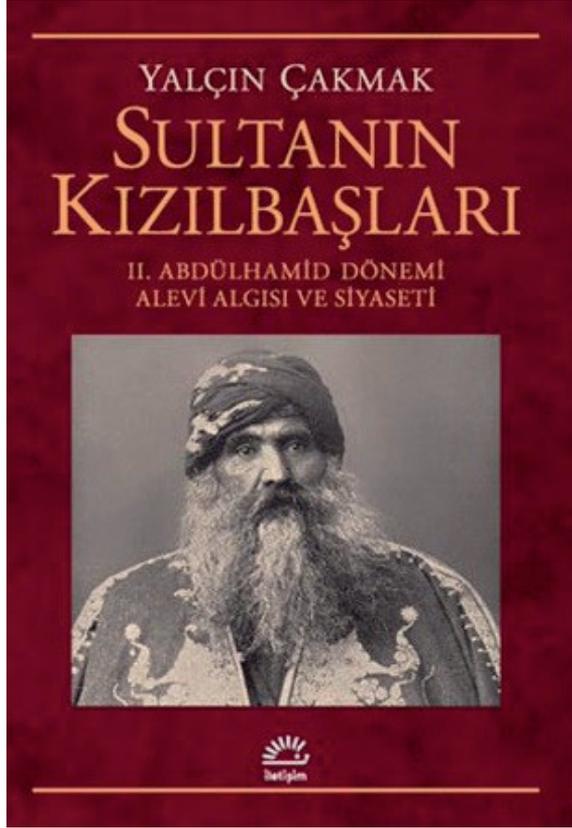


Yalçın Çakmak (2019). *Sultanın Kızılbaşları*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
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Dilara AVCI *



Yalçın Çakmak completed his undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate degrees in the Department of History at Hacettepe University. While teaching in the same department between 2013 and 2018, he also started to work as a fellow in the Department of History at Munzur University as of 2019. His book “Sultan’s

* Arş. Gör., Kırşehir Ahi Evran Üniversitesi, Fen- Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü, Kırşehir, dilara.avci@ahievran.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-7570-6011.

Kizilbashes” appears before the reader as an extended work from Çakmak’s doctorate thesis¹.

Yalçın Çakmak grounds the basis of his book on “Abdülhamid II”, who has recently become a very popular and controversial figure, and his policies towards the Kizilbash/Alevi. While doing this, the author extensively used the primary sources and drew attention to the issues (i.e., Anşa Bacı and Dumuklu incidents) that had been of little to no discussion before. He also benefited from the reports of the missionaries, especially the Protestant missionaries’ reports, the newspapers, observations made by then-travelers, and reports written by the American, British and French consulates. In terms of secondary sources, Çakmak profited from the works of prominent authors in the above-mentioned field of history. Starting with Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, Çakmak also studied the works of Selim Deringil, Rıza Yıldırım, Ayfer Karakaya-Strump and Gökhan Çetinsaya. As a result of the variety of academic studies he used, this new book has opened new discussions and paved the way for recovering from the one-sided understanding of history.

The book starts with the “Introduction” chapter. In the first chapter, the period from “The Birth of the Kizilbash (Red Heads) to The Banning of Bektashi order” is covered. In the second chapter, “From Heresy to Ambiguity: The Kizilbash/Alevi Perception in the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdülhamid II” is discussed. In the third chapter, the subject of “Missionaries, other Western Circles and the Kizilbash/Alevi” is mentioned. The fourth chapter informs the reader about “The Kizilbash/Alevi population”. The fifth chapter focuses on “Strategies of Siege: Searching for Solutions and Practices for Kizilbash/Alevi”. In the sixth chapter, “The Representation Crises of the Kizilbash/Alevi” are discussed. The seventh and final chapter, the subject of “An Intersectional Area in the Kizilbash/Alevi Perception and Politics: Dersim” is covered in-depth as a case study. The chapters are then followed by the main headlines “Instead of the Afterword”, “References”, and “Index”.

The presentation of the book is made by Professor Ahmet Yaşar Ocak. With the sentence: “The book needs to gain the recognition it deserves in this environment where bad money drives the good out of the market”, Ocak emphasizes the

1 The name of the author's doctorate study is “Kizilbash/Alevi Politics of the Ottoman Empire in the Period of Abdülhamid II (1876-1909)”.

importance of the book for the ongoing field research. After the book's presentation, "Foreword" was written by Professor Mehmet Özden who previously undertook Çakmak's Ph.D. advisory. In his writing, Özden states that the new book is important as it lays the groundwork for new questions and discussions in the field, and Çakmak is remaining impartial while doing this.

