; on the other, they sometimes had political interests with the Safavids, though

they were under pressure to become Shiite.

After Chaldiran, the Ottomans working with Kurdish chieftains gained control of most areas of Kurdistan; Diyarbakir, Mardin, Mosul and so on (Howard, 2017, 90). They adopted two ploys to satisfy the Kurds: the first was religious by using the same religious sentiment, and second was political by recognizing the autonomy of Kurdish governments. The presence of a majority of Sunni Kurds helped them in this annexation. For example, with the help of a Kurdish religious leader, Sheikh/Mawlana Idris Bitlisi (1455-1520), they used the religious attitudes of the Kurds to extend their authority/sovereignty over some parts of Kurdistan (al-Khalil, 2011, 247). Following the demise of the Aq-Qoyunlu government, Bitlisi contacted the Ottomans since religiously he was against Shah Ismail. Bitlisi was highly regarded for his service in the war against the Safavids, reaching the highest rank in the Ottoman state. Through religious discourse, he encouraged

people in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan to support the Ottomans.<sup>9</sup> In 1515 Sultan Selim I determined that he should be sent to Kurdistan to incite Kurdish leaders, chieftains and local rulers against Shah Ismail and the Shiite people. Bitlisi was effectively persuasive, with many Kurdish leaders giving support to the Sultan and Emirates, accepting the authority of the Ottoman Caliphate. As a Kurdish and Sunni influencer, he was most successful in Kurdistan, attracting 23 Kurdish leaders in Diyarbakir, Mardin, Mosul, Şingal/Sinjar, Hasankeyf/Heskîf, Amedi and Jazir, Kirkuk and Hewlêr/Erbil etc. For example, after Diyarbakir, when the Ottomans wanted to capture Mardin, Bitlisi sent a propaganda flyer to its citizens and used a Qur'anic verse to affect them. The populace was touched, and the city was captured peacefully. As a unity based on an agreement in 1514 between the Ottomans and Kurds, the nominal authority of the Ottoman state was accepted

provided that the Kurds' autonomy under hereditary rule was preserved, they paid annual tax and supported each other in wars. Thus Bitlisi helped the Ottomans to easily dominate most parts of Kurdistan (al-Khalil, 2011, 232; Zaki, 1931, 161-167).

Conversely, the Safavids used a group of Shiite or pseudo-shiite Kurds who made part of the Qizilbash, the followers of the Safavids. For instance, some Kurdish tribes from the region of Dersim/Tunceli were followers of the Safawi/Safavid Order which afterwards was also known as Qizilbash (White, 2000, 45). This placed them in the sway of the two powers. The Safavids also used marriage ties to be acknowledged by autonomous Kurdish principalities, such as the marriage of Shah Ismail's sister with a Kurdish prince in Kurdistan. This practice of politics through marriage continued, for instance, when the marriage between Safavid and Ardalan families was

<sup>9</sup> See: "İdrisi Bitlisi kimdir?" Islamic Encyclopedia, retrieved 3/17/2020, at:

<https://sorularlailamiyet.com/idrisi-bitlisi-kimdir> (2007/2016).



announced. Moreover, they vested the governance of some other provinces to Kurdish leaders to turn them away from Kurdistan, like Ganj Ali Khan, military commander and governor of Kerman from 1596-1621 and Qandahar 1622-1624. The Kurdish leaders were also given high official posts such as Vizier/Minister, for instance Sheikh Ali Khan Zangana (1611-1691) who was grand Vizier from 1673 to 1690, and his son Shah Quli Khan Zangana (d. 1715) during the reign of Shah Hussein (1694-1722). The Safavids probably used such personal relations with governmental officials and marriage alliances to connect with the Kurds and to neutralize the effect of their common religion with the Ottomans (see: Farrokh, 2011, 10-22; Ward, 2009, 3 & 42; Newman, 2006, 2-24 & 65 & 107; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 135-200, 306, 342-345, 620 & 631).

Despite there being two empires, for an extended period of time there was no direct rule over either part of Kurdistan. Authority was exercised through Kurdish

chiefs. By the mid-sixteenth century, as mentioned, the Kurds governed much of their territory. And, the Ottoman and Safavid states had accepted the presence of Kurdish principalities as autonomous mini-states/Eyalets (Hassanpour, 2003, 111). The power base of the Kurdish chiefs derived from their alliance with one or other of the empires. Most of them were pro-Ottoman and a few pro-Safavid (Farrokh, 2011, 25). In the Ottoman territory there were many Eyalets (see: Inalcik, 2000, 105-107) including those in Kurdistan like Diyarbakir, Van, Sharezor/Shahrizor and so on. As in the time of the Saljuks, in 1527 there was even an Eyalet under the name "Kurdistan" itself, which materialized as a result of negotiations. There were also many autonomous and semi-autonomous districts. For example, the principality of Van established in 1548 covered a number of Sanjaks (Imber, 2019, 147, 156, 165 & 192). Between the state and the Kurdish principalities in the Ottoman Empire, there were formal

arrangements. After the annexation of Kurdistan, the Ottoman government recognized the authority of the Kurdish rulers (Mîrs) and the Kurdish lords to hold their lands as hereditary fiefs. The “Kurdo-Ottoman pact” formally recognized sixteen autonomous principalities of various sizes, about fifty Kurdish Sanjaks (fiefdoms) and a number of Ottoman Sanjaks. In exchange for the autonomy, the principalities had to uphold the Ottoman law, provide the taxes, provide military service for the Ottoman caliphate, not rise against the Porte and conspire with the Safavids, and not modify the frontiers of their state or trespass into the autonomous territories of others (Nezan, 1993, p 14; Bruinessen, 1992, 42; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, 7).

Although the above status was usually respected by both parties, the Kurds-others<sup>10</sup>, until the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some troubles arose that led to bids for independence, such as in two important Mîr principalities, Kurî Janpola<sup>11</sup> and Amir Khan Lap Zêrîn<sup>12</sup>. In DimDim castle in 1608 Amir Khan revolted against Shah Abbas. Before that, when the Ottomans influenced the Safavid’s realm, the Kurdish tribes and clans in the region gave homage to the Ottomans and didn’t obey the Safavids. Shah Mohammad, a Biradost Beg, became the Mîr/prince of Biradost. Nevertheless, Amir Khan did not obey him, and he had relations with other great Kurdish Amirs like Omar Beg, the governor of Soran. In contrast with the Ottomans, the Safavids recognized Amir Khan as

<sup>10</sup> The “Others” for Kurds were both the Ottomans and Safavids (their successors except for Zands).

<sup>11</sup> Kurî Janpola (Mîr Ali) created his independent government in Aleppo/Halab. He had sizeable forces and troops, sermons were recited in his name and a coin was struck. He also tried to create foreign treaties and relations. But in the Ottomans’ war with him, he was eventually defeated and in 1607 his government collapsed (Zaki, 1931, 178-180).

