Russia marches South: army reform and battlefield performance in Russia's Southern campaigns, 1695-1739

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CHAPTER 2
FRIENDS, FOES AND FRENEMIES IN THE SOUTH

If the period from the end of the seventeenth to mid eighteenth century was a chessboard, then opposite Peter's desire to assert his authority and power over vast territory stood important political and military players who were determined to put an end to his "march".

The following chapter will be divided into several subsections, each dealing with a particular element of the complex geopolitical puzzle that the Pontic region from the first decades of the eighteenth century resembled. Firstly, the focus will be on Russia's chief adversary – the Ottoman Empire, a foe as determined and as ambitious as the tsarist state itself. Then the main features of the Crimean Khanate, as an element of the overall Ottoman military system, will be defined. However, the Khanate was a player in its own right and pursued its own interests which will also be presented in the current chapter. Next the dissertation will outline the development and the downfall of Safavid's military and political power, followed by the establishment of a new force under the ambitious and talented Nadir Shah. The subchapter "At the Edge of Empires - the Pontic Frontier and its People" will examine the soldiers of the steppe – Cossacks, Kalmyks, and Nogais, who were an essential element of the social and military ethos of the Pontic frontier and played crucial role in the events, which will be analyzed in detail in the second part of the research. Finally, a brief overview of the minor Caucasian kingdoms and states would emphasize the diversity and complexity of this contested region, destined to attract the desires of three mighty empires.

2.1. The Ottomans – an Empire on the Crossroads

Generally, historiography approaches the development of the Ottoman Empire in the same way as that of Russia and perceives it as a passive recipient of European military innovations and a state, the decline of which was steady and irreversible. However, as recent studies in the field demonstrate, the Ottomans were neither passive recipient, nor stuck in their backwardness.[1] On the contrary, there is evidence which prove that the Ottomans played an active role in the transformation of warfare in Europe. The following subchapter will briefly examine the Ottoman military development during the last decade of the seventeenth century and the first three decades of the eighteenth century and will aim at proving the active role, played by the Ottoman military establishment. The period between the War of the Holy League (1683-1699) and the conflicts

[1] G.Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan – Military power and Weapons Industry in the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Rh. Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare 1500-1700* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

between Russia and the Ottomans during Catherine the Great's reign is one of the least studied in the history of the sultans' realm.[2] A handful of works present the complexity of imperial transition during these turbulent decades. First and foremost, Virginia Aksan's study on the eighteenth century Ottoman warfare is a *sine qua non* for any research on the topic.[3] Further information can be found in the exhaustive works of Gabor Ágoston and the thorough study of Rhoads Murphey, whose research has done much in clarifying major issues regarding the military development of the Ottoman Empire.

The Crescent rises

When referring to the early Ottoman state and its war effort, the theory of C. Rogers for the "Infantry Revolution" can be applied.[4] As Rogers notes, it was the revival of infantry firepower and resistance to cavalry that transformed the medieval warfare into the modern art of war. And if in Western Europe this process developed as a steady change throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in Southeastern Europe this development took a different form.[5] Briefly, the importance of infantry did not fade during the Early and High Middle Ages. Therefore, any state that struggled to impose its influence over the Balkans had to establish a powerful infantry. The Ottomans were quick in understanding this necessity and in elaborating a response to this new military challenge.[6] Initially, the Ottomans were prodigies of a semi-nomad society, the warfare of which was based on light cavalry units that consisted of volunteers and allies of the *bey*.[7] As soon as they came into contact with the Byzantine Empire, however, the beys Osman (r. 1300-1326) and Orhan (r. 1326-1362) found out that light cavalry could only raid enemy's territory, but could not

[2] The War of the Holy League continued as a conflict between the Ottomans and Russia after 1699 and was ended by the Treaty of Constantinople, signed in 1701.
[3] V. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700-1830: An Empire Besieged* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[4] C. Rogers, "The Military Revolution of the Hundred Years War", in *TMRD*, 58-64.
[5] Unlike the West with its chivalry armies, the Balkans had developed a different military system, based on large infantry units, supported by light cavalry mercenaries (Cumans, Alans, Turks and Wallachians) and a heavy cavalry of service nobility (*pronoiarios, bolyari*). Due to the large number of fortified towns and the broken terrain, warfare, based on mounted power, was inappropriate. However, there is no concise study on Balkan warfare in any historical period, prior to the First Balkan War (1912-1913). There are several studies, dealing with national military history, but a comparative research which summarizes the different military systems is still absent.
[6] It took the West almost 200 years before the "Infantry Revolution" was fully developed. It took the Ottomans only 40-50 years to establish a standing, regular infantry, capable of conquering and holding enemy fortresses. If there was a revolution at all, it was the Ottoman transformation from a steppe-style, light cavalry army of irregulars into a standing, regular force of professionals.
[7] These units are generally known as *gazi* (raiders). They were considered wartime "companions" of the *bey* and had the right over 4/5 of the spoils (the other 1/5 *pencik* remained for the *bey*). The Ottomans were the first to elaborate a way of balancing the influence of the gazi and to rein them in, using different administrative and military methods; see C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds. The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

maintain the conquest.[8] As early as 1320, the Ottomans began to experiment with an infantry force of free volunteers, called *yaya*. In addition to yaya infantry, the beys transformed the cavalry units into a single light cavalry force, called *müsselem*.[9] The new infantry proved successful and by 1330 all Byzantine fortresses in Asia Minor were conquered by the Ottomans. However, during the Byzantine Civil Wars (1341-1347 and 1373-1379), which enabled the Ottoman incursion on the Balkans, it became apparent that the irregular yaya infantry was insufficient for the conquest of the well-fortified cities and towns of Southeastern Europe.[10] Therefore, the new Ottoman ruler – Murad I (r. 1362–1389) decided to reform the infantry and to establish a standing force, capable of handling the new challenges. Following the advice of his grand vizier Çandarlı Halil Hayreddin Paşa, Murad exercised his right on one fifth of all military captives and slaves and used this manpower to create a military contingent, loyal only to him. The corps, which came into being, was called "the new army" – *yeniçeri*. As military demands grew, the manpower, provided by the *pencik* tax, was deemed insufficient. Therefore, a new tax – *devşirme*, was established.[11] The new system was used for recruitment of Christian boys between the age of 8 and 16, who were converted to Islam and trained to serve the sultan as his "slaves" (*kul*).[12] The gathered manpower was used to occupy positions in the central administration or to serve in the army as either infantry (yeniçeri) or cavalry (*sipahi of the Porte*). By 1389, the Ottomans already possessed the first standing, regular army in Europe, almost 200 years before the Europeans were able to establish their own. Apart from the regular forces, a standing army of

[8] The process of Ottoman military transformation was similar to the process of Bulgarian transformation seven centuries earlier. The steppe horsemen had to develop a reliable infantry in order get a permanent hold over Byzantine territory. The Bulgarians allied themselves with the local Slavs. The Ottomans, however, carried a different tradition. This tradition was related to the Seljuk tradition from the thirteenth century when local city guilds formed military brotherhoods (*ahi*) in order to fend off Mongol raids in Central Anatolia. The ahi were similar to the Flemish urban militia that was based on the guilds and fought against the mounted French forces. Interestingly, the ahi and the Flemish infantry appeared simultaneously in two quite different backgrounds. Apart from the guild relations, the ahi were also united by their common belief, based on one of the many Sufi sects, which prospered in Asia Minor. Later, similarly to the ahi, the yeniçeri were formed around the Bektaşi sect.

[9] V.V. Penskoy, "Voennaya revolyutsiya i razvitie voennogo dela v Osmanskoy imperii v XV-XVII v.", *Vostok* 6 (Moscow, 2007), 33.

[10] In the fourthteenth century Byzantine garrisons in Asia Minor had to depend on themselves, while the Balkan states still held strong military control on their frontiers and were able to support their garrisons. Furthermore, during the period 1340-1370, both Bulgaria and Serbia were enjoying internal stability and could maintain their war against John VI Kantakouzenos and his Ottoman allies.

[11] Local Christians referred to this tax as "blood tax". In Pre-1989 historiography, the devşirme is described as one of the great atrocities, committed by the Ottomans. However, recent studies by Balkan scholars prove that in some cases the recruitment of yeniçeri was not against parents' will. Furthermore, local population developed different measures in order to evade the conscription. Early marriage of boys was the most common method, since, according to the devşirme law, married boys could not be recruited.

[12] The term *kul* represents an honorable position in the Ottoman society. Therefore, the word "slave" in its negative context is not the most accurate translation of the term. The usual age for recruitment was between 8 and 12, with older boys being an exception. Furthermore, married males were exempt from recruitment, which led to a dramatic decrease in the age, at which local Christians were wedded by their families.

service horsemen was created. They were called *timariots*, and their existence was greatly influenced by the Byzantine *pronoia* system.[13]

The second stage of the Ottoman military evolution was carried out with the spread of gunpowder and artillery. European artillery appeared at the end of the thirteen century, evolved during the fourteenth century and by the 1430s was the new "super-weapon", which greatly influenced the conduct of both siege and field combat.[14] The Ottomans were fast to apply the new technology. The first records of artillery date back to the reign of Bayezid I Yıldırım (r. 1389-1402).[15] In parallel with the usage of the new weapon, the sultans understood the need to establish permanent artillery corps, and by the reign of Murad II (r. 1421–1444; 1446-1451) regular artillery corps (*topçı*) was introduced as part of the *kapukulu ocakları*.[16] Again the Ottomans were one step ahead of the Europeans in both mobility of field and siege artillery and the existence of a regular service. [17]

The third phase of the Ottoman military evolution was the establishment of a military academy. Proponents of the Military Revolution and general Western historiography claim that it was Maurits van Oranje and his cousin Willem Lodewijk of Nassau who established the first military academy in Europe.[18] However, it turns out that the Ottomans were actually the first. The *Enderun* School was established as early as the mid-fifteenth century to educate the devşirme recruits (*acemi oğlan*) in different disciplines, prime among which were the military studies.[19] The Ottomans created a military school that provided training and practice not only for the leading administrators and commanders of the standing army, but also for each soldier. This innovation took place some 130 years before similar institutions came into existence in Western Europe.[20]

Therefore, by the beginning of the sixteenth century the Ottoman army was organized around a stable backbone of regular soldiers, paid and equipped by the sultan, trained in a military school and ready to fulfill the expansionist desire of their masters. No other army in Europe could match the quality of the Ottoman military machine. Thus, the extensive expansion that took place during

[13] Most Turkish historians try to neglect the importance of the Byzantine heritage in the Ottoman Empire. However, there are quite too many similarities and a trend of continuity must be acknowledged. The creation of the timariot system is only one of the examples for the administrative and military heritage transferred from Byzantium to the Ottoman Empire. For an overview of the historiographical debate on the succession issue, see Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 29-60.

[14] Rogers, "The Military Revolution", 64-76; Gabor Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 1-7.

[15] Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 28.

[16]Ibid., 29; The *kapukulu ocakları* (slaves of the Porte) is the general term, that includes the yeniçeri, the sipahi of the Porte, the artillery and supporting troops (topçı and *cebeci*) of the Ottoman standing army.

[17]As Ágoston points out, the cebeci troops were used to provide the support of the artillery train. By 1470 a mobile artillery train was finally established - that is almost 20 years before Charles VIII introduced this type of military corps in Western Europe; Ibid., 28.

[18] Roberts, M., "The Military Revolution, 1560-1660", in C.J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 13-37; Parker, G. "The Military Revolution, 1550-1660 – A Myth?", in C. J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 37-55.

[19] D. Nicolle, *The Janissaries, Osprey 'Elite' 58*, (London: Osprey, 1995), 12-4.

[20] Not to mention that the first military schools in Western Europe were accessible only for commanders and nobles, and not to the rank and file soldiers.

the reigns of Selim I Yavuz (r. 1512-1520) and Süleyman I Kanuni (r. 1520-1566) were not a surprise. The Ottomans were able to defeat and assimilate most of their enemies and became a permanent threat in the regions of Central Europe and the Mediterranean.[21]

After the death of Süleyman, the Ottoman expansion did not cease. Cyprus was conquered in 1573, proving that the Battle of Lepanto (1571) was not as decisive as assumed. The Long War with Austria (1593-1606) demonstrated that the Habsburgs had managed to establish a better firepower, but the Ottomans were fast to follow and, in the end, the sultans' forces were victorious. Internal strife, economic problems and the rise of Shah Abbas I of Persia (r. 1587-1629) pinned the Ottoman resources in Asia. Nevertheless, by 1640 the situation was under control and westward expansion continued. The Cretan War (1645-1669) revealed some of the Ottoman weaknesses. However, relying on better logistics and superiority in numbers, once more the Turks were victorious. Finally, the conflicts with Poland-Lithuania in the 1670s led to the conquest of Podolia.

The Crescent sets

By 1680 the Ottoman Empire had reached its territorial zenith, stretching from Hungary to Persia and from Ukraine to Sudan. The next step was to go beyond these borders and once more Austria was the main foe. The history of the War of the Holy League (1683-1699) is not a concern of the current dissertation. It suffices to note that a massive Christian coalition faced the Ottomans and their forces were scattered on three different fronts. The logistical, financial and military burden was beyond Ottoman's resources and the war was disastrous for the Empire. Hungary was lost to Austria; Russia took Azov and Venice conquered Morea. Usually, the Ottoman defeat in this war is described as fatal and irreversible. However, things were not as hopeless as they seemed. The Russians were defeated in a subsequent war (1710-1711) and Venice had to return Morea in another conflict (1714–1718). The only setback seemed the loss of Belgrade and Timişoara regions after the defeat in the Austro-Ottoman War (1716-1718). In general, supporters of the "Rise of the West" concept claim that the second Austrian victory proved that the Ottoman Empire was no longer a threat to western superiority.[22] However, in defense of the Ottomans, we must note that they faced one of the most experienced armies in Europe, commanded

[21]The Mamluk Sultanate was annexed in 1517, the Knights Hospitaller were expelled from Rhodes in 1522 and Hungary was conquered between 1526 and 1541. Only the Safavids managed to check the Ottoman advance, but not before the Porte succeed in conquering Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Mesopotamia. One might argue that it was the Ottoman threat in the East that led to the fast evolution of the Habsburg armies (the Spanish in particular). The struggle between Charles V and Süleyman was certainly one of the reasons that enabled the creation of a high esteemed, experienced army in Spain, which later proved its potential in the Netherlands and against France.

[22] Black, J., "A Military Revolution? A 1660-1792 Perspective", in C. J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 99-102.

by one of the most talented military leaders of the age.[23] As will be noted below, the Ottoman army was not as efficient as it was a hundred years earlier and unlike contemporary western forces, only half of their rank and file consisted of regular soldiers.

Apart from the military issues that became apparent in the course of the seventeenth century, internal problems also contributed to the decline of Ottoman power. Firstly, a great inflation struck the Ottoman economy. As Inalcık notes in his article on Ottoman transformations, from the great devaluation of the Ottoman currency in 1598 to the seventeenth century, state financiers were under great pressure, trying to hold the fiscal policy of the state intact. Often salaries had not been paid for months, prices increased and *timar* holders became impoverished.[24] Moreover, political strife added to state problems a new set of issues. Succession crisis, supported by the growing interference of kapukulu ocakları in state affairs, led to a period of opened conflict between the yeniçeri-controlled capital and the Anatolian provincial governors, who opposed the centralization of the Empire and wanted to extend their influence over the sultan.