Following the "Foreword" section, Çakmak continues his book with the "Introduction" chapter. Here, Çakmak explains the following topics, and the reasons why he decided to include them in his work. He also talks about the concepts, methods, problems, and hypotheses which he will be using throughout the book. Çakmak often uses the terms "*Kızılbaş, Alevi, Rafizî* (Shi'ite Muslims rejecting the first three successors after the Prophet Muhammed), *Zindik* (heresy) and *Mülbid*" to support his main argument throughout the book. From a problematic point of view, this study seeks to answer the two following questions: Did Abdülhamid II have a specific policy for Kızılbaş/Alevi as it was in the 16th century? Did these policies applied to this community have originality in themselves? Based on these two questions, the hypothesis of Çakmak's study is, although the policies applied towards these communities during the reign of Abdülhamid II were inherited from the past and especially partially consistent with the ones from the Selim I, Abdülhamid II's policies exhibited discursive and practical differences due to the differentiation of the conditions of the 19th and 20th centuries. Another hypothesis is that it allows the history and belief systems of Kızılbaş/Alevi to be analyzed analytically in the light of the statements and records written by the Ottoman bureaucrats, as well as the reports of Western figures during the reign of Abdülhamid II.

In the first chapter of the book, the period from the birth of the Kızılbaş to the banning of the Bektashi order is examined. This chapter gives general information about the history and belief systems of the Kızılbaş to the reader. According to Çakmak, as the interactions with the Safavids began, the concern that the Safavids might influence the Kızılbaş/Alevi population in Anatolia caused the Ottoman administration to always keep the community under close watch. The idea of "Sunni Orthodoxy" that had emerged in the middle of the 16th century negatively affected the non-Sunni Kızılbaş/Alevi communities. In order to turn the Kızılbaş/Alevi community from the wrong ways they were in, a Sunnization policy was put in force against this group during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The administration aimed to show the right version of Islam to the Kızılbaş/Alevi by having mosques, masjids

built in their towns and villages, and also by sending Sunni imams to the regions they lived.

In the second chapter, Çakmak examines the Kizilbash/Alevi perception of the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdülhamid II through the concepts of

*Mülhid*² and *Müphem*³. According to the author, the state began the policy of Sunnization during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The main reason behind this situation was the problems of increasing ethnic diversity in Anatolia after the mass migration of the Muslim population from the Balkans as a result of the defeat in the Russo-Turkish War. The Muslim population in Anatolia exhibited a heterogeneous structure. After the war, Abdülhamid II's state policy gained a direct Islamic identity. Unity of Islam and Pan-Islamism were among the important policies of the period. Abdülhamid II aimed to unite Muslims in the Sunni/Hanafi bloc in order to resolve the legitimacy crisis and to homogenize the state administration. The main reasons for the homogenization desire were the efforts of the Protestant missionaries to turn the Kizilbash/Alevi population to Protestantism and deepening the already existing differences within the Ottoman public, therefore causing conflicts by certain imperial policies that could lead to a separation. One of the biggest fears of the Abdülhamid II era was the possibility of unity between the Kizilbash/Alevi and Armenian populations that could result in an action against the Ottoman rule. In this chapter, the author also examines the records focusing on the fears and concerns of the period. The chapter includes the evaluations and reports of the Ottoman bureaucrats who talked about these issues. Especially the evaluations of Mehmed Memduh Pasha, who was the governor of Sivas at the time, are important. During the reign of Abdülhamid II, other non-Sunni groups were also under the control of the state, the same as the Kizilbash/Alevi. These groups can be listed as Shiites, Arab Alevis, Yezidis, Druze, Crypto-Christians or Istavris, were practicing Islam and Christianity as a double faith.

In the third chapter, Çakmak includes the first-ever interactions between the American Protestant missionaries and the Kizilbash/Alevi community. The general perception of the Kizilbash among the missionaries were that the Prophet Muhammad was denied, and the divinity of Jesus was accepted. By this thinking,

2 Mülhid means defending beliefs and views that will result in the abjuration of religion.

3 Müphem means ambiguous, unclear, indefinite.

they were convinced that it would be easy for the Kizilbash/Alevi to become Protestants. On the other hand, some Kizilbash/Alevi made direct contact with the missionaries and asked for teachers and preachers to be sent to the region to teach Protestantism. The main reason for these acts was the community's desire to escape from the Sunni education system and to have the education they were deprived of by the administration until that time.

Another event that can be shown as an important success of the Protestants is the emergence of the Protestant Kurdish Chief Ali Keko. He was known as a member of a significant tribe in Dersim.