<sup>12</sup> Amir khan Yakdest (One Hand) was one of the famous Mîrs of the Biradost dynasty, the descendants of Hasanwayhids, around Wirmê/Urmîyeh during the reign of Shah Abbas I (1588-1629). He lost his hand when he helped Omar Beg of Soran in a war. Before his revolt, Shah Abbas gave him a ‘golden hand’ (Lap Zêrîn) which became his nickname. The story of the resistance in DimDim Castle/Fort, the centre of his rule, is famous among Kurds (Monshi, 2003, V. 2, 792; Zaki, 1931, 180).

the Mîr of Biradost and the Elka/Sanjak of Mêrgewir and Targawir, Urmieh and Shino. Amir Khan then also influenced other parts of Kurdistan in the Ottoman Empire, thus becoming well-known among the Kurdish governors. Many Kurdish Mîrs/princes, chieftains and tribes in the area, like Abdal Khan Mukri, served and supported him, which led to his attempts for independence from the Safavids, too. They also had a religious conflict with the Qizilbash/Shiite Amirs, so that one of the reasons for Abdal Khan joining Amir Khan was his religious conflict with the Safavids. Accordingly, the Safavids attributed the Khans to Rome/the Ottomans, and in the name of religion and with the help of the group opposed to the Ottomans attacked, besieged and murdered them in 1608. Indeed, the Safavids supported the rebellious groups against the Ottomans. These groups were known as Celalî/Jalali, like the Alevis in Anatolia who were at war with the Ottomans in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the defeat of the Jalalis by the Ottomans under

the leadership of Muhammad Pasha, they were brought into the Safavid realm so that the Safavids, along with Qizilbash forces, used them against the Kurds of DimDim castle. However, Qubad Khan Mukri, the nephew of Abdal Khan, was embroiled in a political conflict with the Safavids, contrary to his father Sheikh Haider Mukri. Because of the ethno-religious conflicts, he didn't support the Safavids against DimDim castle. After the DimDim revolt it followed that the Safavids attacked the Kurd-Sunni Mukri tribes too (Monshi, 2003, V. 2, 792-811; Zaki, 1931, v. 1, 180-5 and V.2). Some writers, like Amin Zaki (1931, 186), mention these events as the Shiite revenge on Sunnis. In the wars against independent Kurds, both the Ottomans and Safavids saw the Kurds as the enemy. They did not trust the Kurds and used Islamic terms against them, such as "Ghazi/Holy warrior" and "Fath/conquest" that were originally applied against non-Muslims.

In sum, because of the rise of Shiism in political power, the

Ottoman-Safavid period was the peak of religio-political confrontation within the Islamic world, compared with previous and subsequent periods, which severely affected Kurdistan. Both empires in the name of religion pursued their political goals and expanded their sphere of influence. The Ottomans tried to preserve Sunnism and the Safavids tried to convert people. The disputes led to many problems in Kurdistan.

#### **The Effect of Disputes on Kurdistan**

In campaigns against the Safavids, the Ottomans each time annexed a part of Kurdistan to their realm. After the Chaldiran war, in 1516 principalities like Diyarbakir and Bitlis were annexed. When the Safavid governor retreated from Diyarbakir he implemented a scorched-earth policy. After capturing Tewrêz/Tabriz in 1534, the Ottomans seized present-day Eastern Kurdistan/Rojhelat and marched via Hamadan on Baghdad. When the Safavids attacked Kurdistan in 1553, the Ottomans responded in 1555 and recaptured some territory. During the

Ottomans' attack on the Safavids during 1578-1590, other areas of Kurdistan fell to them. At the time, a series of Kurdish uprisings in the frontier areas of the Safavid region favoured the Ottomans. But again, in 1623-4, during the Safavids' campaign towards the holy places of Shiite Karbala and Najaf, that led to the capture of Baghdad too, they reestablished their control over the Kurdish territories of Daquq, Kirkuk, Shahrazur and Diyarbakir. In 1629-30, in order to recapture Baghdad, the Ottomans attacked the Safavid realm via Kurdistan and, with a victory at Mahidasht/Kirmashan, advanced to Hamadan. Tensions lasted until the Peace Treaty of Zehaw/Zuhab in 1639 when the Ottomans reestablished their control over Baghdad and the whole of Mesopotamia (see: Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 224-285; Newman, 2006, 28-43).

Thus, most of the Kurdish principalities/Emirates were annexed to the Ottomans with some falling under the Safavids' influence, while others such as

Ardalan were divided or in the case of Hakkari remained desired by both empires. In the conflict between the Safavids (and their successors) and the Ottomans, the Sunni Kurdish emirates looked for help from the Ottoman Empire because they feared Safavid Shiite domination, while others looked for help from the Safavids when they had political conflict with the Ottoman Empire, and even others changed religion nominally. Kurdish principalities such as Bitlis and Hakkari used their allegiance to the Ottomans and the conflict between the two empires to extend their own territories. Nevertheless, the loyalty of Kurdish leaders to either empire led to their victory, inasmuch as it was the adherence of a number of Kurdish leaders to the Safavids that led to the victory of Shah Abbas in the war of 1605 near lake Wirmê/Urmiyeh (Bruinessen, 1992, 142; Imber, 2019, 156; Howard, 2017, 140). However, some Kurdish border emirates like the

governments of Ardalan, Mukri, Small Lur, Baban etc. were attacked by one of the empires when, because of political-religious issues, they gave homage more to the other. For long periods of time Kurdish regions such as Mukiryān, the areas between Wirmê and Van lakes, Kirkuk, Sharazur to Mosul, Kirmashan, Hamadan and Ardalan were frequently occupied by one power or the other (Farrokh, 2011, 6, 66-82).

Concerning the change in allegiance to the Safavids or the Ottomans, the following examples can be mentioned. First, after their period of independence<sup>13</sup>, the Ardalan sometimes changed their political homage<sup>14</sup>, though preserved their internal independence until the end of Khan Ahmad Khan's rule. Then gradually the Safavids' political influence was enhanced. For instance, there was tension in the Ardalan emirate in the 1550s: "In 1551, the Ardalan lord switched his allegiance from

<sup>13</sup> See: Footnote n. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Suraw/Surkhab Beg of Ardalan governed independently and some others, like

Taimur Khan and Halo Khan, received Ottoman support, while Khan Ahmad Khan received support from the Safavids.

the Ottomans to the Safavids” (Imber, 2019, 192). But eventually the emirate was split and Sharezur was detached from Ardalan in 1561 (al-Khalil, 2011, 233). Second, the Mukri government under Sarim Khan gave allegiance to the Ottomans. But after him, his cousin Shaikh Haider gave homage to the Safavids. So, the Ottoman Sultan Sulaiman sent the Kurdish Amirs of Amedi, Hakkari and Bradost to fight against the Mukri government. The next governor, Amir Begi Haji Omari Sarm, gave his loyalty to the Ottomans. Therefore, during the revolt of Amir Khan Biradost, as mentioned, Abdal Khan supported Amir Khan against Shaikh Haidar. After Shaikh Haider, Amir Beg Mukri did not fight against the revolt. Third, Showerdi, the leader of small Lur, was an example of those Kurdish governors who frequently changed his homage from the Ottomans to the Safavids and vice versa (See: Zaki, 1931, V.2). Fourth, towards the end of the Safavids’ rule, in Sunni regions to the west and northwest of the Safavid Empire, several revolts

broke out. The Kurds no longer supported the Safavids and sought Ottoman intervention (see: Farrokh, 2011, 72-5). In the 1710s there were some Kurdish uprisings in Eastern Kurdistan, such as in Hamadan in 1717, where the majority of inhabitants were still Kurdish, and they captured the central part of the Safavid realm almost to the outskirts of Isfahan (Newman, 2006, 107 & 116; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 318).

So, the Kurdish chiefs ruled autonomously in the 16-17<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the borderlands between the Ottoman and Safavid empires where loyalties between them occasionally switched at will (Imber, 2019, 149). The Kurdish principalities which had a varying degree of attachment to the Ottomans or the Safavids were used as a battleground and buffer zone (Romano, 2006, 3). Nevertheless, it was religion that severely affected their allegiance. Indeed, the two empires used religion in favour of their policies and to expand their territorial influence. Because of the religious

policy of the Ottomans, some Alevi/Kizilbash Kurds took political refuge in the Safavid realm. The Ottoman state considered them as part of the opposition, known as Jalalis, who have already been mentioned. In the Safavid domain also, many Kurds were displaced within and from Kurdistan to other places because they did not obey the state's rule: being Sunni, they mostly had a tendency towards the Ottomans or gaining full independence. Shah Tahmaseb and then Shah Abbas (1571-1629), after his conquest in the vicinity of Erzerum, moved a large number of Kurdish tribes from Kurdistan to Khorasan, especially the area around Khabushan (Quchan). The policy was continued by the Afsharids and then Qajars. Nadir Shah also moved tribes from Kurdistan to other parts of his realm – like some of the shikak, Amarlu, Zand, khwajavand (from Garrus), Lur etc. to Khorasan, Mazandaran and Gilan (see: Farrokh, 2011, 55-89; Zaki, 1931, 190; Avery et al, 1991, 4 and 514-5). The Safavids and their non-Kurdish

successors, Afsharids and Qajars, had two purposes: first, perhaps changing demography and decreasing the population of the Kurds who had the capacity to change their allegiance towards the Ottoman caliphate because of their religion and/or their political interests. Second, preventing the invasions that threatened their power from other sides. Thus, some communities of Kurds were detached from their original land and scattered in other lands, such as the inhabitants of the present-day northern Khorasan province in Iran.

