

**THE QIZILBASH IDEOLOGY FROM A SUFI-MYSTICAL PERSPECTIVE: AN ANALYSIS
BASED ON SHAH ISMAIL KHATAI'S DIVAN AND THE "SHEIKH SAFI'S BUYRUK"****Received: 27 December 2025 | Accepted: 23 February 2026 | Published: 15 April 2026**

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Abstract

This article examines the original Sufi character of the Safaviyya Order, which was founded in the city of Ardabil in 1300 by Sheikh Safi al-Din Ishaq. Over time, this order underwent a transformation in its religious orientation, giving rise to the Qizilbash ideology and contributing to the establishment of the Safavid Empire, a major political power in the Middle East. The Divan of Shah Ismail Khatai contains the fundamental principles of the Qizilbash ideology. As both a leading representative of this ideology and the founder of the Safavid state, Shah Ismail's poetry provides significant insight into the understanding of both Sufi thought and Qizilbash beliefs. An examination of the "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk" (, a text outlining the core religious commandments of the Alevi tradition—which still has a wide following in modern Anatolia—reveals the deep historical connection between contemporary Alevism and the former Qizilbash belief system. Considered alongside Shah Ismail Khatai's Divan, the "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk" offers critical information that sheds light on the Qizilbash's Sufi-mystical worldview. This study investigates the Sufi-mystical aspects of Qizilbash ideology based on these two key sources. In addition, primary sources from the Safavid era have been examined, and relevant scholarly works have been analyzed. Through the method of analytical interpretation, the essence of Qizilbash ideology is explored and clarified.

Keywords: The Qizilbash ideology, the Safavid sect, Sufi views, Shah Ismail Khatai.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the Mongols' westward expansion in the 13th century, the process of the emergence of Sufi orders gained momentum in the Islamic world, leading to the emergence of new orders. One of these orders is the Safaviyya order, founded in 1300 in the city of Ardabil by Sheikh Safiaddin Ishaq. What is particularly interesting is that while most of these orders eventually lost their influence and faded away, the Safaviyya Order—one of the most influential communities of its time as a Sufi-dervish order—continues to exert its influence even today. This is undoubtedly due to the strength of the order's ideological system and its ability to maintain people's sense of trust.

Since the path to the Safavid state began at the religious dergah in Ardabil, it is essential to thoroughly research the Safaviyye Order—where its foundation was laid—and the Qizilbash ideology down to the finest detail when studying Safavid history. Although there are scholarly works on the Safavid state, research on the Qizilbash ideology—the ideological system of the Safaviyye Order—and its fundamental

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principles and nature is scarce. The most information regarding the period when this ideology was active can be found in Persian sources. However, this information is insufficient for us to fully understand what the Qizilbash ideology is. For this reason, while researching the topic at , we have relied on the “Divan” (The collection of Shah Ismayil’s poems is known as his “Divani”) of Shah Ismail Hatai (“Xətai” was the pen name used by the Safavid ruler Shah Ismayil when writing poetry) and the “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk,” (Sheikh Safi’s Command) which contains the fundamental rules of Qizilbash belief, as primary sources. By examining the existing literature on the Qizilbash ideology and Sufism, it is possible to highlight the connections between Islamic mysticism and Qizilbash identity. We examine the evolution of the Safavid order and the formation of Qizilbash ideology by utilizing both the poetic expressions in Shah Ismail Hatai’s “Divan” and the teachings in the “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk”. These two primary sources provide a comprehensive perspective for revealing the mystical foundations of Qizilbash thought. Methodologically, our research adopts a multidimensional approach, including text analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative analysis. While Shah Ismail Hatai’s “Divan” is examined in terms of the poetic expression of spiritual concepts, the “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk” provides an organizational and doctrinal framework regarding the mystical dimensions of Qizilbash ideology. The mysticism, divine love, and themes of spiritual ascent evident in Shah Ismail Hatai’s poetry reveal these as fundamental elements shaping the Qizilbash community’s worldview. The “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk,” meanwhile, reinforces the inner richness of Qizilbash ideology by emphasizing spiritual discipline and esoteric knowledge.