Local governors were supported by the new irregular, gunpowder-equipped infantry – the *sekban*. The sekban demanded to have the same rights and salaries as the yeniçeri and wanted to transform their service from irregular basis into a regular, standing force. However, the yeniçeri already were a substantial burden on state budget and an increase in the size of the regular forces would mean a financial crisis for the Empire.[25] The state, therefore, began to fight the rebellious sekban and by 1658 Anatolia was finally pacified.[26] The Ottoman Empire was stable, but it missed its chance to take the next step toward a regular, modern army. The consequences of this decision were felt severely during the War of the Holy League.[27]

[23] By 1716 Austria had won the War of the Grand Alliance (1688-1697) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1715). Her armies were comprised of experienced veterans, with excellent firing skills and perfect drill. This army was commanded by some of the most experienced leaders of the age, among whom was Prince Eugene of Savoy, who was one of the finest military leaders in the entire early modern period.

[24] H. Inalcık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700", *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (Mouton, 1980), 311-3.

[25] Murphey, R., *Ottoman Warfare, 1500-1700* (University College London Press, 1999), 16-7.

[26] Inalcık, "Military and Fiscal Transformation", 298.

[27] If the sekban had been transformed into a regular force, once more the Ottomans might have managed to be one step ahead of the West. However, the political influence of the kapukulu ocakları, the financial situation of the state and the inability to fully develop a general army reform, led to the maintenance of the old system. Furthermore, there was no powerful figure in the administration, able to apply the needed changes. Süleyman was long dead and the energetic Mahmud II was yet to come. In the meantime, most of the grand viziers and the chief "ministers" were devşirme recruits themselves, who would not go against their own. In order to conduct a reform, the state had to either elevate the sekban to the status of the kapukulu ocakları or to dismiss the later from all their privileges and to level the entire army. Because of political, cultural, economic and military reasons, this was far from possible during the seventeenth century.

The Köprülü inheritance

Unfortunately, there are few studies on Ottoman military system in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Most of the works are concentrated on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Russo-Ottoman Wars in the Age of Catherine the Great (r. 1762-1796) and the reforms of Selim III (r. 1789–1807) and Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839).[28] Furthermore, the Tulip Era (*Lale Devri*) reforms are not researched thoroughly in neither Eastern, nor Western studies. Due to these constraints, the following chapter will rely on the data regardingthe end of the seventeenth century and will try to incorporate the few available figures and sources for the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

Regular forces

All regular forces of the Ottoman Empire were part of the kapukulu ocakları. Their privileges, responsibilities and organization were developed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and changed little until the reformation of the army that took place after 1789. As noted above, the Ottomans were the first to create a regular, standing army in Europe and for almost two centuries their military power was superior to any other in Europe. However, as the new tactical and technological innovations accelerated the military evolution in the West, Ottoman power was surpassed and had to catch up with its enemies in Europe. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, all of Europe's major powers possessed a regular, standing army, based on experienced veterans, who had served in several conflicts, which took place between 1673 and 1721. Therefore, the Ottomans were no longer unique, nor superior to European states. However, they were neither inferior. As the following two decades proved, the Empire was still a formidable power, capable of facing primary states and winning a war.[29] Furthermore, the Ottomans possessed a superb logistical system that enabled them to support their war efforts for extended periods of time over vast distances.[30]

It is accepted in historiography that the Ottoman army was unable to follow the tactical evolution of western armies, and thus fell behind during the seventeenth century. Börekçi succeeds in proving that the yeniçeri were able to fight according to the latest firing tactics, developed by the Dutch. Furthermore, he presents several sources which suggest that the Ottomans had used volley fire

[28] G. Börekçi, "A Contribution to the Military Revolution Debate: The Janissaries Use of Volley Fire during the Long Ottoman-Habsburg War of 1593-1606 and the Problem of Origins", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 59, 4 (2006), 408–9; Börekçi gives a summary of the works dealing with Ottoman warfare.

[29] Tthe conflicts with Russia and Austria in particular (1736-1739) ended with Ottoman victory and retrival of several important territories, among which the *sancak* of Belgrade.

[30] Murphey notes that similar logistical networks were developed by the rest of Europe as late as 1720, and in some cases - even later; see Murphey, *The Ottoman Warfare*, 65-93.

as early as 1597 and suggests that they had used this technique during the Battle of Mohács in 1526. Even if the possibility that the Ottomans managed to develop the volley fire on their own is rejected, the fact remains that they were able to produce the most sophisticated maneuver, known to western armies during the early modern period. Apart from the volley fire, the Ottomans were "blamed" for their inability to create a firearms cavalry, capable of supporting the infantry in battle. In general, the timariots failed to take part in the "arms race" with the Austrians and as early as 1602 the grand vizier began complaining about the inability of the timariot cavalry to handle the imperial infantry. Similar problems became apparent during the *Celali* revolts in Anatolia where local gun-equipped bands of rebels were able to defeat the timariot forces, mounted by the capital. However, when in 1724 the Ottomans invaded Persia, their troops were supplemented by gun-wielding sipahi.[31] This change demonstrates that the confrontation with Persia and the rebellions had taught the Ottomans an important lesson and their cavalry was, at least partly, equipped with firearms in order to expand its ability to operate in the difficult terrain of West Asia.

Another element, which reveals the real potential of the Ottomans, was siege warfare. Ever since G. Parker based a significant part of his Military Revolution theory on *trace italienne*, military historians have labeled this fortress "impregnable". However, during the seventeenth century, Ottoman regular infantry, sappers and mining teams in particular, were able to reduce the trace italienne fortifications in Hungary and to conquer these citadels in a matter of days.[32] Symilarly to the performance of the French army in the west, the Ottoman experience could be used to counter Parker's theory.[33] Even though the Cretan War (1645-1669) demonstrated that the art of siege declined during the second half of the seventeenth century, the campaign in Persia revealed that the Ottomans still had a considerable potential for taking fortified positions.[34] According to Abraham of Yerevan, the Ottomans besieged Persian citadels from "all four sides", dug trenches and earthworks and carefully moved their guns closer and closer to the enemy's walls.[35] When the guns were unable to penetrate the walls, tunnels and mines were used to make a breach. Once the walls were overcome, the yeniçeri and the irregular infantry invaded the city. The tactic was the same as the one applied by western armies. The Ottomans

[31] This is a little-known chronicle by Abraham of Yerevan which gives several interesting descriptions of the Ottoman army, during its invasion in Persia. Among the reliable data, Abraham speaks of timariots equipped with firearms, who comprised a significant part of the Ottoman cavalry; see Abraham of Yerevan, *History of the Wars, 1721 – 1738*, trans. by G.A. Bournoutian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1999).
[32] Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, 105-33.
[33] Lynn, "The trace italienne and the growth of Armies: The French Case", *TMRD*, 169-201.
[34] The desuetude of naval power was as essential for the overall lack of success, as was the organization of the besieging forces. Once firm command was established in 1667, the course of the siege turned in favor of the Ottomans.
[35] Abraham of Yerevan, *History of the Wars*, 42-4.

were able to conquer Persian fortresses in a matter of weeks, even though most of them were naturally protected by rivers, mountains and broken terrain.

Regarding the quality of armament, Ágoston skillfully proves that the Ottoman gun industry was quite up-to-date with the developments in Western Europe.[36] Using experienced craftsmen and artisans from Europe, as well as their own capable gunsmiths, the Ottomans were able to adequately supply their forces with gunpowder and artillery pieces. Furthermore, handguns were cheap and were widely distributed throughout the entire empire.[37] In general, the Ottoman army did not lack guns and firearms as was previously supposed.[38]

Finally, in order to respond to the growing firepower of the West, the Ottomans significantly increased the number of the kapukulu ocakları and especially the yeniçeri and the topçi. The army growth is an essential factor for the development of early modern armies and it was present in the Ottoman case, as well. By 1680, the number of yeniçeri had doubled since the time of the Long War (1593-1606), and the number of artillerymen and sappers had grown threefold.[39] The above-mentioned Chronicle of Abraham of Yerevan is a useful source for the way the Ottomans supplied their effort with manpower. Although his figures apparently were exaggerated, there is no doubt that the Ottomans were able to muster and support a sizable force, equipped with firearms and guns and quite capable to overcome Persian forces and fortresses.[40]

Irregular forces

Apart from the state-financed kapukulu ocakları, the Porte relied also on irregular volunteers and mercenaries, and auxiliary troops, provided by the different "privileged" social groups in the Empire. The two most important irregular forces were the timariot cavalry and the sekban infantry.

The timariots were a type of service class, who received land in exchange for military obligations. According to the annual income of their estates, each timariot had to equip not only himself, but also a certain number of armed retainers (*cebelis*). During the seventeenth century, the economic and military potential of the timariots declined significantly. Due to the problems between the central administration and the provinces, the timariot force began steadily to decline, which continued throughout the entire eighteenth century and resulted in their final abolition during the reign of Selim III (r. 1789-1807). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the timariots did try to adjust to the new realities of war and

[36] Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 61-96.
[37] Ibid., 15-60.
[38] As Ágoston and Murphey prove, the theory that Ottoman fire-power was greatly dependant on Dutch and English imports is exaggerated; see Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 42-8; Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, 85-93.
[39] For a complete table of the Ottoman army growth, see Table 1 in the Appendix for the current chapter.
[40] Abraham of Yerevan estimates that between 1724 – 1727 the Ottoman army in Persia consisted of more than 300,000 soldiers; see Abraham of Yerevan, *History of the Wars*, 46; Even though this figure is exaggerated, it shows that the size of the Ottoman field army, sent to occupy Western Persia under the command of Topal Osman Paşa, was considerable.

they adopted, though reluctantly, the firearms. Scholars tend to exaggerate the lack of firearms as a reason for the timariot decline. During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), firearms proved to be not very effective when used in mounted warfare and as a result - a preference for close quarter combat developed. It was the growing number of infantry equipped with guns that turned the tide of battles. During the wars against Austria, it became apparent that cavalry could not break the line formation on its own and needed a more substantial support from the infantry. Therefore, the Porte decided to extend the size of the firearms infantry.

During the Long War it became apparent that yeniçeri alone were insufficient to overcome the growing firepower of the Europeans, which led to the formation of a new infantry, armed with muskets. The units that came into being were called sekban. The sekban was comprised of impoverished peasants from Anatolia, Bosnia and Albania. The usage of firearms ceased to be a monopoly of the kapukulu ocakları and was also introduced amongst the Muslim *reaya*. However, after the war was over, the sekban demanded to become regular troops on the same principle as the yeniçeri. As it was mentioned above, this was impossible and a prolonged period of sekban brigandage, especially in Anatolia, begun to trouble the Ottoman Empire.[41] The disbandment of these regiments continued to be problematic up until the nineteenth century. Part of these irregulars became the notorious *kırcali*. Others became part of the private armies of the *ayan* and fought against the regular forces of the sultan. The situation was finally brought under control in 1826 when the yeniçeri were destroyed and the Ottoman Empire established an entirely regular army. Still, volunteer units – *başıbozuk*, were to be used as late as the First World War. Abraham of Yerevan mentions irregular peasant forces which were an essential part of the Ottoman army during the campaign against Persia.[42] Auxiliary troops were provided by the local population, both Muslim and Christian. These troops were used to cover the logistical needs as well as to skirmish and to reconnoiter enemy forces. They were also used to maintain the order in the rear of the army. In exchange, these groups were exempted from certain taxes, among which - the devşirme. The privileged groups in the Balkans became the elite of the Christian peoples in the Ottoman Empire and during the nineteenth century served as the leaders of the liberation movements.[43]

Logistics

[41] Inalcık, "The Military and Fiscal Transformation", 299-303.
[42] Abraham of Yerevan, *The History of Wars*, 39.
[43] During the "Kırcali Era" (1770-1810) these privileged groups became the heart of the anti brigandage resistance. They armed their fellow townsmen and led them against the ravaging bands of irregulars that stormed the European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The military art, armament and position of these groups are insufficiently studied and deserve a greater attention from historians both in the West and in the Balkans.

The Ottoman logistical system is extensively analyzed by Murphey in his book on Ottoman warfare. In the current dissertation only the main elements of military support, provided by the state, will beoutlined. As Murphey argues, the Ottomans possessed a unique system of supply which was able to maintain substantial armies as far as Vienna and Hamadan. This system (*menzilhane*) was based on a network of supply depots, which were prepared in advance to each campaign. This system followed the main army roads that traversed the Ottoman lands and led to the enemy's heartland. Crucial points for communication were the cities along *Via Diagonalis* in Europe and along the route from Istanbul to Bagdad in Asia.[44] As in the Russian case, river transportation was essential for supplying the army. Each river was used to transport food, guns and gunpowder from the central supply depots to the frontline. River fleets were established on the Danube, the Euphrates, and the Tigris Rivers. Smaller ships and boats were used on the Hungarian river system, as well as on the Drava and Sava Rivers. Apart from naval transport, a variety of land-based means of transportation were applied. The camel and the water buffalo were the most widespread animals, but ox-wagons were used as well. A common practice was to hire local merchants and peasants to assist with the transportation of goods and armament. These "recruits" were supervised by the individual logistics section of the kapukulu ocakları – the *cebeci*. Their increased numbers during the seventeenth century prove that the Ottomans were well aware of the importance of logistics.[45]

The primary element of army provisioning was the supply of gunpowder. As Ágoston argues, Ottoman lands had abundance of materials necessary for gunpowder production.[46] Saltpeter was found in large quantities throughout the entire empire. Wood for charcoal was available in Anatolia and the Balkans. Only sulfur was harder to find, and the Ottomans imported it from Venice and Persia.[47] Gunpowder was produced in mills, dispersed from Hungary to Egypt. The main facilities were in Istanbul, Gallipoli, Bor and Timișoara. Smaller mills existed in Buda, Belgrade, Thessaloniki, Cairo, Aleppo, and Bagdad.[48] The provisioning of gunpowder often included the transfer of resources and stocked gunpowder from provinces, far away from the theater of war, toward the frontline. For this purpose, land transport was preferred instead of naval, due to the risk of exposing gunpowder to moisture.

Most of the guns and firearms were produced in the Ottoman Empire. However, foreign pieces were used as well, either purchased or captured in battle. The most common providers of guns were the Dutch and the English, but Italians and French also imported their products. Ottoman muskets had good

[44] For the main roads and distances in the Ottoman Empire, see Map 1 in the Appendix for the current chapter.
[45] See Table 1 in the Appendix for the current chapter.
[46] Ágoston, *Guns for the Sultan*, 96.
[47] G. Ágoston, "Gunpowder for the Sultan's Army: New Sources on the Supply of Gunpowder to the Ottoman Army in the Hungarian campaigns of the 16th and 17th Centuries", *Turcica* 25 (1993), 75-96.
[48] For a complete distribution of resources and gunpowder mills in the Ottoman Empire, see Map 2 in the Appednix.

quality, sometimes even surpassing that of their neighbours. During the seventeenth century Spanish style muskets with matchlock mechanism were preffered, but during and after the Holy League War, flintlocks became the most common weapons used by the infantry and by some of the cavalry units.

Ammunition was harder to supply since the Ottomans lacked a standard caliber for their guns and firearms, especially regarding the irregular troops armament. However, gunsmiths were capable of producing new pieces during a siege which fit the caliber of copious munitions. The problem with munitions was not overcome up until the nineteenth century and it had impact on Ottoman military failures during the eighteenth century.

