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Reflections on the 19th Century Missionary Reports as Sources for the History of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash

Ayfer Karakaya-Stump | ORCID: 0000-0002-5872-9780
Associate Professor of History, College of William and Mary, P.O. Box 8795, Williamsburg, VA 23187-8795, USA
akstump@wm.edu

Abstract

Missionary reports are the earliest modern records to explicitly mention the Kizilbash, and the "Kizilbash Kurds" in particular. Therefore, they have been utilised relatively extensively by researchers in the field, sometimes at levels disproportionate to their reliability and usefulness. This article develops my previous work on the perils of the missionary reports' utilization without sufficient critical scrutiny of their inherent biases and limitations, and highlights, on the basis of an original missionary letter, the editorial process that they were likely subjected to before publication. It argues that the real significance of these sources lies not in their broad and biased speculations concerning distant (Kurdish) Kizilbash origins, but in the casual observations and incidental details they unwittingly supply.

Keywords

Alevi – Qizilbash – Dersim – American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions – G. W. Dunmore

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Hizrên li ser raporên mîsyonerî yên sedsala 19an wek çavkanî ji bo dîroka Qizilbaşan (ên kurd)

Raporên mîsyonerî qeydên modern ên ewil in ku bi eşkereyî behsa Qizilbaş an jî "kurdên Qizilbaş" bi taybetî dikin. Lewra, ew ji teref lêkolînerên li sehayê nisbeten bi berfirehî hatine bikaranîn, carna jî di asteke ne li gor bikêrhatî û ewlebûna wan de. Ev gotar li ser xebatên min ên berê ava bûye ku di wan de behsa talûkeya sûdwergirtina ji raporên mîsyoneran bêyî lêkolîneke rexneyî ya li hember pêşdarazî, sînorkirin û balkişandinên wan ên esasî tê kirin; û gotar bal dikşîne ser bingeha nameyeke mîsyonerî ya orîjînal, pêvajoya edîtorî ya muhtemel a berî weşandina ku ev name tê re derbas dibin. Gotar, nîqaş dike ku girîngiya rastîn ya van çavkaniyan ne di pêşqebûlên wan ên berfireh û alîgir yên di derbarê kokên (kurdên) Qizilbaş de ye lê di çavdêriyên wan ên rojane û teferuatên tesadufî de ye ku wan bêyî zanebûn gihandine.

Raman le raportî mizgênîderekanî sedey 19 wek serçaweyek bo mêjuy (Kurdî) Qzilbaş

Raportî mizgênîderekan kontirîn tomarî serdemin ke be raşkawî nawî qzilbaşekanî hênabêt û betaybetîş "qzilbaşe kurdekan". Leberewe, be rêjeyekî frawan û hendêkcar ta astî neguncan legell bawerrpêkrawî û sûdmendî ew serçawane, lelayen twêjeranî ew bware sûdyan lêwergîrawe. Em wtare leser bnemay karêkî pêşûtrim bunyadinrawe ke derbarey metrisîy bekarbirdnî raportî mizgênîderekane bê ewey wku pêwîst hellsengandinêkî rexnegrane bikrêt bo layengîrîy zigmakîyane û snurdarêtî ew mizgênîderane, we leser bnemay nameyekî esllî mizgênîderêk, tîşk dexate ser prosey paknuskirdin ke pêdeçêt mizgênîderekan pêş bllawkirdnewe rûberrûy bûbnewe. Miştumrrî ewe dekat ke bayexî rasteqîney em serçawane le xemllandinî gîştî û layengîrîyaneyan lemerr rîşey dûrî qzillbaşî (kurdî)ewe nayet, bellku lew serince labela û zanîyarye xelletênerane daye ke ewan beanqest dawyane.

Sey çimeyanê tarîxê (kurdanê) qizilbaşan, raporanê mîsyoneranê seserra 19. ser o tefekurî

Qeydê modernê tewr verênî yê ke bi hewayo eşkera qalê qizilbaşan û bitaybetî qalê kurdanê qizilbaşan kenê, raporê mîsyoneran ê. Coka nê raporî hetê cigêrayoxanê nê warî ra hetê nîsbetî ra hende ameyî xebitnayene ke ge-gane goreyê bawerbarî û feydeyê înan sînorê qebulî ra zî vîyartêne. Na meqale xebata min a verên a ke mi derheqê tehlukeyanê xebitnayîşê raporanê mîsyoneran yê bê rexnegirîya tehqîqê cidî yê terefgirî û sînordarîya înan de kerdbî, aye ser o virazîyaya. Na meqale pê bingeyê mektubêka mîsyonerêk a orîjînale bale ancena prosesê înan ê edîtoryalî ser ke bi îhtîmalêk weşanîyayîş ra ver pêro nê prosesî ro vîyartêne ra. Na xebate nê fikrî dana munaqeşeyî ro ke girîngîya nê çimeyan a raştikêne, pêardişanê înan ê hîra û terefgîran derheqê ristimê (kurdanê) qizilbaşan ê dûrî de nîya, la observasyonanê eleladeyan û teferuatan ê ke mîsyoneran bi tesadufî dayî, înan de ya.

Introduction[1]

For historians of such marginalised groups as the (Kurdish) Kizilbash,[2] the dearth of sources is an unfailing problem. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that the mid-nineteenth-century reports of the American Protestant missionaries mentioning the (Kurdish) Kizilbash have received a significant degree

1 The Kizilbash (Turkish, Kızılbaş) were the forefathers of the modern-day Alevis, who constitute the second largest faith community in Turkey. Together with the kindred Bektashi order, they make up about 15% of the country's population.

2 There is an ongoing debate concerning the boundaries of the Kurdish identity, with the main issue revolving around the question of whether or not to subsume Kırmanjki/Zazaki speakers under that category. Without weighing in on one or the other side of this divisive debate, which has clear political implications, I will use Kurdish-ness in two senses here: as a linguistic category and as an ethnic identity. As a linguistic category, Kurdish, specifically its Kurmanji dialect in the case of the Kizilbash, is separate from the Kırmanjki/Zazaki language that is spoken by the majority of the Kizilbash in the Dersim region (where Kurmanji Kurdish is the second most spoken language). However, despite their linguistic distinctiveness, Kırmanjki/Zazaki speakers are often identified as ethnic Kurds by outsiders, and some in fact also self-identify as such. Reflecting this tendency, the missionary reports concerning the broader Dersim region, which this piece primarily focuses on, make no differentiation between Kurmanji and Kırmanjki/Zazaki speakers, all being categorised as "Kizilbash Kurds". In this article, therefore, whenever "Kurdish" is used in the sense of an ethnic identity (as opposed to a linguistic category), it is understood as including both Kurmanji and Kırmanjki/Zazaki speakers.

of attention by researchers in the field, especially since the Alevi Cultural Revival of the late 1980s and early 1990s, sometimes at levels disproportionate to their reliability and usefulness.[3] In an earlier article, I commented on the perils of the missionary reports' utilisation without sufficient critical scrutiny of their context and content, highlighting various inherent biases and limitations within them as they appeared in the Missionary Herald (hereafter "MH"), the official bulletin of the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (hereafter "ABCFM"). Focusing on the story of Ali Gako,[4] a Kurdish Kizilbash tribal chief in the Dersim region who allegedly converted to Protestantism, I warned against treatments of the relevant reports as if they were deposits of raw facts. Far from being neutral or accurate, these reports, I argued, ought to be understood as textual constructs fraught with many distortions, and critical omissions and additions reflective of the missionaries' own religio-cultural assumptions and evangelistic interests.[5]

What prompted me to write this follow-up is a hand-written copy of one of the earliest samples of these reports, dated 1858, of which I became aware only recently. The report, or letter, in question has been preserved in the American Board Archives in Istanbul.[6] Its author, G. W. Dunmore, was the American missionary who first "discovered" the Kizilbash (Kurds), and who was also the most enthusiastic proponent of proselytising among them. About him and his missionising efforts, including his interactions with Ali Gako, I spoke relatively extensively in my aforementioned article. Dunmore's letter in question, the original and transcription of which is included in the appendix, is interesting in that, when read in comparison to his published reports, it throws light on the (extra-authorial?) editorial interventions the latter apparently were subjected to prior to publication. This issue, which I could not adequately address

3 To the best of my knowledge, the first researcher to use the missionary reports in the wake of the Alevi Cultural Revival was Mehmet Bayrak, who published some excerpts from them with little critical analysis in his Bayrak (1997). Another researcher to make extensive use of the missionary reports without subjecting them to adequate criticism is Kieser (2011). For a more recent example of the use of missionary records in Alevi studies, see Çakmak (2019: Chapter 3).

