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### Imperial Geography and War The Ottoman Case

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PREMODERN EMPIRES in southeastern Europe and western Asia, with the Ottomans being the last in a succession of empires that controlled territories in both regions,<sup>1</sup> were big territorial entities, and as such more diverse in terms of physical and human geography than the modern nation-states. Physical geography, which will be the focus of this chapter, is an important factor that affected imperial government in a number of ways. For instance, the distance of a province from the seat of power, as well as its accessibility, could affect the level of imperial control over it; divisions could emerge within the ruling elite on the basis of its members' geographical backgrounds; the expansion or defense of the imperial territory depended on geographical and other environmental factors; etc. Geography also was a means through which the administration conceptualized the realm: one may consider, for instance, in the case of the Ottoman Empire, the division by geographical region of some types of registers of the central administration, such as the *ahkâm defterleri*, or the concurrent appointment of two officials (such as the *Rumeli* and *Anadolu kazaskers*) at the same post, one for the European and another for the Asian territories as divided by sea from the Black Sea down to the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, territorial expansion is often intrinsically woven in the fabric of empires, especially if they claim to be world empires. Since war is the basic method for achieving expansion, the aim of my chapter is to use the Ottoman Empire as a case study for discussing war from the point of view of imperial geography, or, in other words, for exploring how war connects with geography

<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, the Ottoman Empire is described as “early modern” rather than “pre-modern”; my selection of term here does not negate the usefulness of studying the Ottoman Empire as an early modern state.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brummett 2007:47–49.

in the imperial context. The concept of “geography” as I use it in this chapter, revolves around “space,” by which I mean the natural, but also the human, environment (terrain, climatic conditions, cultures, etc.). However, space is also associated with other notions, such as “distance,” “time,” and “movement,” and I will also take these into consideration. As for the concept of “empire,” what I am principally interested in is the exercise of power and the political relationship between the imperial center and the territories over which it rules. Finally, what I conceptualize as “imperial geography” is how geography is politicized, so to speak, within an empire, or the interweaving of imperial politics with geography. This includes, on the one hand, how diverse regions become a territorial political entity that is perceived by the imperial government as being composed of a center and a number of provinces, and on the other hand, the impact that geographical factors can have on imperial authority in terms of policy- and decision-making and implementation, as well as political control.

In chronological terms, I will cover the long period from the early centuries of the Ottoman Empire until the proclamation, in 1839, of the *Tanzimat*. This event marks a break in Ottoman history, since it is the official declaration by the sultan of the decision of the government that the “traditional,” premodern, Ottoman institutional framework had to be altered, so that the empire could adjust to the requirements of West-dominated modernity and be “elevated” to the status of a respected modern state within the European state system. However, I will more particularly refer to the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

To give a few examples of questions that can be formulated on the basis of my introductory remarks, how did geography affect the conduct of war by the Ottoman Empire, and in what ways was it important? How did the empire mobilize men and collect animals, munitions, and provisions from its extensive and heterogeneous territories in times of war? What were the political implications of the fact that during war the leadership of the empire did or was expected to leave the imperial capital and move to the war front? What were the consequences of territorial expansion or contraction through war in political, social, and economic terms? I do not claim to be able to make categorical statements for or provide comprehensive answers to all these questions; rather I will make suggestions and hopefully demonstrate that the joint examination of the concepts of “war,” “geography,” and “empire” may throw light on certain aspects of imperial rule, such as methods of government, coordination of forces, use of resources, and center-periphery relations.

The most obvious geographical aspects of war are, on the one hand, that it is intended to result (and very often eventually does result) in territorial gains for the winners and losses for the defeated, and on the other hand, that it is a localized phenomenon. The latter aspect refers to the fact that war usually

concerns (in reality or in the minds of those who plan and carry it out) specific regions as war zones, or lands to conquer or defend, even though it indirectly affects a much wider area than the one where military action takes place. But obviously there are many more aspects to the interrelationship between empire, geography, and war. First of all, war forces the state to mobilize troops, and collect wartime taxes, provisions, ammunitions, and animals from its provinces. Second, the state needs to march the troops and their animals over long distances and varied geographical settings. Third, in imperial campaigns the head of the empire or a high-standing official (in the Ottoman case, often the sultan, or his deputy, the grand vizier) has to lead the troops, which means that he has to abandon his peacetime governmental routine and place of residence in the capital. Fourth, war is an instance when the imperial authority seeks and has to reaffirm the loyalty of its subjects from all over the empire, which is particularly important especially when regular or urgent war needs require good timing or impose strict deadlines; as such, war is an instance when the various ethnic and religious groups across the imperial domains have to be convinced or forced to coordinate their efforts, under the command of the state, for the benefit of the empire.