In addition, certain social groups were expected to provide horses for the army. Furthermore, each timariot was supposed to provide his and his companions' horses from his own estate. Thus, unlike the Russians, the Ottomans were able to supply themselves with horses from domestic sources. Another group – the *celepkeşan* had to provide goats and sheep for the army as well as for the sultan's household. These people possessed large herds of sheep and during the eighteenth century were able to accumulate a considerable wealth, especially during military campaigns. As Murphey notes, war was, in general, good for merchants and animal herders, since it brought them instant profit.[49]

Continuity and change during the Tulip Era[50]

Following the devastating defeat in the Holy League War, the Ottoman Empire went through several years of internal crisis, marked by the court's struggle for power, which resulted in the deposition of Sultan Mustafa II (r. 1695-1703) by the rebellious yeniçeri. The spark of rebellion was set off at the very beginning of the eighteenth century when Mustafa II decided to relocate his power base in Edirne and to rely more on the timariot class. He planned to do so by shifting the existing land control mechanism from a service-held domain to a hereditary one and thus to establish the timariot as a new category of troops, whose loyalty would serve as leverage for the ruler's reform project. The yeniçeri felt threatened by the actions of their master and rose in rebellion. They succeeded in defeating the makeshift army of the Sultan near Edirne. Following the deposition of Mustafa, the yeniçeri continued their revolt for several more weeks, taking full control of the capital. By all means, the entire operation was an act, which demonstrated the ability of the kapukulu ocakları to maintain the status quo.[51] As Acemoğlu and Robinson note, such rebellions were not due to

[49] Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, 85-105.
[50] The so called *Lale Devri* period took place during the reign of sultan Ahmed III and was related to a set of reforms and reformulations of the existing Ottoman order, including the military. The "tulip" in the name derives from the great admiration which Ahmed III felt for tulips, especially for those imported from the Netherlands.
[51] Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1830*, 37.

backwardness or conservatism, but were a struggle to preserve and maintain the existing order with its benefits and privileges.[52]

From 1703s events onwards, a steady process of consolidation under Ahmed III (r. 1703-1730) and a series of viziers began in the Ottoman Empire. The governors were intimidated by the 1703 revolt and their intention was not so much to reform, but rather to reestablish the "old order", taking the reign of Süleyman I as a model of how things were supposed to work efficiently. There were no grand innovations regarding military development, but rather an effort to strengthen discipline in the army and to optimize the payment and the organization of logistics. By 1700 it was apparent that the fief based timar system was no longer adequate to cope with the new European standing armies (most notably the Habsburg forces) or with the growing power of the reforming Russian state under Peter. The increase of gun-wielding units, especially in the infantry, was introduced as early as the Long War and, as it was mentioned above, the government struggled to establish infantry auxiliary forces, which were to supplement the yeniçeri on the battlefield. The control of these troops became troublesome for the state, especially after the local power elites (governors, paşas, etc.) began to establish their own provincial forces – a process that would be repeated by the ayan during the eighteenth century.[53]

With the apparent decline of the central authority's ability to muster and use the provincial forces, the ability of local power brokers to use their potential in exchange for privileges became an ever-increasing trend in Ottoman state during the eighteenth century. As Aksan argues in her study on Ottoman warfare, the first decades of the century in question saw a dramatic increase of these provincial armies, funded directly by the state. Between 1683 and 1769 the number of local militia (*levend*), mustered by governors for the state's campaigns, rose from 10,000 to 100,000.[54] This trend strikingly resembles the way the Habsburgs recruited their forces in the course of the Thirty Years War, when the state granted local power holders and mercenary captains the necessary patents and funds to equip and men armies for the campaigns in Bohemia and Germany. Of course, there were differences, but the similarities of state military problems, accompanied by strong decentralization trends are evident.

Another aspect of the provincial military organization was the existence of local privileged categories of population. In return for tax exemptions, they were obliged to support the state with specific provisions or through fulfilling

[52] D. Acemoğlu, J. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 146.

[53] Ayan were the new provincial elite, who grew stronger in the context of increased tax farming, used by the Ottoman state from 1650 onward. During the eighteenth century they expanded their economic activities by acquiring lands from displaced timariots and also by meddling in state affairs as supporters of palace fractions. By the end of the eighteenth century, many ayan, in both Europe and Asia, ruled over semiautonomous "states", which sought to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman adversaries.

[54] Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1830*, 57.

certain tasks. The tasks included: the maintenance of roads and bridges; working on the fortifications of border garrisons; protecting mountain passes and struggling with bandits in the densely forest areas of Bosnia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Northern Greece.[55] These privileged settlements would, later on, become the backbone of the Awakening of Balkan nationalities, providing rich and well-educated figures, who would struggle to reshape and reestablish national culture and identity. With the growth of governors' and ayan's power, these privileged categories would become a source of support for the central authority. The government would occasionally arm and finance these settlements, in exhange for their fight against the rebellious provincial power brokers, and, later on - the notorious kırcali.[56] The combination of standing garrisons (yeniçeri), local militias (levend) and the categories of privileged local population (*martolos*, *voynuk*, *derbendci*, *pandur*) formed the three-layer system, which was the pillar of the imperial military power in the course of the eighteenth century. The interrelations between these main blocks of Ottoman military power were essential for the preservation of the Ottoman state, troubled not only by external enemies, such as Persia, Russia and Austria but also by the increasing number of internal problems in the face of the growing provincial power and the emancipation of local dynasties.[57]

The second crucial element of Ottoman warfare, both regarding the offense and the defense, was the maintenance of roads and fortification systems. As mentioned above, the Ottoman forces used six main roads to distribute their military power within the primary *eyalets* of the empire – Anatolia and the Balkans.[58] These roads were related to the pattern of campaign organization and also to the mapping of troop movement outside the borders of the Ottoman state. Roads, as Murphey has proved in his study on early modern Ottoman warfare, were essential for the upkeep of the army and for the synchronization between the local economy and the necessities of the military establishment during campaign seasons. This trend continued throughout the eighteenth century. For the purpose of keeping military corridors opened, the government empowered privileged local settlements, which were mentioned above. An additional element to logistics and also to security was the frontier line of fortifications, which resembled the ancient chain of fortresses, used ever since the time of the Romans. Belgrade, Vidin, Rusçuk (Ruse), Silistre (Silistra), Ibrail (Braila), Tulcea, Ismail, Kilya, Hotyn, Bender, Akkirman, Kilburun, Ochakov, Yeni-Kale and Azov were the key points on this line, guarding the Danube and the Black

[55] M. Uyar, E.J. Erickson, *A Military History of the Ottomans: From Osman to Atatürk* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2009), 83.

[56] The kırcali were a phenomenon which occurred in the Ottoman Empire during the late eighteenth century. Most of them were renegades from the Russo-Turkish Wars (1768-1774 and 1787-1792). the kırcali existed as a domestic problem of the Ottoman state ever since the Long War and the introduction of armed local militias. Thus, the Balkan kırcali were nothing more than a continuation of the "practice", which was already set in motion in Anatolia during the previous century.

[57] The first decade of the eighteenth century saw the "dropping out" of Tunisia, Algiers and Tripolitania.

[58] See Map 1 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

Sea coast from enemy depredations, coming from Austria, Poland-Lithuania and Russia.[59] To this list it could be added Kaffa and Kerech in Crimea, which were used not only to distribute Ottoman influence over the Crimean Khanate, but also to protect the Azov and the Black Seas from Cossack pirates. These major fortifications were manned by elite yeniçeri, while local labor was mobilized for their maintenance. These garrisons were well-armed, supplied and numerous, often receiving reinforcements in the event of planned enemy campaigns and sieges.

The third element of any early modern military endeavor was funding. Due to the economic crises during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, the old system of self-supplying troops, centered on the timariot institution, declined. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the state had to pay to most of the soldiers under arms or to negotiate the upkeep of local militias with power-brokers from the provinces. The yeniçeri were, as usual, the best and most strictly paid troops. They received their wages on a three-month schedule, with garrison contingents receiving funds with priority.[60] In addition to the *cizye* tax, paid by non-Muslims, yeniçeri garrisons received funds from a number of farms, ascribed to their fortresses (*ocaklık*). Due to the shortage of funds, gathered for the Treasury, the state delegated to concrete contractors (*mübayaacı*) the collection of taxes and supplies from local settlements. In time, mübayaacı began to collect money instead of supplies and often manipulated the amount of cash, goods, pack animals and wagons for their benefit. These contractors soon merged with the ayan and the local paşas, forming a distinct group of local elites, which were to dominate internal policiy until the reign of Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839). As Aksan notes, over time these special taxes, issued by these new contractors, became permanent and contributed to the alienation of the local population, which was a step toward the emancipation of local nationalities.[61]

The three elements described above, outline a pattern in which continuity rather than actual change is apparent. The transformation, however, did occur in the only military sphere, in which the sultans and their viziers could meddle without attracting the attention of the kul - the artillery. The Ottomans, as noted, were probably the first in Europe to develop a siege train and maintain a high level of expertise in its arsenals and field gun crews. By 1720 it became apparent that western evolution in artillery began to overshadow the Ottoman military traditions in this field. The Empire's artillery lacked the edge it had during victorious battles such as Chaldiran (1514) and Mohács (1526). Fortune helped Mahmud I (r. 1730-1754) to find a western expert, who could modernize Ottoman artillery, using his experience, gained during the wars of Louis XIV. His name was Claude Alexandre, Comte de Bonneval, but he entered Ottoman

[59] Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1830*, 68.
[60] Ibid., 72.
[61] Ibid., 73.

history under his Muslim name - Humbaracı Ahmed Paşa. Bonneval arrived in Istanbul following the downfall of Damat Ibrahim Paşa. Sultan Mahmud I was adamant to continue the old vizier's reforms as much as he could dare, due to the yeniçeri uprising of Patrona Halil and the abdication of his uncle Ahmed IIIin 1730.[62]

Bonneval converted to Islam to silence the kul and *Shari'a* opposition toward his goals, which allowed him freedom in shaping the artillery as he willed. An engineering school (*Hedeshane*) was founded in 1734, followed by the establishment of a grenadier regiment, which included 32 French veterans, who served as NCO.[63] Bonneval, who gained experience as a quartermaster of artillery in the Habsburg Netherlands, was able to standardize the guns and munitions, used by the Ottoman gunners. He was also responsible for the increase in the number of guns, allocated to border fortresses and garrisons, as well as for the better performance of Ottoman artillery during the wars with Persia, Russia, and Austria in 1730s. After his death the *ulema* suspended the school he founded, but a new one, named Bonneval was soon established by Mahmud I's successor Mustafa III (r. 1757-1774).

During the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire experienced a turbulent period of military and political transition. This was closely related to the state's decentralization, fueled by the downfall of the Classical Ottoman order, as deemed under the reign of Süleyman I. This transformation affected all aspects of the social, political and military development of the state. Their understanding is essential for the accurate evaluation of Ottoman military potential, especially when perceived in the context of the growing Austrian and Russian military power.

It is almost impossible to calculate the actual size of the Ottoman forces during the eighteenth century. As noted by Virginia Aksan, the Ottoman archives may never be recovered in their entirety.[64] Scraps of information do exist here and there, and the current dissertation would provide a summary of this data.[65] What is obvious is the ability of the Porte to muster and march large armies again and again in the course of the eighteenth century. The number 80,000 is constant, being visible in the Pruth Campaign, the Persian Campaign, Topal Osman Paşa's campaign against Nadir Shah in 1732, as well as during the Russo-Turkish War (1736-1739). Although Marquis de Marsigli provides us with substantial volume of numbers for the Ottoman and vassal contingents, these figures are related not so much to the eighteenth-century realities, but

[62] In 1730, similarly to the 1703 Revolt, the yeniçeri rose in rebellion to protect their privileges and political benefits from what they saw as re-emerging state desire to rein them in by promoting political "westernization". Rhetorics of protecting the rightful tradition of Islam against foreign influences were used to mask the actual political intentions of the rebels and their allies in court.

[63] Z. Acer, "Place of Reforms in Western Structuring Process of Ottoman State and Their Effect on Modernization (1718- 1789)", *Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken* 2, 1 (2010), 135-46 (http://www.dieweltdertuerken.org/index.php/ZfWT/article/viewFile/105/zaacer- Accessed on 23.02.2016).

[64] Aksan, *Ottoman Wars 1700-1830*, 72.

[65] See tables in the Appendix for the current chapter.

rather to the War of the Holy League. Therefore we should approach these numbers with great caution.[66]

Further understanding of ayan evolution and the transformation of local privileged categories will undoubtedly clarify the trends in power transition, but also in the way the Empire's military potential functioned on regular basis. The comparative approach should also take into consideration the different way, in which Russian and Austrian armies evolved in the course of the Succession Wars, as well as the Great Northern War. The following sub-chapter will concentrate on the second major military and political factor, which influenced the development of the Pontic Steppe – the Crimean Khanate.

2.2. Between the Sultan and the Steppe – the Crimean Khanate

Historiography

The Crimean Khanate remains one of the least studied cases in European historiography. The interest on this subject rose only in the last two decades in the context of frontier studies and the new place of the Pontic Steppe and its inhabitants in the overall history of the continent. The current thesis will only outline the main features of the Crimean Khanate and its role for the expansion of Ottoman military power, and thus, only a few select sources will be taken into consideration. First and foremost, Brian Davies provides an exhaustive illustration of the Khanate's structure and military organization in his work on the warfare and societies in the Black Sea.[67] Davies' account is further expanded in an article by Victor Ostapchuk who presents an interesting case study on Tatar campaigns in the mid-sixteenth century by building upon existing primary sources. Finally, Brian Willaims' recent study on the Crimean Tatars' role in the Ottoman military system sheds further light on the role, played by the Khanate as an essential tool in Istanbul's grand strategy.[68]

Historical background

The arrival of the Mongols in Eastern Europe in the mid-thirteenth century had a devastating impact on the existing political order and led to a rapid reformulation of societies in the mainly Slavonic regions of present-day Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. With the turn of the fourteenth century, Chinggisid power, transfered through the Golden Horde, slowly reshaped, influenced by the adoption of Islam, as well as the incorporation of local administrative practices, merged with the original Mongolian heritage. By the

[66] L.F. Marsigli, *L'Etat Militaire de l'Empire Ottoman* (Amsterdam, 1732).
[67] B.L. Davies, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe, 1500-1700* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
[68] B.G. Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders: The Military Role of Crimean Tatars in the Ottoman Empire* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2013); Williams' work includes an exhaustive list of literature on the Crimean Khanate.

year 1400, the Horde's power stabilized and formed central authority with peripheral tributaries, most of which were the principalities of the former Kievan Rus. With the growth of Lithuanian power in the western rims of the Eurasian Steppe, the Golden Horde had to abandon some of its front positions in Ukraine and tried to distribute its influence over the Russian states, which were already looking for options to overthrow the Horde's suzerainty.