4 The word transcribed as "Gako" by Dunmore and other missionaries is not a name, but a term of respectful address for men older than the addresser. It is derived from the root kāk or kak, meaning "older brother," in Kurdish (Chyet, *c.*2003). A derivative of this same root, "Keko", was also used in the past as a term of respectful address for Alevi dedes, which also seems to be the case here with "Ali Gako".

5 Karakaya-Stump (2004); originally published in Turkish (Karakaya-Stump, 2002).

6 Dunmore (1858). I thank Gültekin Uçar for informing me of this letter, a digital copy of which is available online from the Salt Research website. Uçar himself makes use of it in his book (Uçar, 2019).

in my first article that relied exclusively on the printed reports from MH, will serve as a point of departure for revisiting the hazards of taking the missionary accounts of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash at face value without proper contextualisation and judicious analysis.

Such critical considerations are, of course, in different ways true for all accounts, and do not automatically render the missionary reports immaterial for Kizilbash history; they are simply to underscore the necessity of keeping a duly critical eye when using them as historical sources. When utilised properly, these reports are useful, most obviously, for shedding light on the 19th century encounters between the Protestant evangelists and the Kizilbash, and other historical developments that these encounters catalysed or reflected (Karakaya-Stump, 2004). Additionally, and more importantly for purposes of this article, the missionary reports are significant in that they are the earliest modern records to explicitly mention the Kizilbash, and the "Kizilbash Kurds" in particular. Given the rarity of sources on the subject otherwise, it is a worthwhile exercise to test the potential of these reports for supplying useful insights about the (Kurdish) Kizilbash beyond their encounters with the missionaries, especially regarding their mode of religiosity, which is what the latter mainly focused on in their field reports. Thus, besides highlighting the editorial process that the missionary reports were apparently subjected to before publication in MH, another aim of the present article is to explore this possibility, namely the degree to which reading them closely and "against themselves" might contribute to an understanding of the historical (Kurdish) Kizilbash identity and religiosity at the time of their initial encounters with the Protestant evangelists. In doing so, I will try to show that the missionary reports' real significance for historians of (Kurdish) Kizilbash history lie not in their broad and biased speculations concerning distant Kizilbash origins, for which they are typically cited, but in the casual observations and incidental details they unwittingly supply.

Contextualising the Significance of the Missionary Accounts for the History and Historiography of the (Kurdish) Kizilbash

In mainstream historiography, Kizilbashism is typically perceived as an essentially Turkmen phenomenon. This is so despite the fact that a substantial portion of the present-day claimants of the Kizilbash heritage, namely the Alevis, are Kurdish or Kirmanjki/Zazaki speaking.[7] One reason for this incongruity

7 A common estimate in the literature puts the percentage of Kurdish and Kırmanjki/Zazaki speaking Alevis at around 15–20% of the Alevi population; my personal impression in the

between the historians' (mis)conception of a chiefly Turkmen Kizilbash milieu and the ethno-linguistic plurality of present-day Alevis is, no doubt, early-twentieth-century Turkish historian Fuad Köprülü's influential theory of Kizilbashism/Alevism (together with that of the kindred Bektashi order) as the quintessential manifestation of "heterodox" Turkish folk Islam in Anatolia, the roots of which Köprülü placed in some distant past in Turkic Central Asia (Karakaya-Stump, 2012–2013; Dressler, 2013).

Besides the influence of Köprülü's thinking, which for long has obscured for historians the presence of non-Turkmen Kizilbash, there is yet another reason for this discrepancy that involves various shortcomings of the conventional sources that has so far received much less attention, and that therefore requires further elaboration. Both the Ottoman and Safavid imperial sources, on which historians typically rely, present a top-down perspective of the Kizilbash phenomenon, and so are also restricted in terms of their thematic, chronological, and geographical coverage. Focusing mainly on the acute phase of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict during the first half of the sixteenth century, these imperial sources speak of the Kizilbash primarily in connection to two issues: one, the challenge they posed to Ottoman rule in Anatolia through their various uprisings, which for the most part occurred in southwestern and central Anatolian provinces; two, the support they supplied to the early Safavid religio-political enterprise by forming as they did the Safavids' initial fighting force. In both contexts, the sixteenth-century Ottoman and Safavid sources tend to bring to the fore the role of a set of Turkmen tribes or tribal confederations, such as the Tekelü, Şamlu, Rumlu, and Ustaclu, with little if any explicit references to Kurdish or Kırmanjki/Zazaki-speaking Kizilbash groups (Sümer, 1992; Reid, 1983).[8]

The virtual absence of Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza Kizilbash populations in the conventional imperial sources from the sixteenth century, in which the Kizilbash otherwise occupy an important place, has to do with the fact that, unlike the Turkmen Kizilbash, their Kurdish and Kirmanjki/Zazaki-speaking coreligionists were concentrated mostly in the eastern half of the Anatolian peninsula, a region that came under Ottoman control only in the years and decades following the Battle of Çaldıran in 1514. They were, in other words,

field, however, suggests a higher percentage. This impression is indeed supported by a survey carried out by Ali Aktaş in the late 1990s at Şahkulu Dergahı in Istanbul and during the annual Hacı Bektaş Veli Memorial Celebrations in Nevşehir. Of those surveyed, 18.05% and 13.37% self-identified respectively as ethnically Kurdish and Zaza; however, when asked about languages spoken in their families, 15.16% of the respondents cited Kurdish, and 40.30 cited Zazaki (Aktaş, 1998).

8 It is, of course, possible, in fact likely, that at least some of these tribes or tribal confederations were polyethnic, even if with a predominantly Turkmen presence.

not yet Ottoman subjects when such major Kizilbash uprisings as the Şahkulu and Nur Ali Halife, which are extensively treated in the primary and secondary literature alike, took place. Furthermore, some of these eastern provinces, most importantly Çemişgezek, were initially granted a semi-autonomous status by the Ottoman state, as were other predominantly Kurdish eastern provinces (Özoğlu, 1996: 16–20; Ünal, 1999: 19–26). Their later incorporation into Ottoman domains and partial autonomy, and better sheltered geographical location distant from the imperial centre most likely facilitated the preservation and resilience of the dissentient religious identities of the Kizilbash in these provinces more efficaciously than among their counterparts in west and central Anatolia, who suffered the most under the state's repressive measures through the course of the sixteenth century. Ironically, however, the same factors seem to have kept the Kizilbash in the eastern provinces beyond the purview of the sixteenth-century official Ottoman sources (not to mention their Safavid counterparts, which, for all periods, exhibit little interest in the Kizilbash outside of Safavid territories).

In the following two centuries, from about the early seventeenth century onwards, when the intensity of the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry subsided, and the Ottoman state shifted emphasis in its policy towards the Kizilbash from persecution to accommodation and situational toleration, the Kizilbash as such virtually disappear from the Ottoman official registers and from the written record in general (Karakaya-Stump, 2019: 292–295). They would eventually re-appear in the historical record in the nineteenth century; this time, however, more as objects of fascination and controversy in regards to their religious and ethnic origins than their role in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict. Therein lies the basic significance of the missionary reports: the first to "(re)discover" the Kizilbash in the nineteenth century were the American Protestant missionaries, whose initial encounter with the Kizilbash occurred circa the middle of the century in eastern Anatolian provinces, including the broader Dersim region, Sivas, Maraş, and Malatya.