### **The Ottomans and the Successors of the Safavids (1722-1924)**

#### **The Ottomans and Afsharids-Zands (18<sup>th</sup> century)**

The Safavids were removed by Afghan Sunnite Ghalzays, who captured Isfahan under Shah Mahmoud. At first, some of the Kurds in Khorasan also accepted submission to the Afghans (Avery et al, 1991, 19-23). Consequently, the Ottomans penetrated deeper into Safavid territory than in the past (Howard, 2017, 188-9). At the time, Kurdistan was mostly under the

control of Kurds, while the Ottomans, ostensibly in support of Tahmasp II entered Eastern Kurdistan. The Kurds defended the Ottoman army, though there was some opposition especially from those who had already come from the Ottomans' realm. Because of the assistance of the Lurs and other Kurdish groups who were local Sunni inhabitants at the time, Luristan, Kirmashan and Hamadan, Ardalan and Wirmê in Kurdistan and some parts of Azarbaijan to Ardabil fell into the hands of the Ottomans in 1723-4 (Farrokh, 2011, 83; Newman, 2006, 125; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 327; Avery et al, 1991, 20 and 298-9). As supporters of Sunni Islam, the Afghans were recognized by the Ottomans and signed a peace treaty in 1727 at Hamadan (Farrokh, 2011, 84; Avery et al, 1991, 300). Under the treaty, Ashraf Khan was declared ruler. However, Kirmashan, Ardalan and Luristan were annexed to the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, some of the Kurds supported Afghans also, since they had a political conflict with the

Ottomans on the one hand, and the Afghans were Sunni, contrary to the Safavids, on the other. The Lur chiefs even murdered the Safavid prince Safi Mirza in 1727, after he had escaped from Isfahan to Hamadan and Kirmashan (Avery et al, 1991, 47). Nevertheless, after the peace treaty, the Afghans surrendered the Kurdish Amirs to the Ottomans (Zaki, 1931, 201). The common religion of the Afghans and Ottomans favoured the Ottomans against Kurdish opposition. Despite this, the Afghan rule was short.

Nadir Khan Afshar, who as the commander of Safavids' residual army under Shah Tahmaseb II removed the Afghans, had tried to ally the Khorasan Kurds especially by marriage ties with Kurdish chieftains. They eventually joined him boosted his power. In the war of Nadir Khan against the Ottomans in 1730, the Eastern part of Kurdistan including Luristan, Kermashan, Hamadan, Sine/Ardalan and Wirmê fell under the rule of Nadir. But very soon after, the Ottoman forces in 1731 again captured the same areas of Kurdistan. By removing Shah



Tahmaseb II, Nadir Khan struck the Ottomans and recaptured the areas and also part of the Ottoman territory (in present-day Southern Kurdistan) including Kirkuk, Derne, Sharazur and so on. In 1733, Nadir Khan marched on Baghdad via Kirkuk. In the same year the Ottomans retook the territory. During the conflict some areas of Kurdistan, from Hamadan to Kirkuk, became the battlefield between the two powers (Avery et al, 1991, 19-32 and 302-4; Zaki, 1931, 201; Farrokh, 2011, 107-112).

Finally a peace treaty between the Ottomans and Nadir Khan was ratified in 1735. Nadir then announced himself as Shah instead of Abbas III in 1736. Thus, the Safavid dynasty ended completely. Nadir used religion to reach power. He was a Sunni with a different religious policy and, as one of the conditions at his coronation, asked the assembly to respect Sunni beliefs and abolish persecuting Sunnis. Although he wanted to replace the Shiite sect with the Sunni, because of the long-time Safavid rule his demand never

took hold (see: Farrokh, 2011, 115). Since the Ottomans had taken advantage of the Safavids' heresy to annex and intervene in Rojhelat/Eastern Kurdistan, Nadir wanted to resolve the religious pretext. Because of the disagreement of Shiite Ulama, he did not want openly to proclaim Sunnism as the state religion. Nevertheless, for ease of recognition by the Ottomans, especially at the beginning and instead of Sunni Afghans, he wanted to show that orthodox Islam had returned to the realm. It made signing a peace agreement easier. Besides, he wanted to gain the support of the Sunni Kurdish, Turkmen, and Afghan tribesmen in his own army and to win the loyalty of Sunni Muslims in other lands which he wanted to attack, also opening up a way to challenge the monopoly of the Ottoman Sultan in the Islamic world. Simultaneously, he also attempted to reconcile Shia believers with the Sunni creed to retain them as his supporters (Ward, 2009, 51; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 328 and 648-654;

Avery et al, 1991, 45, 306-8 and 706-9).

However, Shiism remained an influential religion in politics. Even afterwards, Nadir used it as a plea/pretence to attack the Ottomans in 1741. When Nadir became Shah, Shiite people in his territory demanded that Nadir ask the Ottoman Sultan to recognize the legitimacy of the Twelver/Jaffari Shiite sect as a fifth orthodox school of Islam and to open a place special to it in the holy Ka'ba of Mecca. In his negotiations with the Ottomans in the 1730s, he outlined the proposal (Howard, 2017, 192; Avery et al, 1991, 307). The Caliph, based on the wishes of Sunni Ulama, rejected Nadir's proposal. Then, after Nadir's unsuccessful effort in 1741 to use his religious policies against the Sultan to gain the loyalty of other Muslims, he threatened the Ottomans and war began in 1742. Although administratively and organizationally he continued the Safavid establishment, his different ideology and army's composition including Afghans, Turkmen, Kurds who shared Nadir's Sunni beliefs

(Avery et al, 1991, 46 & 308-9; Ward, 2009, 52), influenced the Kurds in Kurdistan too. Moreover, Kurdistan was on the way of pilgrims both from Iran and Central Asia ("Turan"). It provided a pretext. He easily attacked the Ottomans via Kurdistan. In 1743, via Kirkuk he attacked Baghdad and then Mosul. Nadir's army captured areas in present-day Southern Kurdistan including Kirkuk, Hewlêr, and Şingal (Ward, 2009, 55-59, Avery et al, 1991, 46-49, 303 & 309). In the war between Êzîdî/Izidi Kurds and Nadir's forces, they killed several thousand Êzîdîs and their leader Yezid in Şingal in 1743. The war continued between the Afsharids and Ottomans and eventually ended after negotiations and an agreement in 1746 that led to the abandonment of all former demands of Nadir Shah. Although the Kurds helped him to reach power, because of his actions they sometimes railed against him. Eventually in 1747, Nadir was assassinated/killed by his forces on his way to suppress Khorasan Kurds in Khabushan (Avery et al, 1991, 5 &

51-59, 309 and 709; Zaki, 1931, 207; Farrokh, 2011, 124-125).