It was in this context when some of the southern Tatar clans (Shirins, Barins, Argins, and Kipchaks), situated in Crimea, aligned themselves and established an independent realm, which existed outside the shadow of the Horde's authority.[69] It is hard to pinpoint accurately the beginning of this process, but by 1440, it was well on its way. The emancipation of the Crimean Tatars was led by Haji Girei (r. 1441-1466), a powerful Tatar noble of Chinggisid descendant, who was able to unify the clans and to create a khanate for himself, capturing Crimea and parts of the adjacent steppe.[70] Haji was quick to realize that in order for his realm to survive, powerful allies had to be found and soon fate smile upon the "adolescent" khanate. In 1453 Mehmed II the Conqueror, one of the most prominent warrior-rulers of his age, took Constantinople, ending a millennium of Byzantine existence. The sultan was fast to evaluate the situation in the Black Sea region and decided to continue the Ottoman expansion against the Genoese positions in Crimea and Anatolia. In 1454 a large fleet of 56 vessels and many troops was sent against Kaffa.[71] Haji Girei decided to support Mehmed's effort, hoping to gain the powerful Ottoman state as an ally. Although the siege was unsuccessful, it brought together the two countries, laying the foundations of a long, but turbulent alliance, which would last until the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The real watershed in the relations between the Crimean Tatars and the Porte came ten years later when following the death of Haji Girei, the local elite began a prolong struggle for the throne, which resulted in an all-out civil war, lasting for a decade between 1466 and 1476. Soon the confrontation attracted the attention of foreign powers and led to their interference. Both the Genoese and the Ottomans sought to promote their candidates, often shifting their bet from one Tatar *mirza* to another. In the end, Mengli I Girei (r. 1466, 1469-1475, 1478-1515) emerged victorious and with the assistance of Mehmed II asserted himself as the single ruler of the Khanate. The support of the Ottoman ruler, however, came at a price. Mehmed demanded that henceforth the Tatar nobles' choice of every ruler would be approved by the Porte. Such a development opened the doors for direct Ottoman influence not only on the ruler himself but also - on the leaders of the separate clans, who struggled for the patronage of the

[69] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 6.
[70] The transliteration of the names of the Crimean rulers, the tatar clans and the toponyms in the realms of the Khanate is given according to Davies, *Warfare, State and Society.*
[71] Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders*, 2.

sultan in exchange for their vote and support for Istanbul's policies in the Khanate.

Further Ottoman influence on the Crimean realm was asserted through direct expansion. In 1475 a powerful fleet, bearing elite troops and heavy artillery, arrived in Crimea and quickly subdued local Genoese garrisons, ending the Italian presence in the Black Sea region. A chain of strategic fortresses was captured and refortified, giving Istanbul direct presence of power, which could be used to daunt local elites and project imperial policies on the northern frontier. Additional Ottoman garrisons were established in the Crimean Peninsula (Perekop, Kozlov, Arabat and Yenikale), as well as the delta of the Don River, where the old Genoese fort of Tana was reestablished as the key Ottoman strongpoint of Azov.

However, the pressure, which the Ottomans administered on their Tatar allies, must not be overestimated. It was not an actual military threat, but rather the Porte reminded its friends in Crimea what would be the consequences in case of disobedience or infidelity. Most frequently the Turks used bribes, gifts and promises of lucrative raids to seduce the Tatar elite into obeying the will of the Empire. The Khans at Bakhchisarai were constantly blandished with expensive gifts and it became a custom for the sultan to send a set of valuable tokens before any campaign, in which the Crimean horde would raid for the benefit of the Ottomans.[72] Additional subsidies were regularly paid to the prominent clan leaders, upon which fell the choice of the next ruler and who possessed sizable forces and influence.[73]

The relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Crimea has been compared to many different cases – either by the way Egypt and Tunisia were incorporated in the sultan’s realm or by the way the relations with Wallachia and Moldavia were regulated. Williams would even go as far as to seek a relationship scenario, similar to the Polish-Lithuanian case of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.[74] In the words of B. Davies, apart from the military obligations to be a friend to the sultan's allies and enemy to the sultan's foes, the Khan remained sovereign over his own domains, minting his own coins, and collecting his own tribute from Poles, Muscovites, and other nomadic peoples of the Kipchak Steppe.[75] In addition, Tatar loyalty was not as adamant, as one might assume. In periods of economic crisis, when raiding was needed or on occasions, when Tatar political and military interests diverged from those of the Ottomans, the Khanate would act on its own. The appeasement of local nobles and the general population for mounting raids were the main reasons why Crimean rulers acted against the desires of their sovereigns in Istanbul. Still, in

[72] Ibid., 4.
[73] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 7.
[74] Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders.*, 3.
[75] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 7.

most of these cases, the Porte would reprimand the turbulent khans by exiling them and placing new, more reliable candidates on the throne of Bakhchisarai.

A confederation of hordes

The structure of the Crimean state has been, more or less, a puzzle for scholars, due to the shifting nature of nomad habitations, and the turbulent manner in which different clans and *ulusy* (domains) changed their pastures and areas of operation. The internal political ethos of the Crimean Khanate was never a stable one. During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, a series of shifts within the Don-Volga-Ural Steppe occurred, which led to the transition of some clans from the eastern to the western frontiers of the Pontic Steppe. The Nogais, who inhabited present-day western Kazakhstan, slowly moved westward, pushed by the advancing Kalmyks. The first wave of newcomers, known as the Lesser Nogais, entered the Pontic Steppe in the sixteenth century and soon came into the orbit of Crimea and submitted to the rule of the Chinggisids in Bakhchisarai.

Due to the constant pressure from the Cossacks along the Volga and the Don rivers, as well as in pursuit of more lucrative frontiers for raiding, part of the Lesser Nogais resettled westward, establishing their presence in the Budjak and the Edisan.[76] This motion created lesser hordes, subjected to the Crimean Khan, stretching from the Danube Delta to the Volga River. In the 1630s, the picture once again reshaped. The Kalmyks, driven away by the Qing expansion and the rise of the Kazakhs, invaded the Lower Volga, driving beforehand a new wave of Nogais – the Greater Horde. The new Nogai diaspora settled along the Kuban and the Don rivers while more and more Nogais from the former domains of the Lesser Horde moved west to join the Budjak and Edisan Tatars.

With the advent of the eighteenth century, the lands, dominated by the Crimean khans, became less and less spacious. With the growth of Muscovite power under Aleksey I Romanov, and the establishment of the Cossack Hetmanate as a separate entity during the Khmel'nyts'kyi revolt (1648–1657), the lesser hordes were pushed back toward the coastal areas. The establishment and expansion of defensive lines, drawn by the Muscovites to limit nomadic raids into their territories, began to repay the vast efforts, invested by the Russian state. In addition, the rise of the Kalmyks, as a separate, more or less autonomous power, proved to be a significant challenge to the Crimean authority. Although for most of the seventeenth century the khans were able to sustain diplomatic relations with the Kalmyk *tayishis*, with the strengthening of Russo-Kalmyk relations under Peter I and Ayuka Khan (r. 1672-1723), the

[76] See Map 5 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

power balance in the steppe once again shifted.[77] Moreover, the Khanate was placed on defense positions due to the growing expansion of Russia in the south.

Foe to your enemies – the Crimean gear-wheel in the Ottoman war mechanism

In their three hundred years of service, the Crimean Tatars contributed more to the Ottoman military system than did any other of the sultan's non-Turkish subjects.[78] The value of Crimea's military potential for the success of Ottoman expansion in Europe is beyond doubt. For over two hundred years Tatar forces were an essential element of the successful Ottoman strategy for defeating eastern and central European adversaries. While the main Ottoman forces served as a shock force, labeled for shattering enemy armies in pitched battles, the Tatars were the backbone of the auxiliary forces. They were used to harass and devastate the countryside, cut lines of support and communication, and destroy any smaller enemy contingents, which strayed away from the main body of troops, such as foraging parties and late reinforcements.

The central issue when studying Crimean warfare is to determine the actual size of the forces in service of the khans, which were available for campaigning. Contemporary accounts usually tend to overestimate Tatar forces with figures reaching 200,000 or even 400,000.[79] In reality, numbers were far lesser. The actual size of mobilized Tatar forces was closely related to the figure, which was going to lead the endeavor. Thus, the Khans would marshal the most impressive armies, reaching up to 80,000 men for a single campaign (usually the number revolved around 50,000), while lesser leaders such as the *kalga-sultan*-s or the *nuraddin*-s would command smaller contingents of up to 10-20,000.[80] Another factor, which predetermined the size of the army assembled, was the actual aim of the campaign. Raids for booty and depredation would demand lesser numbers than actual military campaigns in support of sultan's forces.[81]

Once the aim was set, a call to arms (*nida*) was issued, urging the warriors of the lesser hordes and the main Crimean ulusy to mobilize according to the khan's demands. The calls, aimed at the mobilization of the Khanate's full potential, were usually mandatory for all males between fifteen and seventy.[82] As Davies notes, with the weakening of the khan's influence during the

[77] Tayishi is a member of the ruling dynasty among the Kalmyks. All terms regarding the Kalmyks are given according to Khodarkovsky, M, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002)
[78] Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders*, 1.
[79] Ibid., 5.
[80] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 18.
[81] V. Ostapchuk, "Crimean Tatar Long-Range Campaigns: The View from Remmal Khoja's History of Sahib Gerey Khan" in B. Davies (ed.), *Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1500-1800* (Leiden and London: Brill, 2012), 158; Ostapchuk notes that certain lucrative raids were preserved only for trusted and loyal warriors and that Tatars aimed at excluding the non-Muslim *reaya* from these endeavors.
[82] Ibid., 157.

seventeenth century, raiding initiatives and calls for mobilization became the instruments of beys and mizras, who strived to assert their interests and policies.[83] Mobilization was usually carried out in remarkably short periods - between ten days and a month, but usually within two weeks.[84] All soldiers were required to bring with them food and supplies, three horses and their armament. Each set of five men received a cart for the transportation of their equipment and provisions.[85] The equipment of the soldiers was diverse, depending on their social status and personal wealth. Common warriors wore simple clothes, made of wool and sheepskin and used padded leather jackets as a sort of protection in combat. Wealthier Tatars had chain mails and conical helmets. The weapon diversity did not significantly change during the existence of the Crimean state. Sabers, short spears, horse-hair lassos and the composite bow were the main elements in Tatar's armament. Muskets, although known and in used in the Khanate, were reserved only for the khan's infantry contingents (consisted of yeniçeri and local mobilized Crimeans) and were perceived as rather clumsy for being used from horseback. Artillery pieces were only brought during major campaigns when pitch battles were expected. These were organized into artillery trains (*top arabacısı*), and smaller pieces were placed on armored wagons in the familiar Hussite fashion, adopted by most Central and Eastern European armies.[86]

Once mobilization began, troops were expected to gather at certain strategic locations, depending on the direction, in which the perceived campaign would venture. The most usual spot for a gathering of the whole army was e Perekop, from where raiders could march either westward against Poland-Lithuania, Moldavia, and Wallachia, north – against Russia and the Cossacks, or to the east – facing the Kalmyks, Circassians, and Persians. The Ottoman fortresses at Kinburn, Ochakov, Yenikale and the stronghold of Azov presented other favorable locations from where raids could be launched eastward. Invasion routes were projected in such a fashion as to circumvent the main Muscovite defensive lines in Ukraine. Campaigns were launched eastward, reaching the Don or the Volga rivers and then swung northward, aiming at Tula, Ryazan, and Kazan or directly against the Russian capital. For campaigns in the west, the Tatars either aimed at Kiev or crossed the river Bug, when raiding north they either aimed against Bar or marched south toward the Pruth to enter Moldavia.[87]

Climate and seasons determined the organization of raids and campaigns. By far the most profitable season was the time of harvest since the border troops of the land militia were preoccupied with harvesting their crops. The abundance of forage and food also enabled the Tatars to keep offensive raids for longer

[83] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 18.
[84] Ostapchuk, "Crimean Tatar", 157; Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders*, 5.
[85] Williams, *The Sultan's Raiders.*, 5.
[86] Ostapchuk, "Crimean Tatar", 159.
[87] Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 18-20.

periods of time.[88] Winter was the other period during which the Tatars struke their foes, taking advantage of the fact that the steppe was frozen, along with the rivers, which facilitated the crossing of the vast expanses. Also, the winter season corresponded with the abundance of festivities, celebrated by Catholic and Orthodox Christians, giving plenty of chances for surprise attacks.

Apart from these seasonal raids and campaigns, Tatar forces (comprised of an ever-increasing proportion of Nogais, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) engaged in prolonged military campaigns, supporting Ottoman war efforts. It could hardly be pinpointed even a single European campaign, carried out by the Porte after 1476, in which Tatar contingents were not present. The khan's warriors marched in Vienna along with Süleyman in 1529 and again in 1683. They assisted the Turks during the Long War, and also in their struggle against Persia, marching to the east as far as the Caucasus. With the intensification of Polish-Ottoman conflicts during the seventeenth century, the Crimean forces were aimed at the Commonwealth's lands more often than ever. The War of the Holy League was the climax of Tatar support and the campaigns engaged the entire potential of the Khanate. The advent of the eighteenth century did not bring any significant change. As it would be analyzed later in the dissertation, the forces under Devlet II Girei (r. 1699-1702; 1709-1713) were of vital importance for the victory over Peter at Pruth, and later on, during the War of 1735-1739, the Crimeans bore the primary burden of the conflict, absorbing substantial part of Russian military activities.

The Crimean Khanate played essential role in the establishment and upkeep of Ottoman military presence on the Northern Black Sea. It did, however, play an even greater role as autonomous power broker, able to shift the scales of any conflict in the Pontic Steppe. The political and military prestige and influence of the Khanate remained formidable throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it was only in the late 1730s that the Tatars' ability to muster and organize their forces for raids and campaigns were significantly diminished by the growing power of imperial Russia and their Cossack and Kalmyk allies.

As it would be analyzed in the following chapters, the Tatars were an essential element of the Ottoman military mechanism, particularly regarding the security and protection of the empire's northern borderline. The well-organized and seasoned warriors of the steppe were pivotal for any successful campaign in Ukraine, Podolia, Budjak, Edisan or the Kuban Steppe. In a century, in which the Ottoman Empire, as already noted, experienced problems with mobilizing its military potential, the Tatars provided a considerable proportion of the Porte's armies and maintained the war efforts beyond the limits of Istanbul's power projection.

[88] Ostapchuk, "Crimean Tatar", 157; Davies, *Warfare, State and Society*, 20.

Having reviewed the main features of the Ottoman military system and its key gear-wheel – the Crimean hosts, the following sub-chapter will examine the other essential protagonists in the tale of Russia's southern expansion. No doubt, the first and most notable of them is the Safavids' Empire.

2.3. An Empire Reforged – Safavid Persia and the Rise of Nadir Shah

The eighteenth century Ottoman warfare is scarcely studied, but there are even fewer works dedicated to the Safavid art of war. In general, there are two main articles by L. Lockhart and M. Haneda, which deal with the military establishment of the Safavids.[89] These earlier works are partially supplemented by the articles of M. Axworthy and R. Matthee.[90] Some piece of information could also be found in the work of W. Floor.[91] A recent study by K. Farrokh presents considerable amount of details on the matter and examines with greater precision the wars with the Ottomans and Russia.[92] Finally, the article on the Safavid army in Encyclopedia Iranica gives an overview of the problem, but it does not provide many details.[93] The theme about the general decline of Persia during the first decades of the eighteenth century is studied in the works of Matthee and Foran.[94] Similarly to the previous part, this sub-chapter aims at presenting a balanced approach toward Safavid military power, rather than giving full description of the different unit types of the Persian army. Safavid "backwardness" has strengthened its position in historiography even more than the Ottoman case. According to most of the above-quoted works, the Safavids did not possess any artillery and gunpowder weapons were used on rare occasions and served merely as palace decorations. However, the narrative of Abraham of Yerevan tells us a different story. By using his work as a starting point, the dissertation aims at presenting a rather different image of the Safavid attitude toward guns.