2. The Ideological Foundations of the Qizilbash: Sufi and Tasavvuf Interaction

The Safaviyya Order, which emerged from the Zahidiyya Order founded under the leadership of Sheikh Zahidi Gilani, was able to bring together people from a wide spectrum, regardless of sectarian affiliation, by establishing Darülirşad—a special center for the order—in Ardabil under the leadership of Sheikh Safiaddin (Sheikh Safi). The order distinguished itself through a Sufi perspective based solely on spiritual perfection at its center, and thus was able to unite people from different sects. Sheikh Safi’s Sufi views and religious perspectives had a profound impact on the local population and earned him the affection of people holding diverse beliefs. Mirze Abbaslı, one of the researchers of the Persian-language work “Səfvətüs-səfa”—the primary and main source on this order and the Safavid sheikhs—expressed this view: “If Sheikh Safi, the founder and leader of the Safaviyya order—which is considered the order of a very significant and vast mass of people in the East—had remained tied to a specific direction, he would not have united those affiliated with the various groups of Shiism and Sunni Islam, as well as those associated with Sufi and gnostic groups, around Dar al-Irşad” (Abbaslı, 1976, p. 290).

The fundamental parameters of the Qizilbash ideology that binds people to the Safavid order, as seen in the poems of Shah Ismail Hatai and works such as “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk”, contain elements that particularly align with Sufi perspectives. So, how and when did Sufi perspectives emerge in Islam?

Following the passing of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace be upon him), disagreements regarding the positions of imamate and caliphate led to the emergence of the Sunni and Shia schools of thought, which divided the Islamic community into two main sects. Among Sunni scholars, particularly the Hanbalis², there is a view that the imam can only be chosen from the Quraysh tribe. According to Shi'i belief, however, the leadership of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, is considered legitimate (Memmedov, 1994, p. 32).

During the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, a new group emerged that opposed him and became known as the Kharijites. According to Zakir Memmedov, these Khawarij initially emerged as a group opposing all Abbasid and Umayyad caliphs, but over time they became engaged in scholarship and wrote books on law, theology, and history (Memmedov, 1994, p. 32).

These doctrinal differences led to both political and theological divisions within the Islamic community. The Sunni and Shia sects hold different understandings of leadership and differing perspectives on the history of the caliphate. The impact of these historical divisions has led to the formation of different sects and belief systems in various regions of the Islamic world. This situation has contributed to the Islamic world possessing a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Some of the doctrinal differences and factional divisions that emerged in Islam have sparked objections within the Muslim community. In such a time, the ascetic movement—aiming to achieve spiritual maturity and rejecting a life of luxury—first emerged. Later, during a period of ideological upheaval in the 8th century, a new intellectual movement known as Sufism took shape and spread rapidly throughout the entire Muslim world. Sufi teachings reached a broader audience, particularly in the 800s. The vast majority of Sufis have interpreted the word “Sufi”—ignoring its etymological root—as “purity,” “purity of heart,” or “an exemplary personality.” However, the word's original meaning, the Arabic-derived term “suf” (meaning “wool”), actually stems from the fact that Sufi dervishes wore coarse garments made of wool (Nicholson, 1978, p. 3). According to some sources, the word “Sufi” is said to contain meanings such as “pure” or “purity.” Prof. Dr. Hasan Kamil Yılmaz notes that there are researchers who consider the possibility that the word “sufi” is derived from the term “Suffa.” During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), there were shelters—known as “suffas”—set up in the courtyards of mosques for the homeless and believers. This space provided lodging not only for the homeless but also for wealthy people who had come from distant lands to see the Prophet. This place served as an environment where these people were taught the fundamental principles of Islam. In this context, the possibility that the word “sufi” is derived from “suffa” can be proposed. However, the professor notes that while it may not be entirely accurate to state that the words “Suffa” and “sufi” are exactly the same from a grammatical perspective,

² The Hanbalis are known for their strict adherence to the Quran and hadiths and tend to oppose any form of free thought outside these sources.

there are many similarities between the lifestyle of the Ashab-ı Suffa and that of the Sufis (Yılmaz, 2022, pp. 68–72).