After the death of Nadir Shah, tribal conflicts provoked a civil war. There was no higher authority and many regional powers and principalities governed their regions autonomously. This provided an opportunity for a group of Kurds, a Lak tribe from southeastern Kurdistan/Rojhelat, namely the Zands who converted to Shia under the Safavids, to seize power. At the beginning, when they wanted to consolidate their power, a civil war also broke out between the Kurds themselves in Ardalan, Hamadan, Kirmashan and Luristan (Zand, Vand, Faili, Bakhtiyari, Zangana, Kalhur etc.). The Sunni and Shiite conflicts probably

affected this civil war. Eventually the Zands under the leadership of Karim Khan, the Wekêl/Vakil, succeeded. The Kurds helped him to overcome other non-Kurdish tribes so that in the battle between the Zands and the Qajars, Mohammad Hasan Khan Qajar was struck by a Kurd in his service. The main social base of the Zand Empire (1747-94) was Eastern Kurdistan, namely the main part of the Median territory of their ancestral Medes, Sassanids, Kakuyids, Hezar-Aspan<sup>15</sup> etc. They also governed most parts of the Afsharids' realm. Unlike the earlier disputes, the majority of the Kurds remained closely connected with Karim Khan. Their main forces were mostly comprised a mixed collection of Kurds from Lur, Lak

<sup>15</sup> 'Hezar/Hazar-Asp' was the Kurdish name of the son of their founder. As governor, they had the governmental title of Atabeg, composed of the Kurdish word Beg/Bag namely God/Lord, according to Nebez (2004, 24) and 'Ata' a Turkish or Arabic word emanated from the Seljuk time. In relation to small Atabegs (see: footnote n. 4), Zangana tribe still lives in Kirmashan. Since some of the Kurds have lived between Pars and Ahwaz, before Atabegs and after them also the Kurds sometimes govern Shiraz. Moreover, some stories show a Kurdish relationship in the region, for example the story of well-known poet Saedi who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, during Atabegs' age (see: Boyle, 1968, 594). The father of Saedi was from the village

Degashkhan (villages of Sheikhs), near Meriwan and he was a Mela/priest in ciwanro/jiwanro. One of the Atabegs transferred him to Shiraz where Saedi was born. In a poem by Abjad, he mentions his Kurdish origin. His books Gulistan and Bostan show that he knew Kurdish. Most of his Kurdish poems were gradually changed by rewriters of his books or were lost. He was also a Shaffiite Sunni whose title 'Sheikh' is probably related to inhabitants of his original village. His books are still taught in Sunni Kurdish seminaries (the author has collected the information from different sources, especially from Kurdish scholars like Mohammed Yousif Rahnamoun and Rauf Rahnamoun).

etc. of which the most important were the Laks. Karim Khan displaced Kurdish tribes like the Ahmadwand to Shiraz, his capital, to reinforce his power. The Kurds defended his army while serving also as wardens of their land. Control over the Kurdish principalities and tribes was nominal and the Wekêl confirmed some de facto chiefs like the case of Ardalán Wali and Zangana chief in Kirmashan (See: Avery et al, 1991, 64-81, 515-6; Zaki, 1931, V. 1, 208 & V. 2).

The Zands attacked the Ottomans to provide internal security and to extend their realm. They had two pretexts for intervention and pursuing an aggressive policy against the Ottomans: first, the existence of the Kurds and a large part of Kurdistan in Ottoman territory, within which there were also Kurdish dynastic struggles. For example, after the ejection of the pro-Zand Baban governor Muhammad Pasha of Baban (1765-1778) by the viceroy of Baghdad, the Zands intervened to support him. So, the Zands'

relations with the Ottomans were disturbed. Indeed, various governments from the time of the Safavids struck towards Baghdad via Kurdistan, especially the Ottoman Kurdish principalities of Baban and Zehaw which were strategically placed to access it. Karim Khan extended his influence in these regions through the Ardalán principality, too. Additionally, Kurdistan was a route for Shiite pilgrims travelling towards the shrines of Najaf and Karbala. Second, using the alleged mistreatment of Shiite pilgrims en route to Karbala, Karim Khan pursued control of Baghdad. The tax taken from pilgrims by the Wali of Baghdad helped him as a pretext. To attract the necessary forces, the Zand state tried to satisfy, encourage and excite the Shiite people through outlining and justifying a Shiite Jihad to capture the Shiite holy places and to pave a way for Shiite pilgrims under its rule. This led to a Fatwa issued by Ottoman Sunni Ulama against Karim Khan and the strictness of the Ottoman state. The Ottomans used

the weight of the Sunni religion to reinforce their influence in the region. Thus, because of the religious conflict, the Zands' influence was not resilient among the Babans. The religious confrontation overcame the ethnic affinity in favour of the Ottomans (see: Avery et al, 1991, 311, 710; Zaki, 1931, 208; Farrokh, 2011, 155).

Moreover, there was a proxy war by Kurdish principalities against each other, instead of facing the two empires. For example, it can be said that the conflict between the Babans and the Ardalans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was probably caused by the religious difference of their governors.<sup>16</sup> This enmity from the west, and other enemies from the east side of their territory such as Azad Khan Afghan, forced the Ardalans to make a political alliance with the Turkmen Qajar tribe, the rival of Karim Khan Zand, in the early civil wars. So, Karim Khan at first did not support the Ardalans. When he defeated the Qajars and

Mohammad Hasan Khan Qajar was killed, the Wali of Ardalan, Khasraw/Khusrau Khan II (1755-1793), was compelled to submit to Karim Khan who confirmed him as Wali of Ardalan. Unlike during the earlier dispute, at the time the Zands sponsored the Ardalans against the Babans. However, Kurdistan again became the field of war of the two big powers. Despite the Zands' support of Muhammad Pasha of Baban in 1774-5, as mentioned, he again cooperated with the new viceroy of Baghdad. In 1776 the Ottomans mobilized their forces towards the Zands. Muhammad Pasha attacked and defeated the Aradalans in 1777 at Merîwan. In reaction, the Zands attacked through Sharezûr and defeated the Ottomans and their Kurdish allies, the Babans (see: Kurdistani, 1946 114-117; Farrokh, 2011, 158; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 329; Avery et al, 1991, 91-138; Zaki, 1931, V.2). Thus, the Kurdish principalities in order to maintain their powers fought

<sup>16</sup> They fought and occupied each other's territories, even the ruling Wali of Ardalan, Hasan Ali Khan, was killed by Selim Beg, one of the

Baban Kurdish chieftains, in the middle decades of the century.

against each other with the help of one of the two super powers or through making alliance with non-Kurdish tribes such as the Qajars.

### **The Ottomans and Qajars (1789-1924)**

After Karim Khan, with Zand power waning because of civil war among his successors and the advance of the Qajars, the Zand government collapsed in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their enemy, the Turkman tribe of Qajar, took advantage of the situation to seize power. As the last of the Qizilbash, they claimed the Safavid legacy. Some Kurds in today's Rojhelat were suppressed by force and their tribesmen were evacuated to Mazandaran and Khurasan; others, to preserve their political status, peacefully submitted to them and

remained.<sup>17</sup> The conflict of Kurdish tribes with the Qajars continued for a long time. For example, the Chieftain of the Shikaks, Sadiq Khan, was involved in the killing of Agha Mohammad Khan, the founder of the Qajar dynasty. Their enmity continued and the Shikaks preserved their autonomy by swinging between the Ottomans and Qajars, so that the Ottomans considered them as Sunni and an ally against the Qajars. In return, the Qajars tried to transfer some Kurds from Kurdistan, such as the Mukri Kurds (Ward, 2009, 60; Avery et al, 1991, 106 and 132-137).