Apart from the missionary activities, the consulates of the European states within the borders of the Ottoman Empire also conducted evaluations and wrote reports on the Kizilbash/Alevi population. Some researchers even carried out anthropological studies on these groups.

In the fourth chapter, Çakmak informs the reader about the demographics of the Kizilbash/Alevi, and the cities which were densely populated by the community. The Kizilbash/Alevi population could be found all across the Anatolian cities, but most of them settled in the provinces of Ankara, Erzurum, Sivas, and the Mamuret-ül-Aziz (also known as Harput). However, there is no separate category opened for this community in the official documents. It is also known that the local administrators had more information about their population. In addition to the Ottoman sources, British and French consulates also collected demographic information about this community.

In the fifth chapter, Çakmak talks about searching for solutions and practices against the Kizilbash/Alevi, namely *tashih-i akaid*⁴ or *tashih-i itikad*⁵. The reason why the word *ibtida* (conversion) was not used instead of the *tashih-i akaid* or *tashih-i itikad* emphasizes only the importance of the necessity of correcting the Kizilbash/Alevi's beliefs despite being Muslims. As required by the *tashih-i akaid* policies, the central administration concentrated on the educational policies and built in the regions where the Kizilbash/Alevi population lived. The schools opened by the missionaries were seen as a threat, and it was aimed that Kizilbash/Alevi would receive education in

4 Meaning the correction of belief system.

5 It is the singular version of Tashih-i Akaid and means the correction of belief system.

the state schools instead. Together with the opening of schools, mosques and masjids were also built in the villages, and Sunni imams and preachers were appointed. A demonstration of allegiance to the authority was expected in return for these, but the Kizilbash/Alevi did not accept the policies very easily. The mosques and masjids were used for other purposes rather than worshipping.

In the sixth chapter, the crisis of representation of Kizilbash/Alevi is discussed. The crisis of representation derives from the Anşa Bacı and Dumuklu incidents, which were supported and explained by the primary sources. To begin with, Anşa Bacı was the female leader of a Kizilbash/Alevi community. She was complained to the administration by the *dede* (socio-religious leaders in Alevi communities) on a suspicion that she was planning a messianic rebellion due to a struggle within the community. An investigation was carried out against Anşa Bacı and her family as a result of the suspicions and fears of the administration due to the insulting statements made against Anşa Bacı. As a result of the investigation, Anşa Bacı and her family were exiled to Damascus, but they were later pardoned and were able to return to their homeland. The reason why Anşa Bacı is important in terms of the Kizilbash/Alevi's history and belief is that she has been accepted as the first female sheik in a sect.

Following the Anşa Bacı incident, the state once again came into contact with the Kizilbash/Alevi population via the Dumuklu incident. The main hero of this case was a person named Ali and his discourses. According to Ali, everything should be a common property except honor. Things like gold, ornaments, money, and goods are nothing but cult figures. Ali was also in contact with the regionally influential *Hakikatçiler*⁶. The act that caused concern for the Ottoman administration, in this case, was when Ali bestowed divinity on himself. When the local administration did not obey the orders given by the central authority, a fighting broke out with the Kizilbash/Alevi population. The events escalated, and although there were no casualties in the Ottoman army, approximately 500 to 800 Kizilbash/Alevi lost their lives. This incident was recorded as a disaster in the official Ottoman documents.

In the last chapter, Çakmak presents a regional study that will attract considerable attention. It is possible that one of his motivations stems from the fact that the area was densely populated by the Kizilbash/Alevi community. Dersim was regarded as

6 Their ideas are based on Sufism rather than the *dede* practice.

a bandit's nest during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The influence of Armenians and missionaries was also actively visible in Dersim. The Kizilbash/Kurds in Dersim could not be taken under control by the state, and they caused a lot of problems to the state in matters such as taxation and military service. The prejudice and negative attitude towards the administration were not one-sided; the local administrators also exhibited negative attitudes towards the community in return. A Sunni point of view was developed against the people of Dersim and the region, who were portrayed as ignorant and uncivilized.

Finally, Çakmak draws a framework as a summary of the book in the part he called "Instead of the Afterword" and provides information about who the Kizilbash/Alevi were, where and under what conditions they lived, and why they became visible and were studied in-depth during the reign of Abdülhamid II. After that, Çakmak concludes the book with the Bibliography and Index sections.

Çakmak brings a new perspective to the relations between Kizilbash/Alevi, who were an inseparable part of Ottoman society from the very beginning, and Abdülhamid II administration in particular. Written without document fetishism, the book will certainly be beneficial for field researchers working on the Abdülhamid II era, the Kizilbash/Alevi issue or other non-Sunni groups.