Army

When in the beginning of the sixteenth century Shah Ismail I (r. 1501-1524) created his state, he mustered his armed forces around the core of an irregular

[89] L. Lockhart, "The Persian Army in the Ṣafavī Period", *Islam* 34, 1 (1959), 89-98; M. Haneda, "The Evolution of the Safavid Royal Guard", *Iranian Studies* 22, 2-3 (1989), 57-85.
[90] M. Axworthy, "The Army of Nader Shah", *Iranian Studies* 40, 5 (2007), 635-46; R. Matthee, "Unwalled Cities and Restless Nomads: Firearms and Artillery in Safavid Iran" in C. Melville (ed.), *Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of an Islamic Society* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 1996), 389-417.
[91] W. Floor, *The Afghan Occupation of Safavid Persia*, *1721-1729* (Paris: Peeters Publishers, 1998).
[92] K. Farrokh, *Iran at War: 1500–1988* (London: Osprey, 2011).
[93] M. Haneda, "The Army III. Safavid Period", *Encyclopedia Iranica* (http://www.iranica.com/articles/army-iii - Accessed on 16.02.2016).
[94] J. Foran, "The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty: Moving beyond the Standard Views", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, 2 (1992), 281-304 (Abreviated henceforth as IJMES); R. Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline and the Fall of Isfahan*, (New York: I.B. Turis, 2012). R. Matthee, "The Decline of Safavid Iran in Comparative Perspective", *Journal of Persianate Studies*, 8, 2 (2015), 276-308.

force – the *qizilbash*. The qizilbash (red hats) were a military force, comprised of Turkoman tribal horsemen. Each of the tribes had its leader, and they served as the wings of the Safavid forces. In addition, the army of Ismail was supplemented by Çagatay and Kurdish irregular forces, most of them, fighting on horseback.[95] All sources and historical works agree that prior to the Battle of Chaldiran (1514) the Safavids did not use guns or firearms. The disaster, caused by the Ottoman firepower, however, was a lesson that Ismail was fast to learn. By 1516 appeared the first artillery pieces and soldiers equipped with firearms. Although their number was not significant, they became the backbone of the Safavid infantry force and during the following century rulers used them in order to invigorate their reform policy. Apart from the Turkoman qizilbash and the gunpowder infantry (*tufangchiyan*), the shahs relied on their royal guards (*qurchis*). Although their numbers were not formidable during the early Safavid period, they were well-trained and equipped and were the only regular troops in service of the shahs.[96] During the reign of Tahmasp I (r.1524-1576), the size of the tufangchiyan and the artillery corps increased, supplemented by the establishment of a new type of army – the *ghulam* (slaves). These troops were recruited among the Christian population of Caucasus (Georgians, Armenians, and Circassians) and were used to balance the influence of the qizilbash forces. The transformation from irregular tribal force into a standing army was successfully completed by Abbas I (r. 1587-1629). He reduced the strength of the qizilbash in half and regulated the structure of the ghulam and *tufangchi-aqasi* (the former *tufangchiyan)* forces. He also reformed the artillery corps and transformed it into a formidable force. [97]

After the death of Abbas, the Safavid military power experienced a period of decline. It was during Abbas II (r. 1642-1666) when stabilization was achieved. However, during his reign the artillery corps was practically abolished. While older historiographical researches have related this abolition to backwardness and disregard toward the value of artillery, Matthee argues that it was economic issues, and the general peace on Persia's borders that attributed to the decline of the gunpowder forces.[98] Furthermore, after in 1639 a peace treaty was signed with the Ottomans and a stalemate was achieved at Qandahar with the Mughals, the only major enemy left was the tribal force of the Uzbeks, who did not possess artillery or guns. In addition, Persia's geography was an obstacle for the development of an adequate artillery force. There were no navigable rivers and the land routes were through mountains and narrow passes, which made even basic soldier movement an arduous task. Unlike the Ottoman

[95] M. Haneda, "The Army III. Safavid Period" (http://www.iranica.com/articles/army-iii - accessed on 16.02.2016).
[96] For the growth of the Persian Royal Guard, see Table 3 in the Appendix for the current chapter; Haneda, "The Evolution", 57-85.
[97] Lockhart, "The Persian army", 92-3; However, Lockhart supports the idea of Sir Robert Sherley's major role in the reforms of Abbas I. This theory has been already rejected by scholars of Iranian history.
[98] Matthee, "Unwalled cities", 410; Matthee, "The Decline of Safavid", 293-6.

Empire, Persia lacked the basic resources for the production of gunpowder. While there were sulfur deposits, saltpeter and charcoal were hard to find and had to be imported. Weapon foundries were also few, the biggest being in Lar.

The narrative of Abraham of Yerevan, however, tells us a different story. During the Ottoman invasion in 1724, several cities were able to equip a considerable amount of "musketeers".[99] Furthermore, Abraham states that Persian citadels were well supplied with cannons, which were used to fend off Ottoman raids. He also deliberately compares the Safavid forces with those of the Afghans, who did not have guns and had to capture enemy strongholds by negotiating with the defenders. Another interesting fact is that the Safavids already possessed *zamburak* camel gunners, even before Nadir Shah (r. 1736-1747) reformed Persia's military system in the 1730s.[100] One last piece of evidence that the Safavids recognized the importance of gunpowder weapons could be derived from the siege of Baghdad (1638). In his concise description of the siege Murphey estimates that after in 1623 Abbas I captured the city, the fortifications were upgraded and were designed to allow the deployment of 20,000 troops, armed with muskets.[101] Thus, it could be stated that firearms were introduced in Safavid Persia at a larger scale than has been previously assumed.

However, by 1722 the Safavid military power was in regression. Lack of governmental initiative and the decline of tribal forces, combined with the lack of able field commanders led to the general disintegration of the army.[102] Resistance against the Turks and the Afghans was carried out by local garrisons, supported by the population. It was not until Nadir Shah entered into the service of Tahmasp II (r. 1722-1732) that a reinvigoration of the armed forces was carried out.[103] Therefore, when Russia invaded the Caspian shores, it did not meet a united empire, but a checkered set of semi-autonomous local governors, switching their allegiance to whoever was most powerful in the given moment.

When analyzing the facts, two distinct notions can be derived. Firstly, Persia did possess regular troops, but they served as palace guards, and their number was insignificant, compared to the size of the yeniçeri. Secondly, the Safavids recognized the importance of gunpowder as early as 1516, only 14 years after the emergence of their state. From that year on, guns played an important role in Safavid warfare, reaching their peak under Abbas I. In general, the Safavid army was less regularized than the Ottoman and the arsenal, possessed by the Persians, was far less impressive than that of the Ottomans. Nevertheless, the theory of Safavid backwardness should be reapproached.

[99] For example, the Armenian population in Yerevan managed to equip 9,000 men with firearms. In addition, 28,000 other citizens were mobilized; see Abraham of Yerevan, *History of Wars*, 25.

[100] Abraham talks about a corps of 15 Armenian *zamburaks*, accompanied a Persian envoy to the Ottoman Empire in 1727; see Abraham of Yerevan, *History of Wars*, 50.

[101] Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare*, 116. As Murphey notes, each of the 10,000 embrasures was to be defended by two musketeers, one bowman and two assistants.

[102] The last more prominent leaders were the Georgian princes Gurgin Khan (King Giorgi XI of Kartli) and his nephew Khusrau Khan. They were both killed during the first Afghan rebellion in 1709.

[103] Axworthy, "The Army of Nader Shah", 637-9.

There is sufficient evidence that guns played far greater role in Safavid art of war than was previously assumed. However, after the disaster at Gulnabad (1722) and the capture of Isfahan (1722), the Safavid army rapidly vanished as force. Only local garrisons and urban militias were still resisting the invading armies of Ottomans, Afghans and Russians. Persia would have to wait half a decade before Nadir Shah would begin his process of modernization. Though this process did not give the Persians a decisive edge over the Turks, it did bring both empires on the same level and left the commanders' abilities determine the outcome of the clash of Islam's titans.

Logistics

Unlike the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Persia was not blessed with long-standing military routes. The harsh terrain, the severe temperature variations and the lack of water in many parts of Persia, made it a country that was hard to control and govern. As Matthee notes in his article, Persia was divided into a number of regions due to the predominantly mountainous terrain of the Iranian Plateau.[104] The capital of Isfahan was separated by mountainous ridges and deserts from the ports of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. Roads crossed the broken terrain and were often impassable during winter season. Furthermore, the nature of the terrain prevented the development of cart transportation, which greatly limited the supply of the armies. Then it is no surprise that the Safavid preferred mounted troops, which could carry their supplies and did not need a baggage train.[105] As noted before, the Safavid Empire lacked the resources to produce sufficient quantities of gunpowder, which also limited the use of firearms. Also, deposits of metals were scarce and were often located in border regions, which meant that they were hard to develop and maintain. Persian forces lacked the necessary logistics to build a substantial infantry force. The terrain, which prevented the movement of larger artillery pieces, also determined Persians' preference for avoiding pitched battles and sieges and relying on ambushes and raids. On the other hand, each invading army met the same limitations even on a greater scale. The Chronicle of Abraham of Yerevan is abundant with examples of how Ottoman and Afghan troops were unable to proceed with their campaigns for days and often had to change their route, due to landslides and narrow passes.

Food and water supply was also problematic. The main grain production was concentrated in the plains around Isfahan and the Caspian Sea. Also large herds of sheep and goats were bred in the mountains. However, combining these two sources of food was not an easy task, due to the problems of transportation.

[104] Matthee, "The Decline of Safavid", 283.

[105] Persian forces were always mounted, ever since the Parthian Empire. The Sassanids also relied on cavalry rather than infantry. During the Middle Ages Arabs, Khwarazmians, Mongols and Timurids used cavalry armies to control Persia. It was far easier and cheaper to use a cavalry force, rather than pay large sums for the transportation of goods on land and the usage of infantry, which would greatly reduce the mobility of the army.

Furthermore, there were no major rivers or lakes, which could serve as a water supply. The transportation of water was also hard, primary due to the high-temperature varieties in the desert and to the half-desert environment of the Iranian Plateau.

Interlude - the downfall of the Safavid Empire

Before analyzing Persia's military development and potential under Nadir Shah, the process of political, economic and military collapse of the late Safavid state will be examined. It is essential to understand this age of regression in order to fully grasp the context of Nadir Shah's rise as well as the historical context, which enabled Russia and the Ottoman Empire to interfere in Persian affairs for over a decade.

Historians, who study the issues of the Safavid period in Iranian history, are still unsure when exactly the decline of the Safavid Empire began. Some point out that it started after the death of Abbas I the Great in 1629, others claim that the downfall of the Safavid begin after the reign of Abbas II (r. 1642-1666).[106] It could be even speculated that it was not until 1694 that the process of decline became irreversible. What all historians agree on is that there are three main reasons, which brought down the Safavid dynasty – political, economic and military.

The first and most often quoted reason is the general incompetence of the last two Safavid shahs – Sulaiman (r. 1666–1694) and Sultan Husain (r. 1694–1722) as political leaders of Persia. Both of them are regarded as drunkards and womanizers, who had little interest in state affairs and who have been entirely subjugated to their advisors and more importantly – to the struggling fractions within the harem.[107] All available contemporary sources support this thesis.[108] Both father and son are known for spending most of their time in the harem, drinking with courtiers or hunting. There are two famous cases, describing the dullness of Sulaiman. According to Muhammad Muhsin, Sulaiman is said to have spent seven years in the harem, without leaving it.[109] On a second occasion, when Sulaiman was told about the possible advance of Ottoman armies toward Tehran, the Shah said that he did not mind, as long as they left him the capital Isfahan.[110]

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[106] For an overview of the historiographical debate on the Safavid crisis; see Foran, "The Long Fall of the Safavid Dynasty", 281-304.

[107] L. Lockhart, "*The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*", (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 16-35.

[108] "*A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia: The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries"*, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939); Father Krusinski, *The History of the Late Revolutions of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); see also quoted sources in L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty*, 16-32.

[109] Lockhart, *Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty*, 31, citing Muhammad Muhsin, Zubdat al-Tavarikh.

[110] Ibid., 30 quoting Father Krusinski, *The History of the Late Revolutions*, 40.

It would be far too convenient, however, to blame the incompetence of the last two Safavid shahs for the downfall of Persia. Before accusing them of not being devoted enough to state affairs, a closer look at their personal life should be taken. Both Sulaiman and Husain were raised in the tradition, developed by Abbas I, that the heir apparent should be locked in the harem and not allowed to hold any offices until he inherits the throne.[111] The first twenty or so years of the two rulers' reign passed in an endless joy and carelessness, surrounded by women and *eunuchs*, who would flatter the monarch, without providing any critical judgment or guidance. Therefore, the two princes were completely unprepared for the hard task of ruling one of the most powerful states in Asia. The lockdown in the harem became a *modus vivendi* for the last two Safavids. In this matter, they were not too distinct from the Ottoman sultans since Süleyman the Magnificent, who also spent their time in the harem or hunting and had little to do with governing. However, the difference lays in the quality of the ruling apparatus. If Late Safavid Persia had a few good ministers in the period 1640–1730, the Ottomans were fortunate enough to be governed by some of the ablest grand viziers.[112] The illustrious Köprülü family and the Tulip Age viziers proved capable enough to maintain the Ottoman power and even expand the empire further or reconquer most of the lands, lost after the devastating peace of Karlowitz (1699). The Köprülü-s, however, were fortunate to have the full support of the sultans. In Persia, some viziers were selected for their qualities but were left without political backup by the ruler.[113] The appointment of ministers was shah's duty, but due to their harem-centered existence, the last Safavids were dependent on their favorites, who were the real distributors of patronage in the court.[114] New viziers had to act in the context of constant political struggle between the fractions of the Safavid court.[115] The swift change of favors brought high level of instability and insecurity inside the court, which crippled the decision-making process and the state control.[116] It must be noted that some effort was made to stabilize and strengthen the state and due to wise measures the Safavid dynasty was able to survive until 1722. However, these steps toward stability were continually hampered by struggle for political power and the antagonism of rival fractions at the heart of the Empire.

Apart from the swiftly changing ministers, two other general fractions strongly influenced the ruler – the harem and the *ulama*. The late Safavid harem

[111] Lockhart states that the tradition of keeping the heir apparent in the harem until accession was Abbas I's greatest mistake; see Lockhart, *The Fall Of The Ṣafavī Dynasty*, 25.
[112] Foran, "The Long Fall", 288-294.
[113] R. Matthee, *Persia in Crisis: Safavid Decline*, 249.
[114] As Matthee notes, the viziers in the Safavid Empire were never able to assert themselves as semi-autonomous power holders in the manner, achieved by the Ottoman grand viziers. This resulted in the fact that Safavid grand viziers remained counselors, servants who continued to operate at the sufferance of the ruler, rather than holders of full executive power next to a feeble shah; see Matthee, "The Decline of Safavid Iran", 292
[115] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis,* 202. Matthee notes the crucial importance of the harem and the eunuchs, to whom the last shahs of the Safavid dynasty would bestow power.
[116] Ibid, 205; Matthee pinpoints the existing tensions between members of the inner court and leaders of the clan nobility as feature of the Safavid politics after 1694.

was a huge institution. It comprised of more than 5,000 women and thousands of servants. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, during a pilgrimage to Meshed, the harem and its servants numbered 60,000 people altogether.[117] Inside the harem, there were numerous fractions, each trying to place its candidates in the administration of the state. These fractions allied themselves with different ministers and advisors and controlled them to achieve their goals. An example for the power of the harem is the fact that since the 1670s Persia was governed not by a council of ministers, but by Privy Council of the shah, comprised of the most influential eunuchs in the harem.