However, the Sufis themselves have not attached much importance to all these views. For them, the essence lies in existence and Sufism. According to Irene Melikoff, Sufism is an esoteric form of Islam and simultaneously a challenge to the rigidity of official doctrines. It aims to allow people to conceptualize their religious visions in a manner suited to their own understanding (Melikoff, 2007, p. 16). E. Cebecioğlu notes that in Sufi terminology, the term “Sufi” is used to describe one who, by freeing oneself from the habits of the self, becomes annihilated in one’s own self and, through devotion to God, attains the reality of realities (Cebecioğlu, 2009, p. 650). Zakir Memmedov, when discussing Sufism, states: “Sufis aimed to live without indulging in the pleasures and comforts of the self by wearing coarse woolen garments—which are uncomfortable in hot climates—and to devote themselves more to matters of the hereafter.” The author further notes that Sufism contains aspects similar to mystical states of mind, ecstasy, and the doctrine of incarnation found in shamanism, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism (Memmedov, 1994, pp. 32–33). In “Alemarayı Abbasi,” one of the earliest sources on the Safavids by İskender Bey Münşi, information regarding the interactions between Emir Teymur and the Safavid sheikh Hoca Ali notes that during their first meeting, the sheikh wore a worn-out dervish robe, while during their second meeting, he had a black cloak draped over his shoulder (Münşi, 2010, pp. 63–64). This detail can be considered an interesting point in demonstrating the extent to which Safavid sheikhs possessed Sufi characteristics.

Sufism and the concept of tasavvuf have generally been used interchangeably, and there are various interpretations regarding tasavvuf. Yaqub Babayev, who studies Sufi orders, states that the concepts of Sufism and tasavvuf carry the same meaning and explains his view as follows: “Sufism and tasavvuf are a religious-philosophical, mystical, and spiritual-ethical system of thought and behavior that was widely spread in the medieval Islamic world” (Babayev, 2007, p. 8). Within this framework, by emphasizing the common points of Sufism and tasavvuf, it is possible to state that they had a broad sphere of influence in the medieval Islamic world, as described by Y. Babayev.

According to Sufi views, the heart is a source of knowledge alongside reason. In other words, in matters of religion and mysticism, one must enrich one’s faith with inner, spiritual beliefs in addition to the Quran and hadiths. While Islam is based on the Quran and hadiths, Sufism is based not only on these but also on inner faith and love. It is frequently observed that Shah Ismail Hatai emphasizes such concepts of inner faith and love in his poems.

Könül baxt-i eşqdir, derya dənizdir,

Bəhri ol ümmana dal da ondan gəl (Ergün, 1956, p. 42).

The Turkmen who joined the Safavid order did not limit themselves to the Quran and hadiths alone, but also preserved their traditional beliefs, which they held dear in their hearts. The main reason for this is

that many Turkic tribes, having adopted a nomadic lifestyle, embraced Islam not merely by reading the Quran or learning from scholars of Islamic jurisprudence, but rather by adopting it from and learning from itinerant Sufi dervishes. The nomadic lifestyle enabled these Turkic communities to interact more frequently with itinerant Sufi dervishes and to adopt their spiritual teachings. In this way, the Turkmen's participation in the Safaviyya order is based not only on the written norms of Islam but also on the traditional beliefs they embraced in their hearts. According to İlyas Üzüm, during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, Turks who gained knowledge about Islam through Arab colonies also began to accept and study this religion under the influence of Sufi dervishes. While urban Turks learned "literal Islam" by studying the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) from official sources, nomadic Turks learned Islam by blending it with their own ancient beliefs through a "syncretic"³ approach (Üzüm, 2002, p. 552).

These groups, who genuinely and sincerely embraced Islam but faced serious difficulties in understanding it in its true sense, naturally continued to uphold their old religious principles alongside their Islamic beliefs (Turan and Yıldız, 2008, p. 14). Irene Melikoff and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak define and explain this as "Folk Islam." In European and Indian sources, this understanding is referred to as "Folk Islam" or "Heterodox Islam" (Newman, 2006, p. 7).

This style of Islamic thought was first studied in detail by Fuad Köprülü. The author chose not to use the term "rafizi"⁴—which was more commonly applied to the Qizilbash in the Ottoman Empire—due to its harsh connotations, opting instead for the term "heterodox"⁵. Köprülü notes that Khorasan was one of the main centers of Sufism and that different ideas and views in the Islamic world were particularly put forward by nomadic Turks (Köprülü, 1976, pp. 17–18).

From this perspective, Fuad Köprülü's work can be regarded as an important source for understanding the religious and cultural dynamics of the period in which the Ottoman Empire existed. In his work examining heterodox thought, **, Köprülü sheds light on the origins and spread of such forms of thought, drawing attention to the diversity and interactions within the Islamic world.