In the words of John A. Hall and G. John Ikenberry, “the state’s most important institution is that of the means of violence and coercion.”<sup>3</sup> War is an institutionalized form of violence *par excellence*, and one that is usually justified and glorified through the invocation of higher ideals and the projection of role models, although, when stripped of its embellishments, it can clearly be described as what Charles Tilly had provocatively called a form of “organized crime.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, war was one of the relatively few fields (especially in comparison with the modern state) in which the premodern state, including empires, was active; the Ottomans did not deviate from this norm.

Empires, in particular, as a specific type of state with universalist claims, come into being and exist through expansion, and expansion is closely linked to conquest; in this respect, the formation, and sometimes the institutions and the elites of empires rest on war.<sup>5</sup> With a (generous) touch of sensationalism, we may claim that the history of the Ottoman Empire is interwoven with war. The first mention of the Ottomans in a Byzantine source (Pachymeres) is the battle of Bapheus in Bithynia (northwestern Anatolia). For centuries, the empire was dreaded by Christian Europe for its formidable military might to which it

<sup>3</sup> Hall and Ikenberry 1989:1–2.

<sup>4</sup> Tilly 1985.

<sup>5</sup> For the association of empires with universalism, militarism, violence, and conquest, see, for instance, Howe 2002:13–18.

owed its expansion, and it was time and again suggested that the Ottomans could only be defeated by a coalition of powers, and not by a single state.<sup>6</sup> Over its long history, the empire was involved in many successful and unsuccessful campaigns, land and sea battles, sieges, and raids against many different enemies, and quite a few among the wars in which it was engaged left their mark on the power, prestige, and reputation of the sultans who were associated with them. Poor performance in war in the course of the eighteenth century alarmed the Ottoman leadership as to the need for reforms, and it was military reform that inaugurated the wider Westernizing institutional reforms of the nineteenth century. Finally, the end of the empire came about as a result of its participation and defeat in the First World War.<sup>7</sup>

The official image of the ideal sultan, as the head of state, was for long that of a warrior who personally led his troops to battle,<sup>8</sup> while the state personnel, both military and civilian, were collectively described as the *askeri* (the military), which reflects their original identity and purpose. Thus, for instance, the Ottoman provincial administration was a by-product of (or largely coincided with) the mechanism through which the state raised its provincial troops.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, territorial expansion was crucial for the increase of the resources of the state, and, subsequently, of the posts and income that it could allocate to its officials.

On the whole, the army was an important institution of the Ottoman state and one that in many respects (from recruitment to the timely payment of the soldiers' wages to checking the political influence of the military) required a considerable amount of attention and energy from the state leadership, regardless of whether the empire was at peace or at war. The Ottoman army was an unequivocally Islamic army, which officially was motivated by faith in Islam, and waged holy war (*gaza, jihad*) on the infidels and the heretics. This exclusivist ideology did not allow much space for admitting in large numbers the many non-Muslim subjects of the empire to the army. Even though until the seventeenth century the janissary infantry was manned principally through the recruitment of Christians, those were forcibly converted to Islam before they could join this corps. The Christian *sipahis* of particularly the early Ottoman centuries gradually became extinct, and overall non-Muslim participation in

<sup>6</sup> Valensi 2000:25; Marsigli 1732:II 199.

<sup>7</sup> Maps that show the stages of expansion and dismemberment of empires, while also indicating the sites of major battles, campaign routes, and raids, are an expression of the association that is generally made between territorial changes and war (for the Ottoman Empire, see Pitcher 1972; İnalçık 1973:24–25; İnalçık with Quataert 1994:xxxiv; Kennedy 2002:47b, 48; cf. Ebel 2008:6, who makes a similar comment).