It was on the basis of some relatively sporadic encounters in these regions, spanning less than 50 years, between 1855 and 1892, and mediated mostly by local converts of Armenian origin, that the Protestant evangelists developed various bold claims concerning the religious and racial origins of the Kizilbash. Excited about the possibility of extending their proselytising efforts beyond local Christians to also include this newly discovered "peculiar people" and eager to supply moral and legal justification for doing so, the Protestant missionaries portrayed the Kizilbash in their field reports as crypto-Christians who had been made Muslim in name only through the force of the sword. They accordingly described the Kizilbash religion as a syncretistic composite of

Christian and pagan elements overlaid with an Islamic veneer, and its adherents as people ready to embrace the Christian faith. However, while the missionaries' interest in these communities rapidly diminished in tandem with their dwindling hopes of a possible Kizilbash conversion, their framing of the Kizilbash religion on the basis of the notion of syncretism would make a far-reaching impact on the perception of Kizilbashism in popular and scholarly literature alike.

To make better sense of this point, we have to note that the missionaries' ideas concerning the Kizilbash religion, which were to be picked up and repeated by a number of early Western travellers and scholars, also spurred a revival of interest in these communities among the contemporary Ottoman political and intellectual establishment (Karakaya-Stump, 2004: 348–350). The latter were well aware of the missionaries' activities in the empire's territories, and, in all appearances, followed closely their interactions with the Kizilbash. It is for this reason no coincidence that soon after the formation of first contacts between the Protestant evangelists and the Kizilbash, during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Kizilbash would also re-enter the state's spotlight. This was a time when the Ottoman officials were growing increasingly suspicious of its non-Muslim and non-Sunni subjects as potential fifth columns in the face of ever greater internal and external challenges to its territorial integrity, with their main anxiety at that moment revolving around the empire's eastern provinces. The Kurdish Kizilbash in these regions were a particular source of distress for the state: For, besides the missionaries' proselytising efforts among them, the Kurdish Kizilbash in the eastern provinces were also (although mostly unduly) suspected of cooperating with the rebellious Armenian groups. Driven by such concerns, and in an effort to reinforce the Islamic fabric of the Ottoman polity, the state hence initiated a number of counter-measures, including its own missionary program, conceptualized in official Ottoman discourse as "the rectification of beliefs" (*taṣḥīḥ-i i'tiḳād*), that aimed at bringing such "deviant" groups as the Kizilbash in line with Sunni normativity (Deringil, 1998: chapter 5; Akpınar, 2015: 215–225).

The efforts of the Ottoman state to assimilate the Kizilbash into the fold of Sunni Islam produced few tangible results. On the other hand, the missionaries' and other westerners' attribution of non-Islamic and non-Turkish provenance to the Kizilbash elicited a reaction with more enduring consequences among the proto-nationalist Ottoman intellectuals affiliated with the Young Turk movement, who now set out to generate their own narrative of Kizilbash history. The result was a new nationalist construct of Kizilbash origins that claimed the peculiar Kizilbash beliefs and ritual practices, which Western writers variously connected to Christianity or to pagan traditions of Anatolia, to be

remnants of ancient Turkish religions rooted in Central Asia, specifically shamanism.[9] This Central Asia thesis, which was thus formulated in part to counter and replace missionaries' Christian-centric depictions of Kizilbashism, would find its most sophisticated and influential formulation in the works of Fuad Köprülü.[10] Köprülü's ideas on the subject would soon acquire a paradigmatic status in the field in both the Turkish and international scholarship alike, and remain unchallenged for most of the twentieth century.

It was only in the wake of the Alevi cultural revival in the early 1990s, when debates on Kizilbash origins were rekindled after a long hiatus, that alternative narratives of varying scholarly quality critiquing and contesting the Köprülü paradigm were put forward. It was during the same period that the long-forgotten missionary reports on the (Kurdish) Kizilbash would be unearthed and used by individual researchers in the emerging fields of Alevi and Kurdish studies, in part as ammunition against Köprülü's ideas. Among these counter-narratives are, for instance, ones foregrounding the Kurdish-speaking Alevis that accordingly locate the source of various Kizilbash beliefs and ritual practices in ancient Mesopotamian and Iranian religions. Others connect Alevism to different repressed Christian "heresies" of Anatolia, or to a set of humanist and socialist values with no religious dimension of any kind.[11] Interestingly, however, Köprülü's Central Asia thesis, as well as the various recent counternarratives disputing it, share in common some fundamental features that are carried over from the mid-nineteenth-century missionaries' accounts of the Kizilbash religion. Not only do all of these accounts seek the roots of Kizilbashism/Alevism outside of Islam, as did the missionaries, but they all rely on the same problematic conceptualisation of the Kizilbash religion as a 'mixture' of some inherently incongruent components borrowed from diverse traditions. They, in other words, seem unable to break free from a fixation on primordial origins and essences in their treatment of the Kizilbash tradition, or forsake approaches based on such tenuous and malleable notions as syncretism and survival theories, two hallmarks of the missionaries' skewed thinking on the subject-matter (Karakaya-Stump, 2019: 8–14).

As this brief overview demonstrates, the missionaries' approach to the Kizilbash phenomenon has had a formative influence on current scholarly and

9 For complete collections of the relevant articles by Baha Said, Yusuf Ziya Yörükan, and Hilmi Ziya Ülken that appeared in various periodicals in the 1920s, see Said Bey (2000); Yörükan (2002); Ülken (2003).

10 Köprülü's most important and relevant works include Köprülü (repr. 1991); Köprülü (repr. 1993); Köprülü (repr. 1996).

11 For examples of such counter-narratives, most written by non-academic researchers and lacking in scholarly rigor, see Bender (1991); Çakmak (2013); Bulut (2007); Çınar (2007).

popular debates on Kizilbash identity and religion, framed largely in essentialist terms. Without a doubt, such debates, whether in the late 19th century or today, are important in and of themselves for offering insights into contemporary politics surrounding the Kizilbash identity. They are, however, of little help if one seeks to understand the experience of the Kizilbash phenomenon as a whole, and from an internal perspective. It is with this concern in mind that I will attempt below a close reading of Dunmore's letter. My aim in doing so is twofold: One, to expand further on my earlier efforts to deconstruct the missionary accounts of the Kizilbash religion by attending to their internal tensions and strategic silences; and two, to explore if, and to what degree, the various secondary details the missionaries supply in their reports may in fact help to elucidate features of the traditional (Kurdish) Kizilbash identity and religiosity prior to the onset of modern identity politics.

Mr. Dunmore's Letter: an Exercise in Reading against the Grain

There is no single report published in MH that overlaps with Dunmore's original letter from the year 1858 in its entirety (Dunmore, 1858; hereafter "Letter-1858").[12] There is, however, one appearing in the MH in 1857 (Dunmore, 1857; hereafter "Report-1857"), part of which corresponds closely in terms of content to the letter under consideration here.[13] Two related themes are discussed in both of them, namely the religious and ethnic/racial origins of the Kizilbash (Kurds). Given their approximate dates and the overlaps in terms of their coverage, these two texts, both undersigned by Mr. Dunmore, lend themselves to an interesting comparison for purposes of showcasing the degree of editorial amendments these reports likely underwent before their appearance in MH.

It would be useful at this point to quote in full the relevant part of Report-1857 published in MH, which will subsequently be compared with Dunmore's original letter, Letter-1858:

12 Since there is no date on the original letter, it might be that 1858 is only an approximate dating by the archivist.

13 Just as this article was being sent in for publication, I became aware that several other original reports by Dunmore were made available online on the SALT research website, one of which appears to be Report-1857. Due to the lateness of this "discovery" I was unfortunately unable to study it for comparison with its published version.