One of the researchers exploring this topic is Irene Melikoff. She also describes the beliefs of the same (nomadic) Turkmen as *Islamized shamanism*. The researcher notes that regarding those who profess Islam but whose beliefs have spread from one language to another, they do not have mosques, do not pray the five daily prayers, do not fast, do not observe the prohibition on alcohol, do not cover their women, can stand side by side with men, and generally marry only one woman (Melikoff, 2007, pp. 20–21). In his works, he defines the Qizilbash as bearers of heterodox Islam. However, the author's views contain

³ Syncretic refers to the act of combining or uniting opposing ideologies or views.

⁴ "Rafizi" is a term used to describe a person or group that deviates from the ideology. During the Ottoman period, this term was used to refer to the Kızılbaş.

⁵ "Heterodox" is used to denote deviation from religious rules.

approaches that give rise to controversy. For instance, referring to his views on prayer, when we examine the poems of Shah Ismail Hatai, we must note that the five daily prayers are accepted as an obligatory condition of the faith among the Qizilbash:

Beş vakit fərzdır, süneti neçə?

Özünü tanı ki, müşkülünü seç (Ergün, 1956, p. 56).

Some of Irene Melikoff's information regarding the Qizilbash aligns with the ideas written about the Yeseviyye order, which was widespread among the Central Asian Turks. The sheikhs of the Yeseviyye order permitted both men and women to participate together in zikr gatherings. Fuat Köprülü explains this situation by noting that, despite having adopted Islam, the Turks remained faithful to their past customs and that women hold an important place in Turkish tradition (Köprülüzade, 1996, p. 2).

Anton Josef Dierl, a European traveler of the medieval period, expressed the following view regarding the nomadic Turks' understanding of Islam: It was not the rigid and lifeless orthodox Islam⁶ that they accepted; rather, the Islam they embraced was a vibrant, flexible dervishhood that preserved archaic-shamanistic elements and was enriched with fantasies. Among these dervishes, only the Qizilbashes opposed the principles of Sharia and orthodoxy (Dierl, 1991, pp. 32–33).

It is important to note that the shamanistic traces in the oral Islamic tradition were shaped by Mongol influence. It is conceivable that the Mongols played a role in the presence of certain traces of shamanism within the belief systems of Turks who had adopted Islam. During their expansion westward, the Mongols held shamanistic beliefs and kept shamans at their courts. In particular, the Mongol state established in Central Azerbaijan was known for its shamans, who continued shamanistic practices even after the Ilkhanids adopted Islam.

Researcher and writer Zeki Velidi Togan attributes the rapprochement between the Turks and the Mongols to the activities of Turkish Sufis. According to Togan, these Sufis' drumming and recitation of poetry were virtually identical to the rituals of the Mongol "gam" shamans, and the Mongols accepted such Turkish sheikhs into their ranks (Togan, 1981, p. 267). During the Safavid period, there were also individuals bearing the title of "dede," and they enjoyed a reputation comparable to that of the Mongol "gams." The sultan's sons had both a "lele" (tutor) and a "dede." Those bearing this "dede" title possessed characteristics similar to the ancient gams. The fact that this concept of "dede" was more closely associated with Kalenderism suggests it may have spread among the Safavids under the influence of the Kalenderis. The poems by Shah Ismail Hatai describing his respect for his own dede demonstrate the high regard in which those bearing the "dede" title were held among the Qizilbash.

İki can idik birleşdik,

⁶ The term "orthodox" is used to denote the strict adherence to religious commandments.

Məhəbbət qapısını açdı,

Şükür didarə yetişdik,

Dədəm xoş gəldin, xoş gəldin (Ergün, 1956, p. 190).

At the same time, the Mongols' conversion to Islam took place under the influence of Muslim Turks. According to Zeki Velidi Togan, after Berke Khan, the khan of the Juchi tribe, and Prince Noyon embraced Islam, the Safavid sheikh Safiaddin al-Erdebili traveled to the Steppe of the Kipchaks and Crimea with his disciples to offer prayers of blessing (Togan, 1981, p. 268). Similarly, some Mongol rulers, particularly certain Ilkhanid rulers, adopted Islam in pursuit of their political objectives.

It should not be forgotten that the oral understanding of Islam emerged as a result of the adoption of Islam by peoples belonging to different religious, ethnic, and civilizational backgrounds throughout history. This understanding involves interpreting and explaining Islam in various ways under the influence of diverse beliefs and mythological concepts. Hans Roemer has described the Turks' approach to understanding Islam in this way as involving belief in miracles, divination, the science of thought, sanctification by saints, and various mystical experiences within Sufi orders (Roemer, 2006, p. 6).