During the Qajar period, the main focus was on the war with Russia, as the most immediate threat. Both the Ottomans and Qajars used religion to attract the

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<sup>17</sup> The Ardalan principality was the important that, as mentioned, had an old relationship with the Qajar tribe as an ally. By showing his strength, firstly by extending his lands to Malayer and Golpayegan, and then announcing his homage to the Qajars, Wali of Ardalan was protected and recognized by the Qajars who bestowed a domain greater than before, including the districts of Sunur/Sunqur and Kuliayi. The Qajar-Ardalan alliance continued and became stronger through marriage ties. Indeed, they followed their old policy of alliance. The political coalition of Ardalan governors with the Safavids, Afsharids, Zands and Qajars and also their common religion led to their long-term

survival. In addition, the Shikak tribe under Sadiq Khan helped the Qajars in establishing their rule. Nevertheless, Sadiq Khan later rose up against the Qajars, but was suppressed by Fath-ali Shah. Moreover, the Kurds in Khorasan controlled their land. This was in line with the Qajar's policy of establishing a network of clients and allies among rival tribes. While the Zands and others in southern Rojhelat and the Shikak Kurds in northern Rojhelat were suppressed, the Dunbuli Kurdish chieftain was appointed as the governor of Khoi and Tewrêz/Tabriz (See: Avery et al, 1991, 119-138 & 517; Kurdistani, 1946, 167; Zaki, 1931, 209).

Kurds to fight against a non-Muslim enemy. The Qajar's new army comprised the forces of different tribes including Kurdish ones like the Shikaks, Dunbulis etc. Against the Russians, pro-Qajar Mullahs declared Jihad/Holy war, for example in 1810. Nevertheless, there was some tension, including religious frictions, and wars broke out between the two powers, both of them using Kurdish land and Kurds against each other in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because of the pilgrimages to the Shiite shrine, during this period also some areas of Kurdistan, especially Kirmashan, were invaded by both powers (Ward, 2009, 64-75; Avery et al, 1991, 151-169).

The Ottomans and Qajars provoked Kurdish rebellions against each other. The Sunni and opposition Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan often looked to Kurdish principalities and the Ottoman caliphate, while the opposition Kurds in the Ottoman territory looked to Kurdish principalities and governors in Eastern Kurdistan, under Qajar rule. While in 1804 the Qajars had unsuccessfully advanced

towards Baghdad through Kirmashan, in 1806 the governor of Baban, Mîr Abdurrahman, who wanted to gain independence from the Ottomans, was turned out by the Wali of Baghdad and with his followers and dependents took up residence in Eastern Kurdistan. In 1812-13 in the war between Baban and Baghdad, the Babans requested the help of the Qajars and they intervened. During those years, foreign officers helped the two empires to invade Kurdistan: for instance, British officers commanded the Qajar army in an expedition into Kurdistan in 1814. In 1817-8 the Qajars raided Ottoman Kurdistan via Kirmashan and Van with the help of Kurdish tribes. Their progression led to the Ottomans' declaration of war which continued through 1820-22, involving most parts of Kurdistan from Kirmashan and Khoy/Khuy to Bitlis and Diyarbakir and towards Erzurum. The Qajar forces with the support of the Faili and Lur Kurds, as Shiite Kurds, occupied Sulaymaniyah in 1821, and took advantage of the conflict between

the Kurds and Ottomans in the area. In these wars, the Qajars also pursued religious purposes, so that when the peace treaty of Erzurum was signed in 1823, they asked Ottoman officials not to harass the Shiite pilgrims in transit to their shrines or Mecca. In the wars of the 1830s and early 1840s, the Qajar army again captured Sulaimaniyah. However, after negotiations in 1845, the Qajars surrendered Sulaymaniyah, and the Zehaw area was divided between both states (see: Farrokh, 2011, 202-205; Avery et al, 1991, 163, 312-3, 388, 465; Zaki, 1931, 209).

The last time the Ottomans invaded Qajar territory was in 1907 when they occupied Kurdish-Sunni regions close to Wirmê. In their march, the Ottomans used Islamic sentiments against Russia and Iran, though eventually Russia ejected them in 1911 (Farrokh, 2011, 224). Then during the First World War, Kurdistan became a battlefield between the Ottomans and the Allies: Russian, British and French armies. At the beginning of the war, the Ottomans formally declared a

'Jihad' (Howard, 2017, 303). The Turks again used Kurdish Muslim sentiments to promote their policy against the Russian army and also to weaken Kurdish national feelings (Ghassemlou, 1993, 105). The Kurds "mostly responded to the Caliph's religious arguments and his call to arms"(Nezan, 1993, 29), especially when they heard rumours about attaching the "six vilayets" – Erzurum, Kars, Bitlis, Erzincan, Mus and Van – to Armenia (Ibid., 45-6) as a Christian state. With the help of the Kurds in Eastern Kurdistan, the Ottomans captured Tabriz via Khoy and Wirmê in 1915. But they were soon expelled by the Russians.

Unlike the Sunni Kurds on the northern borders, on the border of Kirmashan Shiite Kurds at first assisted the Persians/Melliyun to force back the Ottoman army in 1915. Nevertheless, the Ottoman forces supported the committee for defence and an alternative government was established by the pro-German deputies and leaders of the Democratic Party, who retreated to Kirmashan. The Melliyun army used the Kurds as



armed Mujahedins, especially the different tribal Kurds in the area between Kermashan and Qasr Shirin on the border with the Ottoman territory. The Ottomans also helped them with troops, most of whom were Kurds. In 1916 the Ottoman forces, with German backing, captured Kermashan to support the Melliyun army. The Ottoman-Melliyun forces, as a short alliance of the Ottomans with a Shiite force, captured the area to Hamadan. But in the same year the Ottomans were forced back and withdrew. Kermashan again fell into the hands of the allies in 1916. Once again in 1918 the Ottoman army, under the 'Army of Islam' banner, entered Tabriz via Kurdistan. The Kurds and Azeri Turks supported them. The Ottomans used Islam to attract Kurds, and Islam and Pan-Turkism to attract Shiite Turks. Eventually, after the armistice in the same year, they left the region (Farrokh, 2011, 233-240; Ward, 2009, 113 & 120; Avery et al, 1991, 208).

Therefore, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Ottomans used pan-Sunni religious sentiments to

mobilize Muslims against their enemies. The Kurdish Mujahids (Islamic warriors) and their territory were used in the Russo-Ottoman (1828-30, 1877-78), Russo-Qajar and Ottoman-Qajar wars. The Qajars also attempted to cultivate anti-Ottoman rebellions among the Kurds to reach their religio-political aims. This led to a high level of destruction and pillage in Kurdistan (Nezan, 1993, 15 & 17; Zaki, 1931, 228), with Kurdistan and the Kurds becoming the victims in the religious-political wars between the Qajars and Ottomans. Even in the First World War, Kurdistan became a battlefield against the Allies (Britain and Russia) and the Islamic sentiments of Kurds were used. It was a war between the super powers, but many volunteers and warriors throughout Kurdistan became victims in the name of Islam and fear of non-Muslim domination. Consequently, the larger part of Kurdistan and the Kurdish people in the Ottoman Empire were again divided amongst three separate

states, namely Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

### **The Ottoman-Qajar Centralization; Using Religion Against Kurdish Revolts**

While using religion against each other, the Ottomans and Qajars also used the political function of religion against the Kurds as their common internal enemy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from previous Kurdish rulers such as the Ayyubids and Zands, there were many Kurdish statelets/principalities which, as mentioned, revolted and tried to gain independence. The climax of the revolts was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Vali, 2003, 82). The Ottoman and Safavid-to-Qajar rulers only had indirect power, by claiming to be caliphs or shadows of Allah. However, after their consolidation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century both states gradually decided to centralize and extend direct control over the principalities, namely “govern, not rule any more” (Yavuz, 2007). Some reforms were made by the two Empires, undermining the accepted autonomous and semi-autonomous status of Kurdish principalities

(McDowall, 1992, 14). Although the common religion within each state helped this process, so that some principalities were gradually and easily dissolved under the effect of the religio-political and marital ties of their governors who were attracted in central governments such as Ardlan principality, the centralizing tendency ran into opposition from most principalities and the Kurds tried to achieve full independence.