> And here allow me to give a few facts which I have culled from the many sayings respecting this peculiar people. I am satisfied, first, that they are descendants from a Christian stock, made nominal Moslems by the sword. For, although they are called Moslems, and in the presence of Turks declare themselves such, they have no sympathy with them, but on the contrary feel a deep hostility towards them. They do not receive the Koran, nor Mohammed as a prophet from God; but they do receive the gospel, and Christ (usually under the name of Ali*) as the Son of God. They do not observe any of the Moslem fasts and feasts, nor do they use Moslem prayers, nor practice their ablutions. Indeed they have nothing in common with the Turks, except when with Turks whom they fear. But they have a large book, called the *Bouyouruk*, which, as nearly as I can learn, is an eclecticism from the Old Testament scriptures, interspersed with their own traditions. They have also a book called *Yusef Bitab* (sic), book of Joseph, which, I am assured, contains portions of the New Testament. Beside their books, they have at least one of the Christian ordinances, viz., the Lord's supper, which they celebrate at stated periods, with more propriety, and by far more nearly in accordance with its original design, than the Armenians. Their sayists (sic) correspond to elders in evangelical churches, and they have a *Raiber*, or Bishop, invested with more than apostolic power.
>
> [*footnote*] *Ali, they affirm, is only another name for Christ, and to elude the Turks.

This passage, compared to Letter-1858, is quite concise; naturally so, for it must have been edited and abridged before appearing in print. The two, however, are similar to one another in their basic characterisation of the Kizilbash as descendants of some ancient Christian groups in Anatolia who were forcefully, and only nominally, converted to Islam. Notwithstanding this commonality, a close look at the two texts reveal some seemingly minor but still meaningful differences, both in tone and in content, that go beyond a simple case of abridgment.

Most importantly, one discerns a discordance between the verdict of the Kizilbash as crypto-Christians in Dunmore's published report, and the relatively more ambiguous and tentative picture emerging from his original letter regarding the nature of their religion. A noteworthy aspect of Letter-1858 in this regard is the degree of Dunmore's genuine puzzlement, lurking below the surface of a general demeaning rhetoric, in the face of what he perceived as an unrelenting complexity/confusion of the Kizilbash religion and identity. Dunmore wrote:

> The Kuzulbash are 1st Moslems; 2nd they are Christians; 3rd they are heathenish idolators; 4th they are eclectics of all religions; and 5th they have no religion!
>
> How absurd as this seems, and ridiculously absurd as it really is, it is true, in a relative and qualified sense, as will appear in the sequel.

Compared to Report-1857, which emphasises Christianity as the single most formative component of Kizilbashism, and accordingly dismisses its Islamic aspect as no more than a facade, Dunmore in the above quoted introduction to Letter-1858 puts forward additional, seemingly mutually exclusive propositions to describe it, including its "Moslemism" and "eclecticism," among others, each of which he then goes to discuss in greater detail in the rest of the letter.

Needless to say, Dunmore's ultimate goal in Letter-1858, as in Report-1857, was to convince his readers that the Kizilbash are essentially a group of primitive Christians who profess to be Muslim only in the presence of the Turks. This was crucial for the missionaries to justify, morally and politically, the expansion of their proselytising efforts beyond the local Armenians to also include the Kizilbash. Such a justification was necessary for ensuring the support of the upper echelons of ABCFM, and that of the American and British governments, whose diplomatic backing the Protestant evangelists would need for the protection of their Anatolian mission in the likely scenario of the Ottoman state's adverse reaction against such a move (Karakaya-Stump, 2004: 339).[14] Despite that, in Letter-1858, Dunmore discloses certain observations that, inadvertently, complicates the very idea of the Kizilbash being Christians by heart, and Muslims by appearance only. For example, following his remarks on how the Kizilbash snubbed and never observed the formalities of normative Islam, he concludes the section of his essay concerning the "Moslemism" of the Kizilbash as follows:

> [A Kizilbash individual's] Moslemism consists in saying – "*La illaha il Allah, Mohamet Resul Allah*" – "No God but God and Mohamet is the Prophet of God": or – "*Elhamder* (sic) *Allah Mussulman im*" "Thanks to God I am a Mussulman."
>
> …

14 While the *Islahat Fermanı* (Imperial Reform Edict), promulgated in 1856, expanded religious freedoms, the Ottoman government interpreted it such that it would still not sanction Muslims changing religion, and tried to convince Western diplomats of the same interpretation (Deringil, 1998: 115–116).

> The question naturally arises, if the Kuzulbash are not Moslems why are they called so? And why do they profess faith in the false prophet and his book?

These interesting details in Dunmore's letter, that the Kizilbash embraced and recited the *shahada*, that is the Islamic declaration of faith, and "profess[ed] faith in the false prophet and his book", logically weakens the idea of the Kizilbash as crypto-Christians, for they indicate the Kizilbashs' self-identification as (some kind of) Muslims even when not necessarily "in the presence of the Turks." The idea that the Kizilbash performed religious dissimulation simply to dodge the Turks also runs contrary to Dunmore's observation of their stigmatisation as "Kafir Kuzulbash" [infidel Kizilbash] by their neighbours. He remarks on this point when trying to construe the origins of the Sunni Kurds, who apparently in some places inhabited the same villages as their Kizilbash counterparts:

> And we sometimes find Koordish villages thus divided between the two sects, a part having yielded to the pressures, and for the sake of expediency have become orthodox, while others adhere to the peculiar notions of their fathers, and prefer to hear the opprobrious name "*Kafir Kuzulbash*" rather than hypocritically keep the fast and repeat the stupid and tedious prayers of Turks.

The notable absences of these and similar elements in the published reports suggests the possibility of a deliberate effort to edit out (possibly by someone other than Dunmore himself) such contradictory data before their appearance in MH. The same concern seems to underline the insistence in Report-1857 on the feeble contention that Ali (Arabic, ʿAli; cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammed and the first of the Shiʿi Imams), whose unmistakable centrality in Alevi devotion apparently did not escape Dunmore, was simply another name of Christ. Explaining away this key Islamic component of Kizilbashism was apparently deemed so important that a special footnote was added to the relevant passage from Report-1857 cited above, reiterating and reaffirming the assertation that Ali was "only another name for Christ" used "to elude the Turks."

In a similar vein, one discerns a telling incongruity between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 in terms of their respective characterisation of *Buyruk*, which Dunmore calls a "book," but which is in fact the name given to various overlapping collections of Kizilbash/Alevi religious texts (Karakaya-Stump, 2012).

In the above excerpt from Report-1857, Dunmore describes *Buyruk* as "an eclecticism from the Old Testament scriptures, interspersed with [the Kizilbashs'] own traditions." He further adds that "[the Kizilbash] have also a book called *Yusef Bitab* (*sic*), book of Joseph, which, I am assured, contains portions of the New Testament". In contrast to Report-1857, his comments on the subject in Letter-1858 are overall much more dismissive, with no mention of an alleged link between the *Buyruk* and the Bible:

> They have no books except the *Bouyourook*, which I have never been able to get hold of; and though I have had the permission of its perusal, a great many times, I could never find the man in actual possession of it. Whenever I went wher[e] it was, it was always sure to be somewhere else. Such a book is in existence, however, for I have seen a man who has seen it. One of our native helpers who has read it assures me that it contains little else than jargon(?) [and] a collection of myths and fables. He says – "it is altogether *bosh*." It is a small book, written in the Turkish character, and kept with the greatest possible care from the hands of Turks.

The most conspicuous difference in their characterisation of the *Buyruk* between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 is the lack of reference in the latter to the Old Testament as one of its sources, and the absence of any mention of a second book, "the book of Joseph" (the existence of which we cannot confirm) that allegedly contains portions of the New Testament. In Letter-1858, Mr. Dunmore rather states, based on some unidentified person's testimony, that "[the Buyruk] is altogether *bosh*" that is, "empty" or "worthless." Also notable here is his additional remark that it is a text written in Turkish (characters), a fact potentially complicating the claim of its origins in the Christian Bible, which therefore might have been left out in Report-1857.