Among the Turkmen, those who understood Islam in this way showed interest in the Safavid order, which was close to their way of life and placed particular emphasis on mystical experiences. This situation demonstrates the existence of different interpretations of Islam among the Turkmen and that these interpretations stem from various cultural factors.

Although the Safavid Order, the source of the Alevi ideology, emerged as a Sufi-dervish order, we see that as it evolved from a sheikhdom to a monarchy under the leadership of Shah Ismail, it transformed into a state grounded not only in Sufi views but also in Shi'i principles. So how is it that a Sufi-dervish order came to embrace Shi'ism?

Although Shi'ite inclinations and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt were first mentioned by Sheikh Cüneyt, the presence of disciples from all sects within the Safavid Order became the most significant factor in altering the religious direction of the dergah. This situation led to a divergence in the order's ideology and direction by the mid-15th century. The designation of those who joined the order and adhered to this ideology as "Kizilbash" emerged during the time of Sheikh Haydar, who succeeded Sheikh Cüneyt as the Safavid sheikh. After its followers adopted the name Qizilbash, the ideology itself came to be known as the Qizilbash ideology. The Qizilbash, who played an unparalleled role in the establishment of the Safavid state, became a crucial force for the Safavid state. For this reason, in many sources and political correspondence, the state is sometimes referred to as the "Devleti Qizilbash." Although Sheikh Cüneyt was the one who articulated the principles of Shiism within the Safavid order, we can say that it was Sheikh Haydar who defined the main boundaries of these principles.

Regarding the status of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and Ali in Qizilbash belief, there are sometimes misinterpretations. However, in both Hatai's "Divan" and the "Sheikh Safi Buyruk"—which we use as sources for understanding Qizilbash ideology—we see that Allah is regarded as the supreme being, the Creator, and the Truth. In the Buyruk, God is described as having infinite power, being forgiving, wise, the Creator, and all-powerful (Sheikh Safi Buyruk, 2015, pp. 137–138). In Shah Ismail Hatai's "Divan," God is also emphasized as the eternal, everlasting Creator and the Revealer of the Book (Ergün, 1956, p. 253).

One of the significant connections between Sufism and Shiism is the concept of the Mahdi. According to Folk Islam, the Mahdi, the last Imam, has not died but has been taken up to the heavens and will return to reestablish justice. Those who hold this belief always await a savior with a longing for justice. This understanding played a significant role in the Safavids' transition from the position of "sheikh" to that of "shah." The Qizilbash, in particular, viewed the Safavid shahs—including Shah Ismail—as the Mahdi. We also encounter expressions in Hatai's poems where he claims to be the Mahdi himself:

Xətai Mehdi oldu.

İmamlar cəddi oldu (Ergün, 1956, p. 357).

The Qizilbash joined this struggle believing that Ismail Safavi was the Mahdi. This belief may have been a key factor in the Safavids' success. However, the line in one of Hatai's poems, "Hatai is a beggar in the love of the time of Muhammad, the Mahdi" (Ergün, 1956, p. 182), suggests that his earlier statements were motivated by political aims.

After ascending the throne, Shah Ismail did indeed have sermons delivered in the name of the Twelve Imams and had the phrase "Aliyyen veliyyullah" added to the call to prayer. However, these actions do not mean that Shah Ismail had fully converted to Twelver Shiism. The claim that Shah Ismail I converted to "Twelver Shiism" is known to be a controversial topic among historians. An examination of his poetry reveals that he was a true Sufi. His poems contain Sufi depth and mystical meaning. This indicates that he can be described not only as a religious leader but also as a Sufi engaged in a spiritual quest.

Shah Ismail's emergence as a figure who sincerely believed in God and was deeply devoted to the Prophet Muhammad underscores his religious sensitivity and spiritual sensitivity. Furthermore, we observe that love for Hazrat Ali holds a special place in Shah Ismail's heart. This may reflect his efforts to foster religious unity by emphasizing the spiritual values at the core of Islam (Ergün, 1956, p. 57).

These views demonstrate that the Qizilbash ideology is a distinct Sufi-mystical ideology, and that Shah Ismail Hatai was a Sufi. For if Ismail Safavi had not shared the same ideological beliefs as his followers, he could not have won their trust. He describes this in his Divan with the following verses:

Sufiyəm təriqətdə

Həqiqətdə abdalım (Ergün, 1956, p. 133).