During the Ottoman Empire, especially up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was still the notion of an extension of the ‘Abode of Islam’ (Darul Islam). It had, indeed, an internal function and the Ottomans used religious influence among the majority of Muslims to weaken social divisions and remove the sources of political dissent (Murphey, 1999, 30; Inalcik, 2000). Religious affiliation determined the legal, political, and social status of the various ethnic minorities in the Ottoman caliphate. All Sunni Muslim communities were considered full members of the Islamic Ummah (Moaz, 1999, 5). The caliphs used

Islam to maintain the status quo. For instance, seventeenth-century Ottoman writers were often worried about the hidden-internal enemies of Islam, those Muslims who secretly harboured heretical beliefs. They implicitly and explicitly propagated an image of imperial governance under the obedience of God, the prophets and Sultan (Shafir, 2019).

The common religion, as the most important unifying factor, helped the Ottomans against their enemies and dissenters. Although conducting Holy War (Jihad) as a religious obligation of all Muslims was not a continuous obligation without limits, the Caliphs abused it arbitrarily, since the order of Jihad, especially, lay in their hands. Moreover, the faith and religious commitment of the Ottoman soldiers and warriors was a source of their dedication. The Ottomans used it to motivate and reinforce the morale of soldiers against their enemies including internal agents like the Kurds. Religion and the Caliphate symbol were the pretexts that tied the majority of the Kurds

to the Ottomans, so that like the allies and vassals of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdish Begs and the semi-independent principalities had mutually agreed terms for cooperation (see: Murphey, 1999, 32 and 141).

However, the centralization efforts of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) changed the situation and put more pressure on the Kurdish Mîrs. This led to the Ottoman Empire having little control over the principalities for a while (Aubrey, 1937, 176). The problem was worsened by the start of the Tanzimat (a set of settings/reforms) by decree of the Sultan in 1839. In the Tanzimat period, 1839-71, the Ottomans aimed at a coercive unitary state with centralized administration. Thus, between 1837 and the mid-1850s the Ottoman state dissolved the autonomy of Kurdish principalities and imposed its own direct power. Unrest in Kurdistan and Kurdish revolts increased as a reaction (1826, 1834, 1853-55, 1880). There were many insurrections against the Ottoman

state. Among them the rebellions of Muhammd Pasha of Rewandiz and Bedir Khan Beg of Cizîre/Jizira are the most famous (Olson, 1989, 4; Barkey & Fuller, 1998, 7 and 101; Howard, 2017, 247; al-Khalil, 2011, 236; White, 2000, 55-63).

Until the mid-nineteenth century, a large part of Rojhelat was also divided into autonomous principalities.<sup>18</sup> As in the past, at the beginning of the Qajar rule the Shah was mostly a nominal ruler which resulted in a decentralized administration, non-uniform kingdom and autonomous groups and tribes in most parts of the realm who were ruled by kings through their own leaders. However, during 19<sup>th</sup> century gradually the Qajars,

like the Ottomans, began a centralization policy that led to the abolition of Kurdish principalities (Koohi-Kamali, 1992, 171-2). In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century the centralization increased, facing a reaction from the Kurds. Thus, the Qajar Empire also had little control over the traditional chieftains. Although some Kurdish tribes had religio-political dependency on the Qajar rule, others like Shikak and Jaf<sup>19</sup> even until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not follow the Qajar rule. However, by promoting Kurdish movements against both empires, the Ottomans tried to direct the aspirations of the Kurdish movement towards the Qajars using pan-Islamic and anti-shiite

<sup>18</sup> Beside the Walis (viceroys) at Khurmawa/Khurramabad, Pusht-i Kuh (today part of Ilām Province), Kirmashan and Ardalan etc., some Kurdish tribal chiefs had in part equivalent status to the Walis, which preserved their autonomy until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of the quasi-modern state in Iran. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the last Kurdish principality, Ardalan, until 1865 (see: footnote n. 6) Luristan had kept its semi-independent government since the Safavid era and continued under the jurisdiction of the governor/viceroy of Kirmashan; the Wāli of Pusht-I Kuh remained independent/quasi-autonomous during the Qajar times until 1929; one part of Kirmashan was administered by Kalhur Ilkhani by 1907; and there were Kurdish

groups around Wirmê some of whom autonomously crossed the frontiers between the two powers. Indeed the Kurdish tribes did not recognize the artificial borders of states in Kurdistan since the land was divided between two powers, the Ottomans and the Safavids, and they continued their movements regardless of the borders until the early 20s. Likewise, until 1831-2 the Kurdish groups in Khurasan also did not obey the governor of Khurasan and the Emirate of Quchan was autonomous (see: Avery et al, 1991, 144, 468, 512-4 and 520-1; Koohi-Kamali, 1992, 172; Ghassemlou, 1993, 105; Zaki, V.2).

<sup>19</sup> About the autonomous status of Jaf tribe, see: Mousavi, 1392.

tendencies, and the Qajars attempted to use Kurdish opposition against the Ottomans.

As mentioned, there were many Kurdish principalities. Some, around the border between the two empires, switched from one to the other depending on their political affiliations, regardless of their religion (Bruinessen, 1992, 50). Nevertheless, religion was used against all of the principalities, especially during the uprising of several emirates hoping to gain independence in the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> Despite the principalities' revolt, a Kurdish nation-state did not eventuate. Religious justification used to suppress them was an important factor. For instance, Mîr/Pasha Kora (Prince Muhammad), sovereign of the principality of Soran, after amassing his troops, declared the Riwandiz government independent in the 1830s. He annexed many

areas around including Biradost, Hasankyf, Şingal, Hewlêr, Koya and Raniya to his government. He was religious and took no action without a fatwa and the decree of Ulama. His law was the Qur'an and Sharia. Against Prince Mohammed, the Ottomans invoked religion, calling on the prince to stop the war and to seek a reconciliation amongst Muslims. This appeal impressed the religious clergies, who exercised considerable spiritual influence over the masses. A famous clergy, Mela of Khati, who was much respected by Mîr Muhammad in his Friday sermon, talked about the non-legitimacy of war against the Caliph and discouraged Mîr forces. The Mela pronounced a fatwa (religious decree) which was binding upon all the faithful: "He who fights against the troops of the Caliph is an infidel" (Nezan, 1993, 20; Zaki, 1931, V. 1 218-222 and V.2). Thus, when the Ottomans

<sup>20</sup> In 1716 Bakir Beg Kurî Sulaiman rose up against Baghdad and was defeated. In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Sulaiman Pasha Kurî Khalid Pasha revolted against Baghdad. Abdurrahman Pasha of Baban several times rebelled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and tried to create a large independent government. Muhammad Darwish Pasha was treated

independently in Van and in about 1818 struck a coin. Ismail Pasha of Badinan in about 1835 governed independently, but was captured and taken to jail (Zaki, 1931, 213-224). The revolts of Ali Khan and Jaafar Khan Shikak in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were examples of Kurdish revolts against the Qajars (see: Farrokh, 2011, 220).

attacked him, religious dogma prevented him from fighting against the Caliph. Based on the Mela's guarantee and to prevent bloodshed among Muslims, he surrendered himself. Nevertheless, he was executed.<sup>21</sup> According to Zaki, if he had considered politics as well as sharia, he could have been successful (Zaki, 1931, 220-3).

Moreover, even the Ottomans used other religions. For example, when some Mîrs, such as Bedir Khan Beg, started to consolidate their power, the Ottomans sought a pretext to interfere. According to Murre-van den Berg (2010), Syriac texts (1500-1850) show the existence of some religious minorities among the Kurds such as Christians, Êzîdîs and Elevis, so dissension among them worked in

favour of the Ottoman Empire. The conflict culminated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Christians did not participate in the Kurdish feudalist movement against the Porte and refused to pay them tax instead of the Porte (see: Murre-van den Berg, 2010, p 35-36; Nezan, 1993, 21). The wars of Bedir Khan against the Nestorian Christians in 1843 and 1846 paved a way for Ottoman interference (Olson, 1989, 2). While the Ottomans had already encouraged Mîr Bedir Khan to attack the Nestorians if they refused to pay their tax, at the time of his uprising his reaction to their refusal led to the political intervention of Europe. The Porte then used this against the Mîr (Zaki, 1931, 226).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, foreign missionaries protected Christians in Kurdistan

<sup>21</sup> At the time of the uprisings, some of the Kurdish Amirs did not support the rebellious leaders. For example, Ismail Pasha of Badinan didn't help Pasha Kora/Kiwêre, while the Ottoman troops afterwards removed him, too (Zaki, 1931, 235).