Such discrepancies and contradictions between Report-1857 and Letter-1858 that are easily detectable serve to highlight the ways in which the editorial process they were likely subjected to shaped the final reports in the MH that aimed, most obviously, at trivialising the Islamic aspect of Kizilbashism. When combined with various other incidental details and observations supplied by Dunmore in his original letter, they also, unwittingly, affirm the basic Islamic framework within which traditional Kizilbash/Alevi identity was perceived by those who claimed it.

Focusing on the reminder of Letter-1858, we gain further insights into the Kizilbash people's own perception of their religious tradition circa the mid-19th century. In this regard, Mr. Dunmore's remarks concerning the "liberal

eclecticism" of the Kizilbash is most interesting in that they supply clues about certain distinctive aspects of Kizilbashism which set it apart not only from mainstream Islam, but also from Christianity.

For Dunmore, the Kizilbash had "a very extensive faith that can take in all religions". It was this lack of exclusivity that rendered their tradition as less than a proper religion in the eyes of Dunmore. This undue "inclusivity" of the Kizilbash religion is conveyed, among other things, by their reverence to, not to mention divinisation of, all the Prophets:

> It is evident that, while they profess to believe the prophets, they believe that each is, or was in his day, a manifestation and real personification of God. For they say – "Moses was God – and David was God – and Christ was God – and Ali was God – and Mohamet was God"! They have a favorite sort of conflict that shows rottenness in the foundations.

Still more, the Kizilbash held such blasphemies beliefs as the "transmigration of souls and even annihilation":

> Thus they have every thing [sic] like religion, with every shade of infidelity with transmigration of souls and even annihilation; and having every thing they really have nothing. As a system they have no religion at all: and thus by being too religious they became destitute of religion; and perhaps the name – Red-Head – is quite as appropriate as any by which they could be called.

For a self-righteous evangelist like Dunmore, such "inclusivism" by definition suggested a confused mix of incongruent elements from different traditions, and was, therefore, deemed as utterly problematic. The root cause of this predicament of the Kizilbash, according to Dunmore, was their state of ignorance which allowed them to "be driven about, as they are, by every wind of doctrine":

> such a people … in being destitute of learning, destitute of schools and places of worship; destitute of books, and whose teachers, the priests themselves are not able to read, for none but the *Peer*, the *Rahiber* and a very few *imam*s can read at all, should be destitute of any religious system, and be driven >about<, as they are, ~~about~~ by every wind of doctrine.

But what appeared to Dunmore as inauthenticity and a lack of consistency in thinking might well have had an internal logic of its own within the "profoundly

mystified philosophy and religion" of the Kizilbash, which he passingly notes at the outset, but explicitly avoids expanding on:

> Without venturing on any speculations concerning them, or any vain attempts to explain, or to understand their profound mysteries, and their profoundly mystified philosophy and religion – which their learned ones assure us is quite hair-splitting, and even finer than a hair – we must content ourselves, for the present, with a few facts gathered from them by personal intercourse, and through others who live among them.

What were these "profound mysteries" of the Kizilbash, which, according to their "learned ones [were] even finer than a hair"? While Dunmore chooses not to engage with them directly, evidence, both internal and external to the text, allow us to conjecture that these included beliefs and ideas reflective of the heavily mystical and esoteric underpinning of Kizilbashism that, when looked closely, betray their provenance within the broader Sufi tradition.

To begin with their acceptance of all Prophets; this belief, to the extent it involves the acknowledgment of all Abrahamic prophets is, of course, part and parcel of the Islamic teaching that all Abrahamic religions share a common divine origin and contain a core belief in the same God. According to Dunmore, however, the Kizilbash also regarded Ali as one of the Prophets, and, moreover, attributed divinity to all of them. While Dunmore's depiction of Kizilbashism in such simplistic terms as some sort of crude polytheism is in part intended for comic effect, it is also demonstrative of his facile understanding of the mystical dimensions of the Kizilbash faith. It is true that Ali is the central figure in Kizilbash/Alevi religiosity. However, the emic perception of Ali (which, ironically, is claimed to be another name of Christ in Report-1857), and in particular of his relationship with the Prophet Muhammad, draws on the esoteric doctrine of *nur Muhammadi*, according to which Ali and Muhammed are a single unified entity emanating from the Divine. This doctrine, as well as notions of "sainthood" and "sacredness" as projected by various Kizilbash beliefs and practices, are fundamentally informed by a monistic understanding of monotheism, which conceives of God as being pervasive throughout all creation. It is this image of the Divine as immanent and all-encompassing which underlines an array of specific Alevi teachings and maxims, such as the idea of the Perfect Man (*insan-ı kamil*) and Ali in particular as the locus of Divinity (*Hakk ademdedir*), the immortality of souls (*ölen tendir, canlar ölmez*) and the possibility of their transmigration from one body to another (*don değiştirmek*), and the kindred notion of *cyclical existence* (*devir*). Such a monistic interpretation of

monotheism conflicts with the common understanding in Islam that God is ontologically separate and independent from the world. Nonetheless, although considered by the orthodox-minded as highly suspect, even outright heretical, for its blurring of the boundary between Creator and creation, this monistic view of being has been present in Sufism, in one form or another, since its inception.

It is from the same "esoteric" angel, that one ought to understand one of the most interesting parts of Dunmore's letter as a historical source: a Kizilbash maxim that he cites in its original Turkish to demonstrate their vision of God:

> It runs thus Allah-
> **Bin yakadan bash geusterde**, (*Bin yakadan baş gösterdi* / He revealed himself in different guises)[15]
> **Choku saldee geumana:** (*Çoğu saldı gümana* / Throwing many into doubt)
> **Bir yakadan bash geuslesek(?)**, (*Bir yakadan baş gözlesek*(?) / If s/he instead had revealed himself/herself in a single guise)
> **Choku gelir imana!** (*Çoğu gelir imana* / Many would come to believe [in God])

Dunmore's interpretation of this maxim as an indication of the alleged Kizilbash belief that God made a "great mistake by sending so many prophets" is clearly off the mark. This maxim, different versions of which one can occasionally hear still today from older members of the Kizilbash/Alevi community in reference to Ali, instead communicates the esoteric reality that the unity of God is veiled from common human understanding due to the plurality of its manifestation in this world. As a corollary, it also imparts the idea that only a select group of people, such as the Kizilbash, can discern the essential unity of the "Universal Reality" (*Hakk*) amidst the multiplicity of earthly life, thus reflecting the view the Kizilbash held of their own uniqueness as true unitarians.

The same "universalist" mindset that comprehends all religions as different parochial expressions of the same ultimate "Reality" seems to have also shaped the perception of Protestantism on the part of at least some of the Kizilbash. The reaction of an unidentified Kizilbash person to Protestantism recorded by Dunmore is quite remarkable in this regard. Although the exact wording of the exchange, or perhaps the exchange itself, is, at least in part, likely a fabrication,

15 All translations are the author's own.

it is still noteworthy as an explanation for why a Kizilbash person at the time would not consider converting to Protestantism:

> One of their number once said to a Protestant – "you know that our religion is made up of all the religions in the world: And we thought that we could put your Protestantism into our dish – (meaning their religion) – without losing anything of our own; but when we put it in, ~~Protestantism~~ (sic) all our old religion spills over: Your Protestantism is entirely too exclusive for us!