Although the ideology included respect for and reverence toward topics related to Shiism—such as Hazrat Ali, the twelve imams who are his Ahl al-Bayt, and the 14 infallibles (the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.v.), his daughter Fatima, and the 12 imams)—it did not involve the extremism found in today's strict Shiism. Among the Qizilbash, the disciple-mentor relationships within the order were similar to those in Sufi orders.

Kizilbashism is a reflection of Turkish civilization; it is a socio-political movement characterized by a strong love for Islam and the Ahl al-Bayt, shaped by a Sufi understanding, and embracing the concept of *wahdat al-wujud*⁷. Based on the observations he gathered during his travels, Anton Jozef Dierl summarized the Qizilbash as follows: “The Qizilbash do not belong to the Iranian-Persian orders. Even their language of worship is Turkish, and they compose their religious “ ” poems in Turkish as well. In short, Qizilbashlık is the Azerbaijani branch of Anatolian Alevism” (Dierl, 1991, p. 60).

In this context, Qizilbashism is a movement that reflects Turkish identity not only through its religious beliefs but also through its language, culture, and history. The fact that the Qizilbash form the Azerbaijani branch of Anatolian Alevism has contributed to the diverse practice and preservation of Turkish culture and beliefs. For this reason, Qizilbashism holds an important place in the Turkish historical and cultural heritage.

Qizilbash living in Ottoman territories came to be referred to as Alevis over time—that is, followers of Hz. Ali. This designation stems from the term “Qizilbash” being used in negative contexts. Due to persecution, they were forced to practice their faith at night and in secret locations. Although they no longer face persecution today, they still continue their rituals at night and with a similar sense of secrecy, in accordance with traditions passed down from the past. According to Irene Melikoff, in the 19th century, the Qizilbash changed their name—which had become synonymous with negative terms like “rebellious” and “heretical”—to Ali and Alevi, and they do not identify as Shi'a (Melikoff, 2007, p. 10).

From the very beginning of their adoption of Islam, love for Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt has held a significant place in the hearts of Turks. The Qizilbash have also based their faith on this love. Although Sheikh Cüneyt incorporated Shiite elements into his order, it can be said that early Qizilbashism was a unique order and ideology formed through a synthesis of Sufism and Shiism. Although the Twelve Imam Shiism was adopted at the Erdebil dervish lodge under the leadership of Sheikh Cüneyt, the Turkmen serving the order continued to adhere to their old Sufi beliefs.

In particular, while the Qizilbash within Safavid borders eventually became fully Shi'ite, those outside these borders preserved their traditional Sufi beliefs. This is because the love for Ali is not limited

⁷ "Vahdetü'l-vücud" is a Sufi theory allegedly developed by Muhyiddin ibn Arabi. This concept expresses the manifestation of the Creator within creation.

to Shi'ism alone; it is also a fundamental element constituting the basis of Sufi orders. This devotion among the Turkmen has transformed the Qizilbash faith into a complex structure nourished by various influences. This situation demonstrates that the Qizilbash movement possesses a rich and unique cultural heritage.

It is worth noting that some Qizilbash groups who lived within Safavid borders and have preserved their ancient beliefs to this day continue to exist. According to Irene Melikoff, in Iranian Azerbaijan (Southern Azerbaijan), near Tabriz, there is a community known as the "Kırklar" or "Cehelten," and the beliefs and traditions of this community bear similarities to those of the Alevi in Turkey. This group shares the Aliallahi belief, a practice involving the deification of Hz. Ali. These Turks, known as the "Kırklar" or "Cehelten," stand out as a community that keeps their ancient beliefs alive (Melikoff, 1993, p. 34). The community mentioned by the author is recognized as a group known as the Aliallahis. We can state that this group, which lives in the territories of Azerbaijan and Iran today, is connected to the ancient Qizilbash. This demonstrates that the Qizilbash tradition and beliefs, particularly the love for Ali, are kept alive today through these communities.

According to the Aliallahi-Ehli-Hakk⁸ belief, Ali is connected to Allah and has manifested in the form of all prophets and imams; when the time comes, the "hidden" Imam-Mahdi will also manifest in this manner. In Aliallahi beliefs, it is believed that Allah manifests in human form, and it is thought that Hz. Ali has taken on the appearance of Allah. These ideas are also present among the Safavid Qizilbash. According to Qizilbash ideology, the form of Hz. Ali has also manifested in Shah Ismail Hatai.