<sup>22</sup> Bedir/Badir Khan, who became the Mîr/Amir of Jizira/Cizîre and Botan in 1812, tried to unite the Kurds and make them independent. At the beginning, he defeated the Ottomans and declared independence, struck a coin with his name in 1842 and governed many parts of Kurdistan from Van, Sablah, Riwandiz, Musol, Şingal, Shno, Wirmê and Diyarbakir. Eventually,

because of the betrayal of one of his relatives, Amir Ezadin, he was defeated and captured. Afterwards, during the war between the Ottomans and Russia, the Ottomans collected many Mujahids in Kurdistan and determined two of Badir Khan's sons, Ossman and Hussein Kanaan Pasha, as their commanders. Using this situation, when they came back to Kurdistan in 1879 they declared their independence in Jizira and influenced other places to follow suit: Culemerg, Amidya/Emadiya, Mardin, Nusibin.... Ossman became Amir and the Friday Khutaba was recited in his name. But eventually, in negotiations, they were cunningly captured too (Zaki, 1931, 226-228).

not only because of their religious but also their political aims, to open a path of influence for Western powers in the area (see: Aubery, 1937, 178; Bruinessen, 1999).

The suppression of the Mîrs' rebellions led to the strengthening of religious leaders and the emergence of new Kurdish movements under them (Olson, 1989, 4). Following the destruction of the Kurdish principalities, the vacuum was filled by religious Shaikhs, the leaders of mystical orders, that spread throughout Kurdistan and through their religious charisma transcended tribal borders and found popular loyalties to act politically. Thus, most of the Kurdish revolts between 1880 and the 1970s were led by religious leaders (Bruinessen, 1992, 51; McDowall, 1992, 15). It was the turn of the Kurds to form a state, using religion. They indeed followed the politics of religion against religion. Thus, the religious stage of the Kurdish movement started. The Shaikhs used the network of mystical orders like Naqshbandi and Qadri across

greater Kurdistan to influence and mobilize people against the central powers (Bruinessen, 1992, 210-211). The last Kurdish revolt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the first important new movement involving the Kurds in both states, broke out in the early 1880s under the leadership of the great religious leader Sheikh Ubeydullah Nahri, targeting both the Sunni Ottomans and Shiite Qajars.

Shaikh Ubeydullah publicly declared his aim to establish an independent Kurdistan. He said: "The Kurdish nation is a people apart. Their religion is different, their laws and customs are distinct..."(Olson, 1989, 2). So, apart from different ethnicity, one of the elements of the Kurdish nation for him was different religion; Naqshbandi-based Shafei Sunnism. Religious conflict was one of the origins of the Shaikh's uprising. As a Kurd, his religion was against both the Ottoman's Turkish-based Sunnism and the Qajars' Shiism, and their political plans. To support him, in Mukiryān, Ghaza/holy war was declared against the Shiite rule.

At the same time his religious stance was against Russia (Vali, 2003, 95; Hassanpour, 2003, 147; Zaki, 1931, 231-3; Avery et al, 1991, 730; Soleimani, 2018). So, although he established contacts with the other Islamic governors such as the Sherif of Macca and Khedive of Egypt to obtain their support (Nezan, 1993, 23), the Ottoman, Qajar, Russian states attacked him from three sides and eventually he was surrounded and surrendered.

After suppressing the movement of Sheikh Ubeydullah, in response to the new crisis at the end of the 19th century, the Ottoman sovereign started a pan-Islamist policy to unite all Muslims to preserve the Islamic Empire. Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) paid special attention to the Arabic-speaking areas where the Muslim Arab revivalists reinterpreted Islamic concepts in favour of Arab nationalism. He emphasized the Islamic character of his office as the Muslim Caliph and the importance of the Islamic Holy Places (Kedourie, 1992, 292; Soleimani, 2016). The Ottoman system also

used the “Christian menace” under the name of war with Armenia and Russia. Abdulhamid created a special Kurdish light cavalry force among the tribes known as the Hamidiye Cavalry Regiments in 1891 which were composed almost solely of Kurds, but all ranks above colonel were allocated to the Turks (White, 2000, 60). The government made great use of a pan-Islamist appeal to attract the Sunni Kurdish tribes, their chieftains and traditionalist leaders into the Hamidiye Regiments in continuity of its centralization and integrating policy and to accommodate them in Abdulhamid’s Pan-Islamic policy. The regiments were originally set up in areas bordering on the Russian Caucasus which was also inhabited by a significant group of Christian-Armenian people (Nezan, 1993, 25). Apart from its function to make the Kurds loyal to the Caliph, it also aimed to control eastern Anatolia (Bruinessen, 1992, 185-186). Though forming the regiments had a profound effect on the next stage of Kurdish nationalism (Gunter, 2011, 4; Barkey & Fuller,



1998, 8), by creating them the government not only wanted to make an internal shift of power in Kurdistan and reduce the influence of religious leaders (Olson, 1989, 14), but also to involve the Kurds in the Armenian massacre of 1894 (Bruinessen, 1992, 42; Nezan, 1993, 13; Vali, 2003, 95). The Ottoman politicians intentionally used the Sunni Kurds against the Armenians (Olson, 1989, 9) to provoke conflict between them, and also to form a cleavage among the Kurds themselves.

Apart from the Armenians, the Alevi and non-Hamidiye Sunni Kurds were also similarly targeted (White, 2000, 61). From the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the situation of the Alevis was better, but under the new Islamist politics of Abdulhamid II their conditions worsened and some were compulsorily assimilated and converted. Creating the Hamidiye regiments increased the enmity between Sunni and Alevi Kurds. The cavalry attacked the Alevi tribes and confiscated their lands. This Islamist politics led to Alevi

opposition to the Caliphate, so the Alevis sympathized with the Committee for Unity and Progress (CUP), the party of the Young Turks and Kemalists, to support secularism against the Caliphate (Kehl-Bodrogi, 2003, 56; Olson, 1989, 11). It increased sectarianism among the Kurds and caused many problems for the future of Kurdish politics and movements in favour of Turks and the government. The hostility lasted for several decades; when the Sunni Kurds were on the side of the government, the Alevis were in opposition and vice versa.

In the last two decades of the Ottoman Empire, by weakening the institution of the Porte and Caliphate, power was practically in the hands of the Turkish nationalist Youth who banned non-Turkish associations, publications and schools when the Unionists came to power in 1908 (Nezan, 1993, 13). Consequently, the Kurdish Sheikhs like Abd al-salam Barzani and Nur Mohammed of Dohuk demanded a separate administration with Kurdish language, Kurdish officials, spending of tax for local purposes,

and an administrative law in accordance with Sharia. When their demands were disregarded, in 1914 Sheikh Abd al-Salam, Sheikh Taha of Nihri, Mela Salim and Abdul Razzaq Bedir Khan rose in revolt against “the atheist officials” demanding the restoration of Sharia (see: Macfie, 1998, 212). However, the First World War created an opportunity for the Turks to neutralize the Kurds’ plan, again in the name of the defence of Islam. They also used pan-Islamist sentiment during Turkey’s war of independence. Most of the Kurds, as Muslims, were mobilized by the Caliph’s Jihad proclamation and then Ataturk’s call to save the Muslims (Bruinessen, 1992, 47).