Dunmore's aim in relaying this exchange was no doubt to highlight, once again, the exclusivity of Protestantism, which for him was a *sine qua non* of any proper religion centred on a book. But reading from the other end, that is from the perspective of the Kizilbash speaker, one can drive from it a very different meaning: that the exact same quality, namely its exclusivity, which for Dunmore proves the superiority of Protestantism could also be seen as its parochialism, hence as its main flaw. This exchange is noteworthy for showing how the Kizilbash tradition could theologically hold its own in relation to other, more institutionalised religions. It is also interesting for suggesting that the often referenced "inclusivist" teachings of the Kizilbash were not simply a side-effect of an unintentional absorption of influences from any "wind of doctrine" that came their way. Rather, these teachings were clearly underscored by a fundamental belief that different religions are little more than particular expressions of the same universal essence. This esoteric wisdom, it would seem, enabled the congruous coexistence within the same tradition of what to Dunmore, as to many other outsiders, seemed to be contradictory elements.

While the Kizilbash religion was the main concern of Dunmore, he was also interested in making sense of its intersection with Kurdish identity. As mentioned earlier, the Protestant evangelists' field of activities in Anatolia overlapped to a significant degree with areas of high Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza Kizilbash concentration (where the local Armenians, the missionaries' main clients, also happened to live), with smaller Turkmen Kizilbash groups dispersed among them.

There are a few notable points regarding the ethnic/linguistic plurality of the Kizilbash as reflected in Dunmore's letter. For starters, Dunmore does not distinguish between Kurdish and Kirmanjki/Zazaki-speaking Kizilbash, which suggests that there was perhaps no such overt differentiation on the ground between the two groups. Furthermore, the fact that most Kizilbash he encountered, including the alleged Protestant-convert Ali Gako, were Kurdish, led him to suspect, erroneously, that all Kurds were originally Kizilbash, and

that all Kizilbash were originally Kurdish. The latter, in turn, were purported to be "descendants from the ancient Carducians" mentioned in *Anabasis*, the most-well known work of the ancient Greek historian Xenophon composed in the fourth century BC.[16]

Dunmore, thus, postulates, by way of explaining away the Turkish-speaking Kizilbash, that those "found near cities and large towns, or who have become owners and tillers of land … have exchanged their mother tongue [i.e. Kurdish] for the Turkish". Dunmore's conflation of Kizilbash and Kurdish identities also had to do with the intense animosity that he observed between the Kizilbash and the "Turks," not realising, of course, how "Turkishness" at the time was closely intertwined with the Sunni-Muslim identity in popular imagination, though more so in certain parts of the empire than others.[17] Whatever Dunmore's misunderstandings and sweeping generalisations concerning the ethnic identity of the Kizilbash, it is clear that most of his observations concerning the Kizilbash religion arose from his interactions with groups and individuals whose native language was Kurdish or Kirmanjki/Zazaki. Despite that, however, virtually all the indigenous Alevi terminology and maxims that he cites are in Turkish, including the name that the Kizilbash purportedly gave to their religion, "'the sweet vine' – *tatlu tevek*" (which actually makes little sense, and is thus probably a misunderstanding). While this might in part be a result of the fact that Dunmore and his guides communicated with the local people exclusively in Turkish, it is still noteworthy in so far as it aligns with a common idea that Turkish has been the primary liturgical language of all the Kizilbash, including those of Kurdish and Kirmanj/Zaza background.

16 As with the Kizilbash, the missionaries were among the first in modern times to speculate about the origins of the Kurds, typically on the basis of ancient Greek historical narratives, and Xenophon's *Anabasis* in particular. Their various claims, including a direct connection between the Kurds and the Medes (a group also mentioned by Xenophon), would later also be picked up, and to some extent internalised, by Kurdish nationalist circles. For the missionaries' claim that the Kurds are descended from the Medes, see, for example, "For Young People: The Koormanji Koords" *Missionary Herald*, January issue, 1902: 46.

17 It is worth noting in this regard that Mr. Richardson, a fellow missionary and contemporary of Dunmore based in Arapgir, makes the exact opposite observation concerning the ethnic/linguistic background of the Kizilbash: "It is quite certain that the Kuzzel-bash are not Koords, since they do not use the Koordish language, and are very much hated by them". "Arabkir. Letter from Mr. Richardson, July 14, 1856" *Missionary Herald*, October issue, 1856: 298.

Conclusion

The 19th-century missionary accounts, by virtue of being the first known written sources on the (Kurdish) Kizilbash in the modern period, carry an intrinsic value for researchers in the field. While using them, however, one has to bear in mind that these field reports were written primarily for ABCFM in Boston with the goal of conveying to the church members at large the achievements of the missionaries. They are, therefore and naturally, distorted by missionaries' own religio-cultural assumptions and evangelistic interests. They often miss or ignore the actual focus of Kizilbash religiosity and identity, or contain only superficial, if not entirely inaccurate, accounts of their specific beliefs and rituals which minimise their usefulness for scholarly reconstructions of the Kizilbash tradition. Despite that important caveat, the various incidental and secondary details the missionary reports supply, especially when these are combined and cross-checked with internal Alevi sources, can help debunk some misconceptions about, and enrich our understanding of, traditional Kizilbash identity and religiosity prior to the commencement of large-scale urbanisation and modernisation processes in in the mid-twentieth century.

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Appendix: Transcription and Facsimile of Letter-1858

The Kuzulbash

(Pg. 1) The Kuzulbash are certainly a very peculiar people. To give anything like an intelligent, definite and correct idea of them or their religion would be about as difficult a task as was ever undertaken by a sane man. For they embody more contradictions and absurdities, probably, than any other people or sect of religionists in Turkey; and perhaps more than all others together. As a people, they are the most wild, ferocious, and warlike and cruel; and the most kind and humane; they are the greatest thieves and robbers, and the most honest, honorable and noble; they are the most ignorant, and the most intellectual; the most religious and the most destitute of religion; in a word they are the best and the worst class of natives that I have found in Turkey. They are so much like the cracked kettle of worldwide fame, that one can't avoid the comparison – which the lawyer proposed to make good by proving 1st that the kettle was whole when his client returned it; 2 it was cracked when he borrowed it; and 3 he never had the kettle!

The Kuzulbash are 1st Moslems; 2nd they are Christians; 3rd they are heathenish idolators; 4th they are eclectics of all religions; and 5th they have no religion!

How absurd as this seems, and ridiculously absurd as it really is, it is true, in a relative and qualified sense, as will appear in the sequel.

Without venturing on any speculations concerning them, or any vain attempts to explain, or to understand their profound mysteries, and their profoundly mystified philosophy and religion – which their learned ones assure us is quite hair-splitting, and even finer than a hair– we must content ourselves, for the present, with a few

facts gathered from them by personal intercourse, and through others who live among them.

(Pg. 2) 1st: Who and what are the Kuzulbash?

Our knowledge of them is very imperfect. They are a sect of nominal Moslems – as a people sui generis – scattered over an extensive region between the Taurus range and the Black Sea; and for the most part found in the vicinities of Kharpoot, Arabkir and Sivas.

The opprobrious name Kuzulbash, or Red-Head, is applied to them by Turks, probably, on account of the color of their turbans, which are quite uniform, and for the most part red. They reject this name, however, and call themselves "the sweet vine" – *tatlu tevek*.

Of their ancestry we have no positive knowledge. There is some evidence however that they are of Persian origin; and it may yet turn out that they are the same with the Persians in nationality and religion. Thin tall, athletic and noble frames, their manly and marked features, their peculiarly dignified mien, together with their heterodox Mohammedanism, are all in favor of this conjecture. In their language also – which is for the most part Koordish – the Persian descent is prominent if not predominant. Indeed we are assured by one who is regarded as a good Persian scholar, that the language of the Kuzulbash Koords is little else than the Persian modified and corrupted: and probably the same is true of Koordish generally. The Turks, moreover, say that the Persians are all Kuzulbash, and these are a part of them. Perhaps they are descendants from the ancient Carducians mentioned in Xenophon's Anabasis as most uncomfortable foes, and who, as Gibbon assures us "occupied the large mountainous territory east of the Tigris, and preserved for many ages their manly freedom in the heart of the despotic monarchies of Asia, and whose posterity, called Curds, **(Pg. 3)** acknowledged the nominal sovereignty of the Turkish Sultan". The Kuzulbash of Turkey are Koords, or plainly of Koordish origin. Indeed the majority, I think, are nomadic tribes, for the most part occupying mountainous regions, in summer dwelling in tents and tabernacles, as their fathers did, and wintering in villages of crude huts, built mostly of stone and wood. Their chiefs however, often have large and respectable *konak*s.