In this order, it is also believed that the soul manifests in various forms. This belief is evident in Hatai's poetry as well. His statement, "Mürteza (Ali) entered and wandered within a garment (clothing, form)," supports this notion. A similar belief was also found among the Hurufis. This demonstrates that a mystical and symbolic mode of thought can emerge in similar forms across different cultures.

3. The Expression of the Qizilbash Ideology in the "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk"

The relationship between Alevism and Safavid Islam (Qizilbash), in which the love for Hazrat Ali holds significant importance, has influenced each other within a religious and cultural context; this process is crucial for understanding how the Alevi tradition was shaped by Safavid influence. This relationship between Alevism and Safavid Islam can be understood within the context of the teachings and principles expressed in the "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk".

Today, the book titled *The "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk"*, which contains the written sources of Alevi beliefs, may suffice to illustrate how deeply intertwined Alevi are with the Qizilbash tradition. This is because the founder of the Safaviyye order was Sheikh Safi (Safieddin), and members of the order are

⁸ Ehli-Hakk - People of Truth

generally referred to as “Qizilbash.” The fact that this book, to which Alevis attach special importance, is titled “Şeyh Safi Buyruk” provides a basis for claiming that Alevis are the heirs of the Qizilbash. In this context, we can say that the precepts in this book form the foundation of Qizilbash ideology.

The 2015 translation of the “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk” by the Presidency of Religious Affairs, published in both the old script and the Latin alphabet along with explanations by Doğan Kaplan, was utilized in our article.

The Buyruk begins with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) summoning Hazrat Ali to his side to impart certain pieces of advice and instructions. According to the beliefs of the Alevis and Qizilbash, Hazrat Ali wrote down these pieces of advice, resulting in a massive book. This book was passed down through Hazrat Ali’s descendants to Sheikh Safiaddin al-Erdebili. Sheikh Safi also used the advice in this book to educate his disciples and always placed great importance on it (Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk, 2015, pp. 19–20).

The purpose of this narrative regarding the emergence of the “Sheikh Safi Buyruk” is to convince people that the origins of the Safavid order stem from the lineage of Hazrat Ali. Furthermore, it is noted that Sheikh Safiaddin’s descent from Hazrat Ali served as the reason this book ultimately reached him. Although this seems unlikely to be true, the Qizilbash succeeded in convincing their disciples and followers that they descended from the line of the Imam.

Both in the Buyruk and in Hatai’s poems, there are narrations cited as hadiths. Sayings such as “Whose master I am, Ali is also his master,” “I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate,” and “Both I and Ali are of the same light” are included in the Buyruk as hadiths (Sheikh Safi Buyruk, 2015, pp. 41–43). However, we cannot find these hadiths in authoritative hadith collections.⁹

The verse most frequently repeated in the Buyruk is the tenth verse of Surah al-Fath, which Sufis use as the “oath of allegiance verse”¹⁰ (The Holy Quran, 1982, p. 511). This verse has been frequently used, particularly during initiation ceremonies into the order. The issue of biat and covenant is an important topic in Alevi belief and Sufism in general. A person who pledges allegiance to his spiritual guide must not turn back from the path, even if it means sacrificing his life. In the question-and-answer section between Sheikh Safi and his son Sheikh Sadreddin, regarding the matter of the covenant and prostration within the order, Sheikh Safi states the following: “Prostration within the order is a station of supplication” (Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk, 2015, pp. 58–59). It can be accepted that this principle plays a special role in the belief system of the Qizilbash, and that the oath of allegiance (biat) expresses loyalty within the order.

⁹ In our research on Sahih al-Bukhari, we did not come across such a hadith.

¹⁰ The meaning of the verse: Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you are pledging allegiance to Allah. Allah’s hand is over their hands. Whoever breaks his pledge, it is only to his own detriment. Whoever fulfills his pledge to Allah, Allah will grant him a great reward.

The principle of the four gates and forty stations found in the Buyruk exists in all Sufi orders and holds great importance. We first encounter these topics in the works of Ahmad Yesevi on Sufism. A. Yesevi writes about this topic in connection with Hazrat Ali, noting that it is reported that the station of dervishhood consists of forty stages. One who knows and acts becomes a pure dervish; for those who neither know nor act, dervishhood is forbidden. Ten of the forty stations are in the Sharia, ten in the Tariqat, ten in Ma'rifat, and ten in Haqq (Eraslan, 1977, p. 66).