The third main fraction, struggling against the others, was the ulama. The Shi'i clergy had a crucial role in Safavid Persia because the state was organized on the principles of theocracy. The Shah was regarded as the incarnation of the Hidden Imam, and thus, he was perceived as the leader of all Shi'i Muslims. Nevertheless, using the weakness of the last two shahs and the instability within the court, the ulama managed to place itself above the authority of the shah, taking away his "divine" functions. The authority of the ruler was greatly undermined. Another problem, created by the conservative Shi'i imams, was the persecutions which they issued against Armenians, Jews and the Sunni Muslims.[118] These led to a series of revolts and also strengthened the position of the Ottoman and Russian empires, which proclaimed themselves defenders of Sunnis and Christians within the Persian Empire. Following the persecutions, most of the tribes and small states in the Caucasus, which were previously under Persian supremacy, transferred their allegiance to Persia's western and northern neighbors.

All these struggles for the right to distribute patronage had one main effect – they greatly vitiated the ability of the central authority to govern the realm. The swift change of ministers, governors and local magistrates led to instability of the political and administrative foundations of the Safavid Empire.[119] Threatened by constant shifts of the ruling elite, local governors aimed at securing their power by achieving autonomy. By the end of the seventeenth century uprisings and disobediences was constant feature. Regardless of the many adverse factors, the Empire managed to subject all insurrections and revolts for an extended period of time. It was only after the two other factors for the Safavid's decline emerged that the Empire crumbled. Although the general incapacity of the last Safavid shahs contributed to the downfall of their empire, it would be an exaggeration to blame them solely for the crisis that struck Persia at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

[117] Ibid, 286.
[118] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 202-7.
[119] In such terms, Persia is very much like Spain in the Age of Charles II, when there was constant struggle of court fractions to remove one another from the political scene. Like Persia, Spain lacked the unifying political figure who could resolve the main issues of the state. It would not be until the advent of Philip V (in Spain) and Nadir Shah (in Persia), that the two states would overcome their internal political strifes.

The second main reason for the downfall of Safavid Persia was the state's economic crisis and its main consequence – the weakening of the army. This issue concerns several historical studies. In his article on the downfall of the Safavid dynasty Foran develops the idea that the inability of Persia to go beyond its mediatory position in the trade between Europe and Asia, combined with the high inflation, characteristic for all countries during the seventeenth century, had a devastating effect on Persia's economy. His thesis is supported by R. Ferrier, who studies the impact of European trade on Safavid economy.[120] Ferrier concludes that the outflow of money from Persia to India combined with the devaluation of the Persian monetary system and the decline of silk exports to Europe after 1680 led to general crisis in Persia's economy. A third source of information on the decline of Persia's economy is V. Lyststov.[121] Using contemporary Russian sources, he concludes that Persia's income from silk fell threefold between 1710 and 1722. However, Lystsov relates this decline to the destabilization of the Persian state and the inability of the Empire to gather its taxes and fees due to lack of control over the provinces. These points are all confirmed and extended in R. Matthee's study on the decline and fall of the Safavid Empire. According to his latest research, it was a combination of poor monetary policy; political fragmentation within court; reduction in the flow of funds and goods due to hoarding and short-sighted religious policy that spelled the doom of the Safavid state.[122]

In general, Persia suffered from being solely a mediator in the trade between Europe and Asia. Exports of raw silk and cloth could not make up for the large sums that the Empire was paying for luxury goods brought by Dutch, English and later French merchants.[123] Furthermore, the seaborne trade between India and Europe turned out to be faster and safer than the overland trade route through Persia and the Ottoman Empire. The political distortion of the Persian provinces strengthened this trend even further. The income of Persia dropped steadily until it reached its lowest level during the reign of Husain. To make things worse, Shah Husain was firmly devoted to architecture and began constructing palaces, parks, and mosques. The money for these expensive building projects had to be found elsewhere since the treasury was empty. In the late years of Sulaiman and during the entire reign of Husain, tax farming and sale of offices became standard practice. As it is well known, both methods of funding lead to a high level of corruption and are also responsible for the low quality of the administrative apparatus.[124]

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[120] R.W. Ferrier, "Trade from the Mid-fourteenth century to the end of the Safavid Period", in *Cambridge History of Iran, vol 6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 412 – 90.
[121] V.P. Lystsov, *Persidskiy Pokhod Petra I: 1722 – 1723* (Moscow, 1951).
[122] Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 248-51.
[123] Foran, "The Long Fall", 283-4.
[124] As Foran concludes, the purchase of offices often placed incapable persons on important positions. Furthermore, these people sought to restore their "investments" by requiring additional taxes, taking bribes and deflecting funds from the state income. This led to heavy losses for the state as well as public unrest due to the surcharged of the population with taxes.

Finally, the inability to provide finances for the army led to the disintegration of Persia's military power. The armies were often disbanded due to lack of money or because governors and generals mustered a force, which was armed and supported inadequately. The constant shift of positions in the high command of the army destroyed any opportunity for a consistent strategy to handle the worsening situation on all frontiers of the empire.[125] The inability to muster armies led to the humiliating necessity of begging local rulers to gather their forces for the protection of the empire. The most famous example is King Giorgi XI of Kartli, who managed to organize a 30,000 Georgian army and to suppress the revolts in Baluchistan and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the shah had to beg him personally and give away titles to receive the help of the Georgian king.[126]

Apart from the above-examined three primary factors for the decline of the Safavid Empire, a fourth one could be added – the worsening geopolitical situation in Persia. All of Persia's neighbors were eager to exploit the weakness of the Safavid state and their political development allowed to be carried out an aggressive policy against Persia.[127] The first to strike a blow against the weakening Persian state were its former client states – Baluchistan and Oman. The Baluchi tribes ravaged Persia's southern provinces on several occasions and the Oman pirates conquered some of the most important naval bases in the Persian Gulf and disrupted significantly the naval trade between Persia and the European merchant companies.[128] The next wave of anti-Persian raids came from the dependent tribes of Caucasus and Afghanistan. Urged by the Shi'i's religious persecutions, the Sunni tribes overthrew the Safavid suzerainty and began raiding Persia - pillaging the cities and disrupting the trade. The final strike came from Persia's most dangerous enemies – the Ottoman Empire and Russia. Both states were looking to exploit the weakness of Persia and to conquer as much as possible in order to achieve their economic and strategic goals.

The combination of these four major factors made it impossible for the Safavid Empire to resist. The political, military and economic problems were interrelated, and an influential figure was needed to handle the grievous situation. However, after the weak and undetermined rule of Sulaiman, Persia

[125]Ministers were often envious of the generals and used their influence on the shah, in order to remove the generals from their positions and check the power of the military. Furthermore, army commanders were often representatives of the old provincial elite, while the ministers and the central government were a type of service aristocracy that held its power due to its positions in the state administration. The struggle between the provincial and tribal leaders and the central service aristocracy began after the death of Ismail I in 1525. Relatively weak monarchs and interregnums raised the power of the old provincial elites.

[126] The titles were "Vali of Georgia", "Supreme commander of the Persian Army" and "Governor of Kerman". Furthermore, Shah Husain had to proclaim Giorgi's son – Vakhtang, ruler of Kartlia and his nephew – Khosrow – mayor of Isfahan.

[127]Oman was centralized and stabilized after the expulsion of the Portuguese from Muscat. The Baluchi were also united in their struggle to overthrow Persia's superiority. Using the weakening of the Mughal Empire and Safavid Persia, the Afghans united under the Ghilzai tribe and tried to forge their own realm in Inner Asia.

[128]These raids greatly influenced the downfall of Persia's trade.

was headed by another weak and indecisive shah, who did not possess the traits, necessary for imposing a strong will over the collapsing administration. If after the disastrous rule of Shah Safi (r. 1629–1642), the stability of Persia was saved by Abbas II, the reign of Husain, with its many mistakes and problems, sealed the faith of the Safavid dynasty. Husain did not possess the necessary will or skills to reform his realm, and the disintegration of the Safavid Empire became inevitable.

The army of Nadir Shah

Following the collapse of Safavid rule, Persia was shattered into several semi-autonomous regions, which resisted foreign invaders on their own. Under the banner of the last Safavid – Tahmasp II from the Afsharid dynasty – Nadir Shah, began to reestablish central authority and to reshape the scattered pieces of the former military ethos. Nadir Shah was a reformer in the same sense as Peter I – a ruler in desperate need of reforging his army, which had been soundly defeated by its enemies. It was evident that the Ottomans were the most eminent threat for Persian security. They possessed the largest army to invade Persia and were well accustomed to fight on Iranian terrain, or at least better accustomed than the Russians. The Afghans, occupying a substantial part of the former Safavid realm, were not as dangerous as the Ottomans, but were still a force to be reckoned with. On the other hand, their numbers were limited, and they had proven their inability to fight sieges or to conduct prolonged campaigns outside the frequent raids. Russians, on the contrary, were a mystery. Safavid Persia had never fought a war against the Northern Empire, nor had it met a European-style army on a grander scale. Nadir Shah made a significant and profound choice – to let the Russians occupy their Caspian forts and concentrated his efforts against the other invaders. Like Peter, he did not hesitate to copy good practices from his enemies. Ottoman military ranks and unit structure was presented on smaller scale in order to update and upgrade the older Safavid structure. Musketeers were introduced *en masse*, using Ottoman-style handguns, while cavalry practice was borrowed from the Afghans, who received Persian ranks.[129] What Nadir Shah did was not so much to reinvent the Persian army but to reinforce the old one by implementing new useful ideas, taken from his enemies. He was more of an elaborator rather than an inventor of military practice. His genius laid in his ability to pick his entourage, inspire his troops and, most of all, in his sheer tactical and strategic talent, which elevated him as one of the most successful Asian warlords of all time.

The final result of Nadir's reforms was the establishment of a standing army consisting of 200,000 troops and supporting personnel which was divided into two main bodies – cavalry and infantry. The cavalry consisted of the royal

[129] K. Farrokh, *Iran at War: 1500–1988* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 91-3.

cavalry, as well as additional troops from different regions of Persia – Khorasan, Azerbaijan, Baluchistan, Afghanistan and even from the khanates of Central Asia. The infantry was comprised of three main bodies –heavy musketeers (*jazayerchi)*, light musketeers and troops armed with spears, halberds, bows and swords. They entered combat in this particular order, giving primacy to the gunmen and using the traditional infantry as a final resolution or as a reserve, which was to be deployed at crucial moments on the battlefield.

Apart from these two main bodies Nadir Shah promoted an artillery corps, comprised of a combination of standard heavy artillery and camel-mounted light artillery pieces, called zamburak. As mentioned above, the zamburak existed during the Safavid era, but it was Nadir Shah who brought them forward and deployed them with success during his campaigns against the Ottomans and the Mughals.

In terms of logistics and supply, Nadir Shah created several gun foundries and arsenals around the empire (the main were in Isfahan, Merv and Kermanshah). The state also funded the purchase of horses for the army and provided each horseman with a state-bought mount.[130]

The cost of war was to be covered by ever-increasing taxation, which landed a critical blow on the already crumbling Persian economy. Although during his lifetime Nadir Shah succeeded in building and keeping a formidable army, which was better than its enemies on every front, his death brought a general collapse not only for his army but for Persia itself. The amount of funds, necessary for the maintenance of a 200,000 strong force were beyond the scope of the Persian Empire, which lacked the economic, administrative and resource bases, on which to build and maintain a standing regular army in the manner of Europe and Russia.

Unlike the Ottoman army, which was controlled by a stable, centralized state, between 1722 and 1726 the Safavid forces were left without central command. Local garrisons and urban militia lacked the supplying system, provided by the state. Local governors were looking after their own interests and often concluded agreements with the invaders. On the other hand, where resistance was organized, the local population was able to equip a considerable amount of firearms and used them actively against the enemies. The crisid in which Persia was must not be exagerrated, since only three years after the capture of Isfahan by the Afghans and the Northwestern provinces by the Ottomans and the Russians, Shah Tahmasp II, with the assistance of Nadir Shah, was able to rebuild the Persian army. Its strength grew almost 18 times between 1725 and 1733.[131] This dramatic increase was followed by an impressive quality growth as well, with guns and artillery introduced on an unprecedented scale. For some time Nadir Shah was able to maintain a standing army with high esprit

[130] Ibid., 92-6.

[131] For the growth of the Safavid army between 1500 and 1743, see Table 2 in the Appendix for the current chapter.

de corps and armed as good as any of its opponents. Combined with the tactical and strategic genius of its master, the army of Nadir became an instrument for victories and conquest. The lack of civil, economic and administrative reforms, however, spelled doom for the grand army. Following Nadir Shah's death, the pressure on the treasury became unbearable and only in a couple of years the strong and victorious army was only a distant memory, shadowed by the reality of Afghan resurrection and Ottoman revival in Iraq.

As it was noted above, the idea that the Persian lacked firearms and regarded them as useless should be reconsidered in order for the real image of the Safavid military machine to be illustrated. Similarly to the Ottoman and Russian cases, scholars should bear in mind the geopolitical issues of a given country, when analyzing its potential. In the case of Safavid Persia, Matthee and Farrokh have certainly made a good effort, which will hopefully be followed by scholars of Iranian history.

Having reviewed the imperial powers, who opposed Russia's bid for mastery in the Pontic region, the following sub-chapter will focus on the other important element, crucial for understanding this turbulent and complicated region – the frontiersmen.

2.4. On the Edge of Empires - the Pontic Frontier and its People

Apart from the three regional powers – Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, the Crimean Khanate, as noted, was the only more or less settled society of the steppe. Apart from Crimea existed several quasi-political entities, which shaped the social and political background of the Pontic frontier. These societies – the Cossacks, the Kalmyks and the Nogais, shared large number of similarities regarding the relations they sustained with imperial authority. Their resemblances make it necessary to review them as a whole, with the notion of pointing out significant similarities and differences in order to establish the primary pattern of the frontier-Empire relations, which were essential for the conduct of war in the time frame, which is examined in the present dissertation.