They live in tribes very much like the North American Indians, and preserving a distinct nationality, they never intermarry with Turks or any other people.

Many of those found near cities and large towns, or who have become owners and tillers of land to any considerable extent, and in their habits made a respectable approximation to civilization, have exchanged their mother tongue for the Turkish, while others still retain it. But it is plain, I think, that the Turkish is not their vernacular, or at least not the language of their fathers. There is something in it that distinguishes them from Turks, though they seem to have perfect command of it. We sometimes find Kuzulbash villages near together, the one using Koordish and the other one using Turkish.

That they are not the original Turks is plain, I think, from the deadly hatred always everywhere existing between them and the Turks – more deadly and deep rooted than is found between any other people. The Turk shows his estimate of the Kuzulbash by declaring that he is outside of all religions and worse than a Jew, while the Kuzulbash Koord would not relish his favorite meal of bread yoghoort (*sic*) and onions half so much as a good chance to dispatch a Turk.

They say – " we have Abraham to our father, through Ishmael who was the *Korban*, and not Isaac; and they thus claim unbroken lineage from the father of the faithful; and doubtless – **(Pg.4)** they might add – "though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not".

Whether the Koords were all Kuzulbash originally or not, it is impossible to determine satisfactorily. The fact that but few of them observe the Moslem rites, and the most orthodox are loose and careless in their religious performances, is evidence, so far as it goes, in favor of this conjecture. Moreover, we sometimes find whole villages in Kuzulbash regions that have gone over from them to the orthodox Moslems, under pressures of fear and straitened circumstances within a comparatively short period. And we sometimes find Koordish villages thus divided between the two sects, a part having yielded to the pressures, and for the sake of expediency have become orthodox, while others adhere to the peculiar notions of their fathers, and prefer to hear the opprobrious name "*Kafir Kuzulbash*," rather than hypocritically keep the fast and repeat the stupid and tedious prayers of Turks.

*2***(?)** ***Their Religion***: While they are nominal Moslems, and from fear of the Turks they profess faith in the Koran and its author, they perform none of the rites or ceremonies of Mohametans. As for fasts, they ridicule them and never find time to observe them, and the feasts, they care nothing for. The only rite that they observe in common with Turks is that of circumcision; which, of essence, is no more Mohametan than it is Jewish or heathenish. True, when they live in near proximity to Turks, they sometimes have a mosque in their village to accommodate their orthodox neighbors when they happen to be burdened with them, but they never, or almost never go to that place of prayer themselves: and I don't believe that one Kuzulbash of a thousand could, for his life, go through with the orthodox genuflections of a Moslem, much less with the prayers. **(Pg. 5)** His Moslemism consists in saying – "*La illaha il Allah, Mohamet Resul Allah*" – "No God but God and Mohamet is the Prophet of God": or – "*Elhamder* (*sic*) *Allah Mussulman im*" "Thanks to God I am a Mussulman."

It is evident that, while they profess to believe the prophets, they believe that each is, or was in his day, a manifestation and real personification of God. For they say – "Moses was God – and David was God – and Christ was God – and Ali was God – and Mohamet was God"! They have a favorite sort of conflict that shows rottenness in the foundations. It runs thus Allah-

Bin yakadan bash geusterde,
Choku saldee geumana:
Bir yakadan bash geuslesek(?),
Choku gelir imana!

The import of this is that "Allah made a great mistake in sending so many prophets; for the result is that the mass of men are left in doubt as to which is the true (*sic*); whereas if he had sent but one, they would have believed him!

They have no books except the *Bouyourook*, which I have never been able to get hold of; and though I have had the permission of its perusal, a great many times, I could never find the man in actual possession of it. Whenever I went wher[e] it was, it was always sure to be somewhere else. Such a book is in existence, however, for I have seen a man who has seen it. One of our native helpers who has read it assures me that it contains little else than jargon(?) ⟨and⟩ a collection of myths and fables. He says – "it is altogether *bosh*." It is a small book, written in the Turkish character, and kept with the greatest possible care from the hands of Turks.

(Pg. 6) The question naturally arises, if the Kuzulbash are not Moslems why are they called so? And why do they profess faith in the false prophet and his book? In Washington Irving's "Mohamet and his successors", we find the following: – "Beside the Koran or written law, a number of precepts and apologies which casually fell from the lips of Mohamet were collected after his death from ear-witnesses, and transcribed into a book called the Sonna or oral law. This is held equally sacred with the Koran by a sect of Mohametans thence called Sonnites; others reject it as apocryphal: these last are termed Schiites. Hostilities and persecutions have occasionally taken place between these sects almost as virulent as those which between Catholic and Protestants have disgraced Christianity. The Sonnites are distinguished by white, the Schiites by red turbans; hence the latter have received from their antagonists the affectation of Kuzilbashi, or Red-Heads."

How it may be that the Kuzulbash found in Turkey are the same as those mentioned by Irving; that the Sonna has since received the name *Bouyourook*, and the Schiites were what are now called *Sayits*. There are other facts however that favor the opinion that the Kuzulbash are descendants from a Christian stock – from superior independent tribes who had embraced Christianity and were brought under the Mahometan sword: and once nominal Moslems, the sword drawn over their heads has kept them in partial subjection. Except in the presence of Turks, whom they evidently fear more than they fear God, they are free to declare their faith in Christ as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. They believe in his incarnation, crucifiction (*sic*) and atoning death. On this point I have been particular to sound them as much as possible, and am inclined to think that they have quite as near an approximation to actual belief as they have in any ~~other~~ Christian doctrine. True many of them say that Ali too was

(Pg. 7) the Son of God; but they also say that Christ and Ali are one and the same, and that they use the latter name to delude the Turks; a thing not very improbable, when we consider that their lives were constantly in peril, and that as Ali was Mohamet's son in law and intimate friend, by such a shift they might avoid the vengeance of their merciless foes without a complete abandonment of their Soul. They say – "we love all the prophets, but we love Ali most of all." And if they are asked who Ali is, they reply – "he is the Son of God". 'But who is Christ?' "He is the Son of God." But they do not affirm this of any of the prophets. They predicate of Christ or Ali, above miraculous conception and Divine Sonship: and yet they say of all the prophets that they were "God manifest in the flesh." On this great mysterious doctrine – God in Christ – their ideas are evidently confused and they multiply words without knowledge, in which they are not alone. They assent to, or profess to believe all the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel; and that the New Testament is the most authoritative of all books, and the *Bouyourook* is next to it! They hold that the teachings of Christ's 12 Apostles – called *imam*s – are authoritative, and moreover that their own ecclisiastics (*sic*) are not only endowed with authority by Apostolic succession, but they have it by lineal descent! And not only so, but they have all the distinct sects which such superiority and distinction would naturally if not necessarily secure to them. While one says – "I am of Paul and another – I am of Apolus",[18] they are carnal and walk as carnal men. They preserve these distinctions with remarkable carefulness, so that ecclisiastics (*sic*) often have to travel a long distance to attend to their flocks. Their ecclisiastics (*sic*) consists of three distinct classes or grades. The head of all is called the *Peer* and lives near Sivas: the second rank is called the *Rahiber* and resides in the Dersim Mountains, 10 hours from Kharpoot: the 3rd class are the *Sayit*s or common priests, and are found in great numbers everywhere, and sometimes come from the eastern villages.