Shah Ismail Hatai's poems also touch upon the themes of the Four Gates and the forty stations.

Kırx məqamı dörd qapıda fərq eylə

Gəl ey talib özünü qul eyləyəni gör (Ergün, 1956, p. 77).

The concepts of Sharia, Tariqat, Ma'rifat, and Haqq represent the process and the distance from raw contemplation to becoming a perfect human being. This understanding of the four gates symbolizes the human journey toward understanding and internalizing divine reality. While Sharia deals with the application of religious rulings and rules, Tariqat encompasses the Sufi teachings that guide one on the path to spiritual ascent. Marifet signifies the quest for deep knowledge and understanding, while hakikat pertains to the direct comprehension and lived experience of divine reality. The purpose of this path is for the human being to attain a superior rank and level of reality (Kaplan, 2008, p. 132).

When examining the stages of Sufism, we clearly see that the "Sheikh Safi's Buyruk" holds a special place among the written works describing Sufism. The fundamentals of Sufi views, particularly those of the Alevi tradition, are presented as "The Path" and "The Back." Doğan Kaplan writes that the "tarikat," meaning "the path," is the method of the righteous servants turning toward God, encompassing the transcendence of circles to reach the station. When we examine statements such as, "Well, whose son are you? I am the son of the Path; my Path is the Path of Ali—the Path of Sharia, the Path of the School, the Path of Gnosis, the Path of Truth," it becomes clear that the Qizilbash ideology is grounded in the four foundational principles of Sufism (Kaplan, 2008, p. 99).

The instructions in the book prohibit teaching the order's principles to "those who are not on the path" (non-believers). To substantiate these ideas, the decree also includes the following words of the Prophet: "Speak to people according to their level of understanding, for they cannot comprehend more than that; Allah protects those who adhere to the ethics of the saints" (Sheikh Safi's Buyruk, 2015, p. 57).

When we examine the Alevi ideology from a political-historical perspective, the objectives of these principles within the order become clear. As Halil İnalçık and other historians have noted, external intervention forced the Alevis into secrecy, and as a result of these influences, they led a secluded life (İnalçık, 2017, p. 204).

4. CONCLUSION

The Safavid Order emerged in its early period as a Sufi-centered structure, uniting diverse religious and ethnic communities around a spiritual center. Upon careful examination of sources such as the “Sheikh Safi’s Buyruk” and Hatai’s “Divan,” we can see that Qizilbash ideology is distinct. On one hand, there is Sufism and Sufi perspectives; on the other, there is Shiism, and the result is a new synthesis known as the Qizilbash ideology.

In the Qizilbash ideology, many characteristics of Sufism and Shiism have merged. The Qizilbash ideology has taken shape through the blending of Sufi and Shiite elements, such as Sufism’s deep spiritual quest, the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of existence), the mentor-disciple relationship, the understanding of love and gnosis, the Shiite belief in the Mahdi, and devotion to Imam Ali. Turkmen nomadic communities learned Islam primarily through itinerant Sufi dervishes, which imbued their belief system with syncretic (mixed) and folk-Islamic characteristics. This synthesis deepened and spread under the leadership of Shah Ismail, the founder of the Safavid Empire. Shah Ismail Hatai, both a Sufi poet of profound mystical depth and the founding leader of the Qizilbash ideology, established a religious-political leadership model shaped by mystical elements.

However, over time, changes occurred in the order’s ideological structure, and Shiism came to play a more prominent role for political purposes. Nevertheless, groups affiliated with the Qizilbash ideology have continued to adhere to this ideology, even if operating under different names. The Qizilbash have developed different interpretations and practices across various cultural and geographical contexts, yet they share a common ideological heritage. For this reason, Qizilbashism is not merely a historical phenomenon but continues to exist as a meaningful system of identity and belief in the contemporary world. Groups adhering to this ideology have continued to remain faithful to their beliefs, regardless of the regions or eras in which they lived. Groups such as the Alevi in Anatolia and the Aliallahis in Azerbaijan and Iran are recognized as heirs to the Qizilbash ideology. These communities uphold their ancient beliefs centered on the love of Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt.

Today, Qizilbashlık is not merely a historical phenomenon but also persists as a social and cultural identity. Along with its beliefs, culture, and way of life, Qizilbashlık has served as a significant bond among various communities in the Islamic world from the past to the present. This ideology is not merely a reflection of the past but is also an integral part of the present and the future.

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