Historiography

Since the end of the Cold War, Western historiography has produced a concise and well-written amount of secondary literature, which opens the debate on the development of frontier societies in the Pontic region. On the other hand, it also shares a new, intriguing perspective what the ethos of these people was, and how did their relations with the powers in the region (especially Russia) shaped their fortunes. One of the most detailed works is that of Michael Khodarkovsky, whose approach and comparative description of the variety of peoples inhabiting the lands between the Don and the Uralus Rivers is a must for any research on

the topic of frontier warfare and societies.[132] Another invaluable source of information, regarding Cossacks, in particular, is the work of Christoph Witzenrath. In his study of Cossack society and the way it was affected by Moscow's policy, Witzenrath unravels an elaborated structure, in which economic gains and interests are used as the welding of society.[133] Cossacks remain the essential focus of most scholars of the topic, since the primary sources, available for their history, is abundant in comparison to the materials, available for the Nogais and Kalmyks. Boeck's study on the Don frontier in the Age of Peter I tells the story of imperial effort to tame and handle the semi-autonomous frontiersmen and tap their potential for the benefit of Russia's expansion.[134] The study of Thomas Barrett on the Terek Cossacks provides a case study, focused on the relations between one of the frontline Cossack hosts and the local population in the North Caucasus region in the context of Russia's imperial expansion during the eighteenth and the first half of nineteenth century.[135] Regarding the Kalmyks, a brief introduction to their history and their settlements along the Volga River can be found in U. Erdniev's research on Kalmyk ethnography and history.[136]

A Socio-political puzzle

Following the Time of Troubles, the newly established Romanov dynasty began to assert its power and influence along the Volga River, trying to strengthen its grip on the steppe between the rivers Don and Yaik (Ural River).[137] These territories were initially inhabited by some Cossack hosts, who, in general, acknowledged the tsar as their sovereign, as well as the powerful Great Nogai Horde, which controlled the lands between Yaik and the Lower Don. Tensions among local forces, as well as constant raids into Russia, were a scourge for the tsarist authorities who had no actual means to assert their sovereignty over the turbulent frontiersmen. Before the successful war with Poland-Lithuania (1654-1667), after which Moscow was able to strengthen its hold over the Cossacks, the tsars could hardly count on any military leverage outside the walls of their Volga garrisons, the chief of which was Astrakhan.

The Nogais, most of whom were Muslims, were likely to join forces with the Crimeans and Bashkirs, and even with the Khans of Bukhara and Khiva,

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[132] Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*.
[133] C. Witzenrath, *Cossacks and the Russian Empire, 1598-1725: Manipulation, Rebellion and Expansion into Siberia* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[134] B. J. Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries: Cossack Communities and Empire-Building in the Age of Peter the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[135] T.M. Barrett , *At the Edge of Empire: The Terek Cossacks and the North Caucasus Frontier, 1700-1860* (Oxford and Colorado: Westview Press, 1999)
[136] U. E. Erdinev, *Kalmyki – Istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki* (Moscow: Kalmyk Book Publishing, 1985).
[137] Time of Troubles (in Rus. *Smutnoe vremya* 1598 – 1613) was a period of internal strife, civil unrest and foreign military interventions that followed the end of the Rurik dynasty and came to an end with the accession of Mikhail Romanov as tsar.

rather than serve the interests of the Muscovite state.[138] It was precisely such an alliance that Russia came to fear the most and the *voevodas* of Astrakhan struggled hard to bring disunity among the Nogais, playing the different mizra-s and their fractions against one another. This strategy achieved an unexpected result in the 1620s, when, following the death of Khan Ishterek, his successors engaged into a kind of civil war to determine the new ruling elite. In the end, there was no single winner, and the weakened fractions were left to lick their wounds while the Don and Terek Cossacks were encouraged to attack the weakened Nogais. This situation, favorable for the Muscovites, was soon to change with the arrival of a new Asian Horde – the Kalmyks.

A factor, which contributed to the Kalmyk migration, was the rise of the Kazakhs, whose raids began to torment Kalmyk settlements in what is now Central Kazakhstan. Driven forward by their enemies in an early seventeenth-century repetition of the *Völkerwanderung*, the Kalmyks firstly settled on the eastern banks of the Yaik River, and later crossed it, entering the Eastern Volga Steppe. From there, they launched a series of raids against Russia, the weakened Nogais and went westward as far as the Perekop in Crimea, forcing all local parties to unite in order to cope with the new threat. A combination of hastily forged coalitions was able to overpower the Kalmyk hosts and drive them across the Yaik by the mid-1630s. This success was, however, short-lived. The inability of Muscovy to project its power properly into the Volga basin and to protect the Nogais from Kalmyk depredations urged the later to join forces with the Crimeans and the Dagestani. Nogais ulusy were moved westward, most of them concentrating on the Kuban River, where a significant part of the once great Horde was to live until the Age of Catherine the Great. Others sought refuge in Crimea and some even joined the Budjak Horde in what is now south-western Ukraine. In any case, the scattered Nogais had no choice but to turn to the Muscovites and raid their territories, as well as the lands, controlled by the Cossack hordes.

To cover its southern flank and secure the hold on the Volga Steppe, the tsars sought a new strategy. They allowed the Kalmyks to settle on both sides of the Volga River and concluded a series of contracts with them, stipulating that the Kalmyks were to cease raiding Russian lands in exchange for carte blanche to strike at the Tatars and Nogais. The Kalmyks were also to cooperate and support Russian military campaigns in the Pontic region and also to restrain from keeping diplomatic connections with other states, most importantly Crimea, the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. As Khodarkovsky notes in his work, this was easier said than done. Kalmyk raids were to continue in the 40s, 50s and even 60s of the seventeenth century. The pressure on Russian frontier lands was only loosened a bit after the Kalmyks received a guarantee that none of them would be forcefully converted to Orthodox Christianity and after they were

[138] Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 127-8.

allowed free trade in Muscovite cities and towns in the Volga valley (the so-called Lower Cities) as well and Moscow itself.

The unreliable Kalmyk aid was not enough to guarantee imperial interests in the Pontic Steppe, and the tsars opted to have additional leverage to spread their influence over the region. After a series of military and diplomatic advancents against Poland-Lithuania achieved by Tsar Aleksey, the incorporation of the Cossacks became an essential part for the establishment of the Russian government. The acquisition of Left-bank Ukraine, as well as Kiev, was used to incorporate the Hetmanate as an integral part of Muscovy. Although the Cossacks would keep their autonomy as late as the Great Northern War, constant steps were undertaken to secure their allegiance and obedience. The restrictions of raiding on Crimean and Ottoman territory, as well as on the Zaporozhian Sech, combined with the ever increasing need for Russian subsidies, made the Cossack bands more and more dependent on Muscovite financial aid. The lack of local manufacturing, especially arms production, as well as the low level of farming, made the hosts compound to follow imperial dictate in exchange for guns, grain and grants. Nevertheless, in the course of the seventeenth century, the Cossacks demonstrated their resolve to follow the economic interests which lay at the heart of their *Personenverbands*, rather than the machinations of their Muscovite puppeteer wannabes.[139] The clearest example of this trend was the conquest of Azov, which was carried out by the Cossacks in 1637 when their river flotilla stormed the unprepared Ottoman garrison and captured the town. Muscovy, unwilling to risk a war with the Porte (after their humiliating defeat in the Smolensk War) withdrew its support and left the frontiersmen to their destiny. In 1642 the Turks regained Azov, following the peace they concluded with the Safavid Empire, but Cossack raids in the Black Sea continued throughout the seventeenth century, with some remarkable episodes, such as the siege of St. John Monastery near Sozopol (1629), in present-day Bulgaria. During this event, a force of 150 Cossacks, after sacking the Black Sea coast, sought refuge on the island of St. John, barricading themselves in the monastery. Here they became surrounded by a large Ottoman fleet, bearing 4,500-5,000 yeniçeri on board, which laid an eight-day siege to the monastery. The advent of an auxiliary flotilla (some 4,000 men on 80 vessels) was able to breach the Ottoman encirclement and the Cossack *chayka*-s sailedvictorious and overburdened with booty. Following the incident, Ottoman authorities razed St. John Monastery since Cossack pirates repeatedly used it as a base of operations.[140]

With Cossacks and Kalmyks proving unreliable of enforcing imperial policy, Muscovy decided to act on the notion that if you want a job to be done

[139] See Witzenrath, *Cossacks*, 31-61 for a concise explanation of the structure, formation and upkeep of the Cossack war bands.

[140] V. Karavylchev, *Ostrovniyat manastir Sv. Yoan – edna neprochetena stranitza ot tzarkovnata ni istoriya* (http://dveri.bg/99q3a - accessed on 28.01.2016)

well you should be involved personally. Following the lengthy peace after the war with Poland-Lithuania (1632-1634), Aleksey Romanov decided to invest substantial amounts of manpower and funds in the establishment of defensive lines (zasechnoy cherty) along the Volga frontier, slowly, but steadily moving the southern border of the Russia realm toward the Caspian Sea. To man these new defenses, the tsar nurtured a steady flow of serfs, fleeing away from their masters' lands. Instead of returning them to their rightful owners, the central authorities granted the serfs small tracts of land in exchange for military service, thus establishing a frontier militia, which was already mentioned in the previous chapter. Although neither aggressive nor quick, the policy of creating a firm military frontier, similar to that forged by the Habsburgs in Hungary, proved to be the lasting solution that brought Russian dominance over a region, in which ethnicity, military and political interest and religion were mashed up into a boiling caldron of trouble.

During the final decades of the seventeenth century, the situation in the Pontic Steppe began to shift once again. The rising power of the Kazakh Horde, as well as the continuing pressure of the Qing expansion, troubled the Kalmyks who began to probe for options to expand their trade and diplomatic liaisons with Crimea, Dagestan, and Bukhara. These diplomatic activities strengthened the resolve of the central government, now headed by Peter I, to assert direct military control even further in the south. Besides, Ayuka, the new Khan of the Kalmyks, certainly seemed disenchanted with Muscovite imperial designs and gave signs of following a separate political path. All this was about to change. In 1696, following an unsuccessful first attempt, Peter was able to acquire Azov from the Ottoman Empire. This victory tripped the power-balance at the Don basin and urged the Kalmyks once again to align themselves with the Russians. In the following campaign of 1697, the Kalmyks proved essential for the protection of Azov and their cavalry, led personally by Ayuka Khan, was used to keep the numerous Nogai horsemen in check.[141]

Peter I asserted Russian authority by conquest. Thereafter, he managed to reform the administrative structure of his realm, while simultaneously struggling against Sweden. The establishment of governorates (guberniya) in 1708 initiated a process of steady political centralization in the lands of the Muscovite Tsardom, which in 1721 was transformed into the Russian Empire. By that time, the Astrakhan Governorate had been established as a separate entity (1717) to buttress Russia's presence in the Pontic Steppe. Artemiy Volynskiy, an experienced diplomat who had served Peter both as an envoy and a field commander, was bestowed the governor's office and immediately began to assert his prerogatives upon the Kalmyks, the Nogais, and the Cossack hosts at Don, Terek, and Yaik rivers. Volynskiy's policy was efficient and resulted in strengthening Russia's grip on the steppe, especially after the death of Ayuka

[141] The Azov campaigns will be analyzed in detail in the following chapter.

Khan. With the intensification of the struggle for power, the governor of Astrakhan played the Nogai scenario from the previous century by severing the different fractions of the Kalmyk Khanate. The strife and instability significantly weakened the Kalmyks, and voices were spoken out for departing and returning to the Oirats' ancestral lands to the east. Troubled by the notion of a possible alliance between the Kalmyks, Crimeans, and the Kazakhs, the government in St. Petersburg decided to compromise. Furthermore, the process of Kalmyk incorporation had already begun and the prospect of the departure of these more or less predictable neighbors only to be replaced by new Asian Horde was daunting. In addition, the establishment of the Tsaritsyn defense line and the strengthening of the Terek line following the Persian Campaign meant that the Russians were now in full control of Kalmyk migration. Still, it was cheaper to compromise with the choice of a new khan. In 1736, in the context of growing tension between the Russians and the Ottomans, Donduk-Ombo was chosen as a suitable heir to the Kalmyk heritage. In turn, he provided continuous support for Russia's military efforts.

While Kalmyk autonomy was kept, although consistently limited in economic and diplomatic aspect, the case with the Cossacks took a rapid turn following the rebellions of hetmans Kondraty Bulavin (1707-1708) and Ivan Mazepa (1709). Bulavin's Rebellion was ill-organized and ill-managed, striking not so much against the established political order, but against the figure of Peter himself. Thus, a limited number of followers were gathered. In combination with the harsh winter conditions and the lack of allies, the rebellion was supressed by mid-1708, without achieving anything significant. Even so, Peter was furious because his authority was challenged by a simple Don Cossack ataman.[142] Before he could take firm measures, another Cossack rebellion sparked.

After repeatedly being abandoned by Peter in the course of the Swedish invasion of Ukraine, losing some 15,000 men in less than six months, Ivan Mazepa became disillusioned with Russia's friendship. Followed by a small number of loyal Cossacks, Mazepa deflected to Karl XII's army, hoping to gain Swedish support for the recognition of Cossack autonomy in Ukraine. Unfortunately for Mazepa, and the rest of the Cossack hosts, Peter was able to eradicate the Swedish army at Poltava, and was free to turn his undivided attention to the troublesome Cossacks. Although advised to abolish all Cossack privileges, the Tsar decided to appear as a generous and forgiving sovereign. Peter did not limit the economic autonomy of the Cossack but secured their submission to the military necessities of the Russian state. In exchange for keeping their exclusive rights and tax concessions, the Cossacks had to accept that the time of voluntary service to the State was over. From now on, the Cossack hosts were subjected to mandatory quotas, demanded by the Russian

[142] According to B. J. Boeck, it was the rebellion of Bulavin that triggered the reactionary policy of Peter toward the Cossacks; see Boeck, *Imperial Boundaries*, 187.

military, or had to pay fines in case of manpower shortages. This was first demonstrated in 1711 in the context of the Pruth Campaign when the Don Host not only gathered the greater part of the troops it was required to provide, but also paid an indemnification of 970 rubles for the number of servicemen who were absent from the levy.[143]

Khans, hetmans and the Empire

Apart from the process of frontier indoctrination into Russia's political order, there was the question of authority. Asserting sovereignty over their turbulent frontier subjects had been a matter of utmost importance for the Moscow grand princes and tsars ever since the fifteenth century. As already noted, the government tried to implement a combination of methods in order to impose its will over the Cossacks, Nogais and the Kalmyks, which included: direct military pressure, economic dependence and forging of military symbiosis against common enemies. In this pattern of interrelation, it was essential for the rulers in Moscow to be deemed by their frontier dependents as legitimate overlords. This was achieved either by the notion that the tsar was the representative of the Christian Lord on earth, when it came to the Orthodox Cossacks, or that the ruler of Muscovy was, in fact, the "great white Khan", who took the Golden Horde's fallen mantle, in the Steppe Hordes' perspective.

For most of the seventeenth century, Russian tsars had trouble asserting their direct political dominance over the frontiersmen. The Muscovite state lacked the military leverage to cow the inhabitants of the Pontic region into submission or even to impose the developing serfdom system, which dominated Russia Proper. The government tried to manipulate local authorities with gifts and bestowments of regal insignias in order to impose the idea that political leadership in the Frontiers had to be recognized by the authorities in Russia. It wasn't until the reign of Peter I that this line of conduct transformed from wishful thinking into reality. As noted above, the arrival of royal armies on the Lower Don and the overpowering of Cossack rebellions allowed Peter to turn a new page in frontier-imperial relations and to establish a new pattern of subordination between the government and the local authorities.

As already noted, the chief administrative measures were, aimed at the Cossack Hetmanate. Following the victory at Poltava, Peter I asserted his right to approve any chosen hetman before he came into office. Apart from that, Russian authorities, represented by the Kievan governorate, put pressure on the hetman to appoint favorable men in charge of the regimental districts, of which the Hetmanate constituted. Peter stepped even further by personally interfering in the choice of the hetman himself. As Boeck demonstrates, while studying the

[143] Ibid., 189.