(Pg. 8) The people commonly call them *Dedeh* – a name so nearly like that applied to the Armenian priests – *Derder* – that I am inclined to believe that it is one and the same, as their office so nearly corresponds to theirs. But what the particular business or office of the *Peer* and *Rahiber* is I have never been able to ascertain. Whether they are designed to correspond to the Bishop and Archbishop or the Patriarch and Catholicos of the Armenians; or to the Pope and cardinals of Rome, or to all these together with the Sheikh-ul-Islam of Moslem faith, if known at all is known only to themselves. Like most other parts of their mysterious religion, this is kept so far as possible, a profound secret.

18 Quote from the Bible, 1 Corinthians 3:4.

Another thing in favour of the supposition that they had a Christian origin is the interesting fact that they celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is done, as I am assured with even more than primitive simplicity. They come together at one of their houses, both males and females, quietly seating themselves in perfect order, inclining their heads forward remain sometime in silent meditation; after which their priests pass around with bread giving to each a piece or *lokema*, and this is followed by the cup containing wine, when they have it, otherwise water is used instead. After the distribution of bread and the cup, they pass silently out one by one, having eaten as they suppose the very body, and drank the very blood of the Son of God, and thus become one with him! They thus have transubstantiation substantiated in themselves, with the additional absurdity of having become deified in the mystical process!

But who are admitted to this pact of love as they themselves call it? Not everyone (*sic*); but only such as are counted(?) worthy. If one has a quar[r]el against any, the parties must first become reconciled. If any has committed theft or robbery, or has wronged his brother, he must make confession to his priest, and perhaps make good the injury. It is quite evident that they have something like the **(Pg. 9)** Confessional, and their *Sayit*s, like the Armenian Papal priests are paid for exercising their apostolic power of binding and unbinding the sheep and the goats of their flocks. But their feast of love is obscured with closed doors, so guarded that none but their own fraternity can possibly enter; and an attempt to force an entrance would be rewarded by certain death. And yet love is the fundamental principle in their religion; and "charity covereth a multitude of sins."[19] They will sit and hear you discourse on love as many consecutive hours as you please to entertain them; and I am decidedly of the opinion that they really cherish and manifest more love among themselves, and less of deception and intrigue, than any other Oriental sect or people, except those who have been brought under the influence and power of the Gospel. Though they are desperate and merciless to their enemies, they are true and magnanimous as friends. It is an essential part of their religion to defend and protect their friends even to the death. And I would not ask for a truer friend or a more reliable protector than I have found among the wild Kuzulbash Koords. They say – "a man who does not protect his friend, and is not willing to lay down his life for a brother, does not love God."

They have more sympathy with, and love for Christians than they have for any others. As Moslems, of course, they must detest the worship of pictures and of all other created things; but we are assured that they do sometimes go into Armenian churches and prostrate themselves before these church idols: and more than this, they are known to worship sticks and stones, and especially huge trees. They say that some prophet or saint has doubtless sat beneath that tree, and therefore it is sacred! And with their remarkable notions of deified prophets, it would not be strange if they fancy

19 Quote from the Bible, Peter 4:8.

that by contact, they actually impart of their celestial nature to the old tree. I have been assured also that they worship the sun: and if they worship pictures and rocks and old trees, as I doubt not they do, it is no more remarkable that they worship the sun also, and even the moon and stars.

(Pg. 10) So much for their Moslemism, their Christianity and their heathenish idolatry: let us move then for a moment to their still more liberal eclecticisms. Surely they are the most liberal religionists to be found anywhere. With their Mohametanism, Christianity and idolatry, you find mixed up and interwoven and conglomerated, atheism, pantheism, materialism, and every other absurd ism (*sic*) that the benighted mind of mortal man is capable of inventing. One of their number once said to a Protestant – "you know that our religion is made up of all the religions in the world: And we thought that we could put your Protestantism into our dish – (meaning their religion) – without losing anything of our own; but when we put it in, ~~Protestantism~~ (sic) all our old religion spills over: Your Protestantism is entirely too exclusive for us!"

Thus they have every thing (*sic*) like religion, with every shade of infidelity with transmigration of souls and even annihilation; and having every thing (*sic*) they really have nothing. As a system they have no religion at all: and thus by being too religious they became destitute of religion; and perhaps the name – Red-Head – is quite as appropriate as any by which they could be called.

Why then, it may be asked do we hear so much of religious interest amongst the Kuzulbash? A native helper at Arabkir once said to me – "I have seen a great many Kuzulbash and have preached the Gospel to a great many; and I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel, as I find among them."

And surely, we may say, it must be a very extensive faith that can take in all religions! But he was sincere and partly right, in making this assertion. Surely it is not strange that such a people – such out casts (*sic*), whose hand is against every man's, **(Pg. 11)** while every man's hand is against them; being destitute of learning, destitute of schools and places of worship; destitute of books, and whose teachers, the priests themselves are not able to read, for none but the *Peer*, the *Rahiber* and a very few *imam*s can read at all, should be destitute of any religious system, and be driven ⟨about⟩, as they are, ~~about~~ by every wind of doctrine; having no hope, and without God in the world. The marvel is rather, that we find among them so much mind, so much nobility of character, and so great freedom from the low vices of Turks and nominal Christians too, with such a readiness to listen to the truth, as we find among the Kuzulbash. For, among all the different religious sects of Turkey I have not found such readiness to hear the Word, with so little opposition, as amongst this strange and benighted people. They are the only people that have never refused me lodgings, and have never failed to welcome me to their houses, when they knew that I came to preach the Gospel to them. Nominal Christians often insult the preacher and deride his preaching; the Kuzulbash never. Uniformally (*sic*), when we go to their villages, they give us the best accommodations, and the best of every thing (*sic*) that their place affords; and it is sure to be

more abundant, cleaner, and better in every respect than we find elsewhere among filthy orientals. And after they have done all in their power for our comfort they gather about us and listen respectfully to the reading of God's Word and preaching; and when prayer is offered they are seen to observe silence, and often bowing the knee with us, at the close respond a loud amen!

In the regions of Sivas, Arabkir and Kharpoot, a goodly number of this people have heard the truth and have already become partially enlightened: Some are reading and searching the Scriptures for themselves, and have openly, boldly, and perhaps, sincerely and intelligently professed Protestant Christianity. And for this, some have been **(Pg. 12)** beaten, imprisoned, put in chains and driven into exile; while others have been shorn and shaven of their beards, have had their property confiscated, and have literally suffered the loss of all things, professedly for Christ's sake and the Gospel's.

One of their noblest chiefs – Ali Gako – after having entreated us more than three years without success, to send him a man to teach the youth of his village and preach the Gospel to himself and his people, when such a teacher was found for him, received him to his own house, furnished him with a room and all necessary accommodations for school and religious services, with the additional compensation of board and 100 piasters per month; and taking his place beside a dozen lads, he began to learn his alphabet!

Many interesting facts might be added, and indeed a volume might be written filled with interesting facts respecting this remarkable sect – this peculiar people.

The conclusion of the whole matter is, that the Kuzulbash are a very peculiar, benighted, doubtful, interesting and hopeful people, ready to listen to the Gospel, while some are ready to receive it gladly. Some are more in need of it, and of the earnest, "effectual prayers of the righteous which availeth much."[20] The work among them must be a work of faith, and in a sense, for a time at least it will be an experiment. It may require long continual and patient labor in breaking up the fallow ground and sowing in trees. But already we are cheered by the sweet words of the Lord, echoed from the dark mountain homes of Dersim – "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation."[21] And in answer to any who may think the Kuzulbash almost a hopeless people for subjects of the Gospel, God says – "*He that goeth forth and weepeth* bearing precious seed, *shall doubtless come again* with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with *him*." "*Let God be true* and *every man a* liar."[22]

On behalf of the mission (signed) G. W. Dunmore

20 Quote from the Bible, James 5:16.

21 Quote from the Bible, Isaiah: 52:7.

22 Quotes from the Bible, Psalm 126:6 and Romans 3:4.