During the two above-mentioned wars, because of pan-Islamist propaganda the region of Alevi Kurds was full of unrest. Because of the promises of the government and Ataturk under the brotherhood of the two peoples, and considering their autonomy, the Sunni Kurds cooperated with them in the struggles. In his first speech in the new parliament of 1920,

Ataturk argued that the parliament was the representative of a unified Islamic community, not of Turks, Kurds etc. He even mentioned autonomous government for the Kurds wherever they were in the majority (Barkey & Fuller, 1998, 9). Nevertheless, the Kurds’ demands based on the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 and accepted by the Sultan’s camp under pressure from the Allies, were not supported by the new Turkish government under Ataturk, although he had previously promised to do so (Romano, 2006, 27). Hence, the Kochgiri revolt of Alevi Kurds, led by tribal leaders, occurred in 1921, and was also supported by their religious leaders such as Sayyid Riza (the leader of another Dersim revolt in 1937). While some Sunni Kurds participated in the revolt, the majority of them didn’t support the movement because of the effect of pan-Islamist politics, the promises of Turkish leaders and the above-mentioned Sunni-Alevi conflict. Thus, it was suppressed. When, under pressure from Ataturk, Kurdish rights were not regarded in

the Lausanne treaty (1923) and the Caliphate was abolished, a new revolt of Sunni Kurds under Shaikh Said broke out in 1925. Because of the presence of former Hamidiye commanders in the revolt, not only did majority of the Alevis not support it or participate, but some Alevi tribes actually fought against it (see: Olson, 1989, 12 & 31-35). Indeed, despite the suppression of the Kochgiri, Ataturk had again attracted them in the name of secularism in which the Alevis were safe. Consequently, in turn, the Sunni Kurds also did not support the Dersim revolt of Alevi Kurds in 1937.

### **Concluding Discussion: The Impact of Historical Religio-Political Confrontations on Kurdistan**

Throughout the Islamic period, the religio-political confrontations of different political powers affected Kurdistan in different ways especially through using religion politically, as a means to gain power. By forming the Islamic caliphate, at first, Muslim Arabs through Holy wars against Zoroastrian Sassanids and Christian

Romans occupied many lands including Kurdistan. After converting different peoples, except for one period after the Mongols, the latent function of Islam helped the Caliphs and the Muslim rulers to unite and tie different peoples to each other under the Islamic empire in the context of the Muslim Umma, a community of faith. They made an umbrella under which Islamic symbols such as Umma and Caliphate could cover all lands. It severely affected the cultural and socio-political situation of all nations. Indeed, the political model of Islam was based on “the possession of a single, and genuinely sacred, language” (Hastings, 1999, 200) which, through the Qurán contributed to the universalization of Arabic. Though the Qurán is almost entirely anti-ethnic and anti-national, Islam was unintentionally a means of assimilation and integration. It served the Arabs practically and eventually became a part of Arab nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the ancient period, Kurdistan almost came under the

Islamic Caliphate. However, despite the socio-political impact, most of the Kurds preserved their language and culture. During the first period of the caliphate, the Kurds gradually revived. The Kurdish governors and then several Kurdish governments and principalities in Kurdistan appeared and were reinforced especially from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, following a decline in the power of the Caliphs. Even, during the Mongol invasion some of the Kurdish governments remained, especially by giving allegiance to the invaders, and some new governments were formed which stayed in place until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the principalities were affiliated and tied to the Caliphate under the name of Islam. Nevertheless, some powerful governments didn't obey any Sultans or Shahs. They struck coinage, and the Friday prayer sermon (the Khutba) was recited in the name of their governors. Moreover, sometimes the Kurds participated in the power of the Islamic empire to govern other lands like the independent Ayyubid

state. They also experienced having a monarchy, like the Zand dynasty (Bitlisi, 1597/2005; Nezan, 1993, 14; Bruinessen, 1992, 161-75; Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, 4).

From the arrival of Islam to the period of the Ottomans and Safavids, thus, although under different political powers, such as the Caliphate and Ilkhanids, alternatively, the Islamic world and Kurdistan were not divided between super powers with different religions. After a long period, with the emergence of the Sunni Ottomans and Shiite Safavids, a situation similar to that of the ancient period and the war between the Sassanid and Roman empires was repeated. The religio-political disputes severely affected politics in the region and the socio-political situation of Kurdistan. Religion was used to gain power and then with the help of religious sentiments, religious leaders and conversion they influenced Kurdistan. The Kurdish governments were forced to give allegiance to one empire or the other. Most of them were tied to the empires by religion. The

Ottomans used common religion, Sunni Islam, to attract most of the Kurdish people, the Sunni Kurds, and their governments. The Safavids and their successors used the political conflicts between the Kurds and the Porte, and the religious conflict between the Alevite minority and the Ottomans. They tried to convert the Sunni people in their realm to reinforce their loyalty to them and to change the demography of Kurdistan. In some cases, they tried to convert the governors of principalities such as Ardalan through marriage. And some governors accepted the situation to retain their power, even though only in name. The disputes, marches and wars between both sides, using Kurdistan as their battlefield, damaged the land and the people. Finally, their centralization severely damaged the political structure of Kurdistan.

The partition of Kurdistan was the important consequence of the wars. Most parts of Kurdistan were attached to the Ottomans and some parts to the Safavids, while other parts alternated between

them. The conflicts even affected the relations between the Kurdish principalities. They fought against each other, or supported each other against others, or received the support of one of the major powers. Nevertheless, this period of Kurdish principalities, known as the golden age, paved the way for the revival of Kurdish culture, language and writings, especially by the clergy. According to Hastings' theory of nationhood (1999), Kurdish nationalism originated from that time. Simultaneously, the Kurdish governments had remarkable growth. But with the decline of tension between the Ottomans and the Safavids' successors, their centralization started. By increasing the centralization, they continued to reinforce their religions to cover other social cleavages, especially ethnic ones. This led to enhancing the Kurdish Mîrs' revolts for independence. Both states tried to suppress them. They used clergies and people's religious sentiment against the uprisings. In reaction, the Kurdish

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revolts were continued by religious leaders.

At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with the emergence of different nationalisms, the hostilities of empires were replaced by nationalistic confrontations that used religion in different ways – which the author will try to examine in another article. Unlike the previous period when the Kurdish leaders often made military and religio-political alliance with one of the empires to strengthen their position, and sometimes switched their allegiance, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially from the last decades, the Kurdish nationalists sought an independent state. Indeed, during the Islamic period until the emergence of the pan-Islamism of Sultan Abdulhamid II and then the Pan-Turkism and the anti-Kurd policies of the Young Turks (1908-1914), although making an independent state was not possible for different nations including the Kurds, there were nonetheless some equal rights of citizenship (Bruinessen, 1992, 269). In reaction to the changes, Kurdish nationalist

awareness developed more. Besides, the pan-Farsist policies of Reza Shah in Iran saw Kurdish nationalism grow even further. Thus, after the weakness and collapse of the caliphate and traditional monarchy, then the advent of quasi-modern centralized states, the conflicts in the form of nationalistic confrontations between the heirs of the Ottoman and Qajar empires continued in Kurdistan. Religion has also played an important role in the new confrontations up to now. Failure to create a Kurdish state has led to the continuity of the Kurdish movement especially in new forms, first under religious leaders and then political parties.

This research shows that during Islamic history until the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, three nations - Arab, Kurd and Turk - have played a most important role in the Middle East. The disputes and hard political competition between them shaped the region's politics. While eventually during the Ottoman realm the Arabs and Turks used the political function of religion more,

and successfully, in the Qajar realm the political legacy of the Turkmen Qajars was left to the Fars nationalists. After the hegemony of Arab, Turk and Fars (as a new political actor in the region) nationalists, in restating the political history of the Middle East often affected by them, the role of the Kurds, despite its historio-political importance, has not been considered so positively – that is to say, as people who deserve political rights. Nevertheless, the historical disputes have been reflected in clashes between Kurdish nationalists and others. It has affected the modern politics of the region.

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