Don hosts, Cossack elites had to obtain the patronage of high-ranking Russian administrators in order to secure their leading positions in the Hetmanate.[144]

In the case of the Kalmyks, state pressure had to be applied more delicately, since the Khanate, although far from its prime, was still a substantial force on its own, and the service of the Kalmyk cavalry was valued above that of the Cossacks, as demonstrated in the Azov Campaign in 1697.[145] It was not until the death of Ayuka Khan in 1724 that the government seized the opportunity for a direct intervention into Kalmyk internal affairs. By using the control over the pastures north of Tsaritsyn, the imperial authorities decided to bully the Kalmyks into accepting the Russian candidate for the throne. Without consulting with the Kalmyk nobles, and especially to the *tayishi*-s closely related to the late Ayuka Khan, the Russian opted to abolish the khan title and replace it with a viceroy of their choice.[146] The authorities in St. Petersburg decided to place their trust on Dorji-Nazar – a pro-Russian figure, who stood in the middle of the line of succession. To the dismay of the imperial officials, Dorji-Nazar refused to alienate the Kalmyks by pressing his claims. Furthermore, there were voices for the departure of the Kalmyks to Crimea. Daunted by a possible steppe alliance, the tsarist government accepted a compromise candidate - Cheren-Donduk.[147] Russia exercised its influence again in 1732 to protect Cheren-Donduk from his popular nephew Donduk-Ombo, who claimed the throne for himself. Donduk-Ombo, along with a substantial number of followers, departed toward Kuban. In the context of rising tensions between Crimea and Russia, and the fact that the Empire was preoccupied with the War of the Polish Succession, St. Petersburg once more had to step down. All of Donduk-Ombo's demands were satisfied, and he returned to the main *ulusy*.[148]

The imperial administration had greater success in subduing the Cossacks. The reig over the frontiersmen was done by the abovementioned practice of extensive patronage combined with the increased commitment of the Russian military in strengthening its control over the southern borders. In 1728, to secure his position as hetman, Daniil Pavlovich Apostol signed the so-called *Reshitelynye punkty*, which stipulated that the hetman will henceforth receive his authority from the sovereign rather than the century-old practice of election by the Cossack officers. All matters of foreign policy had to be approved by the emperor, and only border disputes could be handled by the hetman, who, however, was to keep them in accord with Russia's diplomatic obligations. Regarding military matters, the hetman was subjected to the field-marshal of the Russian army. He was also forbidden to employ more than three mercenary

[144] Ibid., 190-2.
[145] See following chapters for the difference between the subsidies and gifts, received by the Don Cossacks and the Kalmyks.
[146] Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 140.
[147] 1724 marked a climax in Russo-Ottoman relations in the context of the war in Persia. Furthermore, up to October 1724 Peter I was recovering from an urgent medical treatment, regarding his health condition.
[148] Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 141.

regiments in his service. In administrative terms, the members of the Cossack Hetmanate's council of commanders (which served as both Cabinet and ruling regulatory body for the existing regimental districts) were to be elected by the Russian government. In addition, tax revenues, collected within the Hetmanate borders were to be transferred into the Imperial Treasury. The juridical rights of the Hetmanate and the Russian subjects were equaled in terms of landowning, but henceforth, serfs were prohibited from settling down in the territory of the Hetmanate.[149] And if this measure was not sufficient, the next step of imperial authority institutionalization cemented Russian power over the Cossacks. In 1734, following the death of Daniil Apostol, Empress Anna decided not to hold elections for a new hetman but instead created the Governing Council of the Hetman Office. This was a six-member administrative body, headed by a Russian government representative, along with two imperial figures and three Cossack leaders. The Office ruled Ukraine on behalf of the Empire until 1750 when Empress Elisaveta (r. 1741-1762) appointed one last hetman – count Kirill Grigoryevich Razumovskiy, who held the office until 1764 when Catherine the Great abolished the Hetmanate and incorporated it into Russia.[150]

Soldiers of the steppe

The essential value of frontiersmen, for Russia's policy, was their military prowess. Constantly thriving on raids, "little war" and defense of border garrisons, the very ethos of the frontier people was war. Military hierarchy served as the basis of the frontier societies, with commanders of a 100, 1,000 or 10,000 men becoming administrative and political leaders as had been the practice in the Mongol Empire and the steppe realms which had preceded it. Such was the case with the Crimean Khanate, the Nogais and Kalmyks. Their khans and lesser princes (tayishi) led separate hosts into single raids or overall campaigns with the status of the endeavours determined by the rank of the respective leader. In the case of the Cossacks, where clan loyalties were replaced by the relations of the Personenverbands, the commanding officers were elected by their followers. Moreover, the officers elected their superiors on the same principle. This autonomous system of self-control contradicted the imperial desire to implement its influence, and, as noted above, Russian authorities sought different means to subdue their frontier allies and dependencies.

While the military abilities of the Cossacks remained legendary for most of the time, their well-deserved glory was earned in constant confrontation with the Crimean Tatars, Ottoman sipahis and Polish hussars. Nevertheless, as later examination of Russian campaigns will prove, the Kalmyks were in no way inferior to their Hetmanate counterparts. In fact, during the Russo-Ottoman War

[149] *Reshitelynye punkty* (http://litopys.org.ua/rigel/rig21.htm - accessed on 29.01.2016).
[150] Razumovskiy was from a Cossack family, brother of the Empress' morganatic husband - count Aleksey Razumovskiy.

of 1736-1739 it was the Kalmyks who gained the most notable victories against the Crimean contingents. With no substantial military industry, the frontier hosts had to count on continuous Russian support regarding guns, munitions and funds. This gave great leverage in the hands of the imperial administration and allowed the government to bargain its political and administrative objectives in exchange for more substantial subsidies. The principal military export, apart from manpower, was horses, which were bred in the Pontic Steppe and between the rivers Volga and Yaik. Horsepower was in constant scanty during the Sothern Campaigns and sometimes authorities had to issue and organize several musters of animals to meet the needs of a single year of campaigning.

Regarding battlefield functions, the Cossacks and Kalmyks served as scouts but also as shock cavalry, supplementing the regular dragoon regiments. Unlike the dragoons, however, Peter, and later Minikh, relied solely on the frontiersmen to intercept and raid enemy bases of operation and settlements in the steppe and Dagestan. The Cossacks and Kalmyks earned the trust of the supreme command firstly, because they gained victories on enemy territory and secondly – because much of their payment came from the loot they gathered from the state's opponents.

2.5. The Caucasians

The Caucasus is a classic example of a frontier region, on which multitude case-studies can be carried out in order to understand the complicated nature of frontier societies and the patterns of their development. Ever since Antiquity Caucasus served as the watershed between the grass sea of the Eurasian Steppe, populated by a variety of tribes, and the more settled and centralized kingdoms and empires which rose and fell as ages passed by. Petty mountain kingdoms, tribe confederations and lone city-states emerged and dwindled while they were struggling to retain their independence and to survive in the midst of the constant clashes between nomads and empires. This tremendous duel began with the Cimmerian invasion of Assyria in 705 BC and continued up to the early modern period. During the first half of the eighteenth century the Caucasus was more or less as divided as it is today. Georgians occupied the western parts of the region, forming several petty kingdoms that fell under the influence of the Ottoman and Safavid empires, which used them as buffer states in the religious and political depredations of each other. These were the states of Imereti, Kakheti, Kartli and Mingrelia, which were also flanked by several lesser Georgian states that were tight up in a complex scheme of interdependencies.[151] The Georgian principalities were the closest thing to an early modern state that

[151] The kingdom of Georgia fell apart after a long period of civil unrest. Ever since 1466, the parts of the state were kept apart by its neighboring empires, which feared that a united orthodox monarchy might disrupt the gentile equilibrium between the Suni Ottomans and the Shi'i Safavids. Basically, Kakheti and Kartli were under Safavid influence, while Imereti and Mingrelia, as well as Abkhazia and other Black Sea coastal territories were mastered by Istanbul.

the Caucasians were able to produce. There was some form of national governance such as tax collection and laws, but the medieval feudal system was kept intact, and the gentry possessed a considerable amount of rights and privileges. Georgian lands also included the larger towns and cities in the region such as Tiflis (Tbilisi), Gremi, Telavi and Kutaisi, but by the late seventeenth century, these territories became depopulated due to constant warfare, famine and deportation of serfs. Information on the economic and social development of these states is scarce.[152] Manufacturing and commerce, in the European and Ottoman sense, were almost non-existent since border conflicts were constant and most of the trade routes through the Caucasus were blocked by native mountain tribes. Goods were produced only locally, and export was probably insignificant. Monetary policy was offset by natural barter, and the only economic centers remained the fairs. Only slave trade seemed to flourish thanks to the constant flow of prisoners and captives emanating from strife and confrontation in the Georgian lands.[153] The only other valuable export of the Georgian kingdoms was its battle hardened troops, who served mainly under the banners of the Safavid Empire. Georgian troops were used as an infantry core of field armies and were reported to wield guns, along with other weapons. Late Safavid rulers employed approximately 15,000 Georgians in campaigns against the Afghans in central Asia. The Georgians performed well, given the experience they had accumulated while they were fighting similar foes in the Caucasus.

Unlike the divided kingdoms of the Georgians, the other large Orthodox group in the region, the Armenians, did not possess a state of their own. The territories, populated by the Armenians, were divided between the Safavid and the Ottoman empires according to the treaty of 1639 which split Armenia in half between the two states. The stability that ushered in the following decades provided the basis for reinvigoration of economic and social life in the once devastated and contested areas. Armenian merchant families, who spread their networks across the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, were able to monopolize a large share of the inland trade between the Far East and the West.[154] Penetrating as far as India and Malaya, the Armenian diaspora was able to accumulate considerable amount of goods, specie and prestige. With regard to trade inside Persia and between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf, the Armenians were in a position from which they were able to compete and even overshadow the trading companies of England, the Netherlands and Portugal. Commercial ties with Russia also strengthened with the advent of the seventeenth century. In exchange for a golden throne, given to tsar Aleksey by the Armenian merchants in Persia, the Russian monarch allowed the Armenians

[152] Population of Kutaisi had fallen to only 1000 in 1670, and the once rich coastal towns were inhabited by only a few hundred each. R. G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994), 52
[153] Ibid., 48-52.
[154] S. Payaslian, *The History of Armenia: From the Origins to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 107.

to monopolize the silk trade between Persia and Russia and also permitted the construction of a port on the Volga River to serve as their entrepôt in Russia.[155] Growing economic and cultural potential led to the formation of a national idea of independence from both Muslim monarchies. Russia was perceived as an essential ally in this cause, but negotiations were also conducted with the Papacy. However, by 1739 the only actual attempt to assist the formation of an independent Armenia was Peter's Persian Campaign, and that failed miserably in regard to the Armenian cause. The lack of state and the preference for commerce over strife led to the fact that Armenians did not possess an army of any kind. Their territories were fully incorporated into the Safavid and Ottoman empires, and local garrisons comprised of imperial troops. With the demise and collapse of Safavid rule in the 1720s, Armenians began to self-organize in order to protect their settlements against raging bands, Caucasian tribes and invading Ottoman troops. In 1723, the Armenian *Catholicos* (head of the Armenian Church) Asdvadzadur promised Peter to raise an army of 60,000 to support the Russians in case they cross the Caucasus and enter into Armenia. Although this figure is debatable, Armenian merchants were able to arm and pay for the protection of their cities as it is evident from the work of Abraham of Yerevan. Although they did not manufacture guns and weapons, the Armenians possessed both the money and the trade links to supply armament from both the Ottoman and the Persian empires and even beyond. Their lack of political structure, however, prevented the organization of a capable body of troops which could have any chance of fending off the depredations of the Muslim conquerors.

The last vital and significant element of Caucasian ethos were the mountain tribes and petty states, which were situated on the slopes of the high mountain and in the territories north of the Caucasus, as far as rivers Terek and Kuban. While most of these people were Sunni Muslims, there were frontier societies, which still exercised some pagan practices. Some of these societies even followed the Islam, but in in its unorthodox form, which included some practices from the Shi'i branch and even from Christianity. Sects, sufis, and other mystics, as well as the existing pre-Islamic tradition, played a substantial role in the formation of the frontiersmen’s perception of the world. The Caucasian lands resembled an even more decentralized version of the Crimean khanate: with a ruler, who had almost no authority outside his stronghold and clans who were strugling against each other, while trying to keep imperial influence away from their lands. Ottomans and Safavids claimed some degree of suzerainty to the Caucasian tribes, but it was more a pretense rather than an actual authority. The economy was non-existent apart from the slave trade and the exchange of booty and goods, pillaged from one another or during raids on the lands of Georgia and Armenia. With the advent of Russia, following the conquest of Astrakhan, the Circassians, who had remained Orthodox, separated

[155] Ibid., 108.

from the other predominantly Muslim mountain groups, but neither of them willingly obliged to imperial authority. It was impossible to sustain organized armies. The Caucasians formed bands of several hundred men that bore resemblance to the Ottoman gazi and the early Cossacks. They lived in small, non-permanent settlements, which the Russians referred to as *gorodki* (literary meaning miniature towns). These settlements were protected with a moat or had no fortifications and most of the buildings were no larger than tents. On one occasion, when Russian troops tried to pursue the Caucasians into such a village, the entire population simply left it and fled to the mountains only to return after the departure of the tsar's troops.

Regarding loyalty and support, the Georgians and the Armenians were willing to accept Russian help and authority, but only to a certain degree and with concessions from Russian side. As it turned out, as late as 1739, Russia was unable to penetrate the inner part of the Caucasian land and thus, from the very beginning, any actual cooperation between Russian and local troops was doomed to fail. Nevertheless, the Caucasian Christians continued to rely on the tsar as the leader of Eastern Christianity and the main figure, who could bring unity and independence from the century-long Muslim domination. Unlike their settled neighbors to the west and south, the Caucasian frontiersmen were suspicious of and even hostile to Russia and deemed it as simply another imperial power that threatened their autonomy and freedom.

2.6. Conclusion

Russia’s marches south were destined to meet a large variety of adversaries and only a few friends, with part of the later providing only reluctant assistance to the imperial cause. Russia’s policy in the Pontic region developed hand in hand with the understanding of the southern frontier and the people who inhabited it. As already demonstrated, Russian authorities would build up their experience by combining diplomatic measures with administrative methods and military pressure. This worked in the case of the Cossack and Kalmyk hosts, which were slowly incorporated into the imperial system. The settled societies – the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and the Crimean Khanate, had to be studied carefully, and the foreign policy, conducted toward them had to be woven with more tact rather than pressure.

Both the Ottoman and the Safavid empires possessed a substantial military potential, which could be mustered to protect home territories as well as their client states. While by the end of the seventeenth century Persia began to fall into a state of extensive decline, the Ottoman Empire was able to survive the dramatic setback following the War of the Holy Leagueand to rebuild its military potential to meet the challenges of the eighteenth century. Persia, although weakened demonstrated its vitality under the decisive leadership of Nadir Shah and by 1736 its military establishment had been transformed into a

powerhouse, capable not only of defending the heartlands of the empire but also of striking its neighbors with stunning success.

As for the petty borderland states of the Caucasus, their existence became more and more problematic with the assertion and strengthening of the imperial control. The events in 1722 and 1723 demonstrated that rapid shifts were to be expected not only in borderland states' allegiances but also in those of the empires. Russia would easily exchange Georgia and Armenia for the control over the Caspian coast while the Ottomans were more than willing to let the northerners ravage Crimea while their possessions in Budjak and Kaffa were left unharmed during the War of 1736-1739. This salvaging of local political and military resources for the profit of grand strategy had an undermining effect on the frontier societies, which led to their eventual downfall in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.