<sup>8</sup> Imber 2002:118–120; but for the eighteenth century, see Zilfi, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Imber 2002:177–215.

the Ottoman army gradually became rather marginal, and usually concerned men in auxiliary capacities.<sup>10</sup>

Even though the Ottoman state was in principle a military state, the Ottoman society was not meant to be a militarized society. The state aimed at controlling the access of the tax-paying non-*askeri* population, the *reaya* (the flock), to guns;<sup>11</sup> and because of the Islamic character of the state, the prohibition to bear weapons applied even more strictly to the non-Muslims, the *zimmi*s. However, in actual practice, the distinction between *askeri* and *reaya* was often not as clear-cut as the state would have had it be: for instance, the *reaya* subjects of the sultan were formally called up and provided military services to the state throughout Ottoman history, and from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, especially through the increasing infiltration of the janissary ranks by *reaya*, being *askeri* gradually ceased to automatically signal true elite and military status. Moreover, Ottoman archival sources suggest that, in spite of the state's ban on the ownership of weapons by the *reaya*, this was a widespread phenomenon,<sup>12</sup> even among the non-Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

## Ottoman Imperial Geography and War

War is not a mere series of military engagements, but a complex phenomenon that can be and has been analyzed from many different perspectives. If viewed from a spatial angle, the impact of geographical factors on waging war cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, there is a strong political side to war, since it is associated with the goals and interests of states, including power and prestige. My intention here is to examine the interaction and interrelation of the geographical and the political aspects of war in the context of the Ottoman imperial polity. One may consider, for instance, the fortresses, the gunpowder and munitions factories, and the post-stations that formed networks that extended all over the Ottoman Empire, all the way from the imperial center to the frontier.<sup>14</sup> These can be treated as mere infrastructure that was technically necessary for the successful waging of war, but at the same time they were markers of imperial presence that were spread over long distances and varied territories, and suggested sovereignty and efficacy. Frontier fortresses in particular were

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Marsigli 1732:I 85–86, 101–102, 145; Stein 2007:89–93; Sfyroeras 1968. For French soldiers who fought for the Ottomans in the course of the 1593–1606 war against the Habsburgs, see Finkel 1988:107–109.

<sup>11</sup> İnalçık 1975:195–196.

<sup>12</sup> İnalçık 1975:195–198; but for firearms, see Jennings 1980.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Pylia 2001:91–92; Stathis 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Heywood 1980; Heywood 1996; Ágoston 2005; Stein 2007.

statements of sovereignty which, on the one hand, guaranteed the security of the population in the interior, and on the other hand, served as a warning or threat to external enemies; their aim was predominantly defensive, but they were also used as bases for raids and attacks, or campaigns, against the enemy territory. Thus, they were outposts that communicated the center's authority over lands hundreds of miles away from it.

During its long history, the Ottoman Empire was engaged in many land and naval military campaigns, some of which to destinations very far away from the seat of power and the "core" provinces of the empire (i.e. central and western Anatolia and the southern and central Balkans): Egypt, Iran, Hungary, Vienna, Malta, India, and many more. (A catalog of raids also includes such places as the environs of Venice and the coasts of France and Spain.) Military campaigns are by definition related to movement, and thus space and geography. This relationship is apparent in all the stages of a campaign, even in its beginning: the official starting point of an imperial campaign changed depending on its destination (usually, Üsküdar, on the Asian coast opposite Istanbul, when campaigning in Asia, and Edirne, in Thrace, when campaigning in Europe). To reach its eventual destination and confront the enemy, the army often had to march very long distances over diverse geographical and climatic zones,<sup>15</sup> which took weeks or months.<sup>16</sup> This posed serious problems in particular to the provincial timariot *sipahi* corps, as its members were remunerated through the collection of largely agrarian taxes, and ideally wished to be back to their base districts at the specific time when these taxes, especially the tithe, had to be collected. This could prove impossible when they had to fight hundreds or thousands of miles away from their homes, or when wars dragged on for two consecutive campaigning seasons and they were made to spend the winter near the front.<sup>17</sup>

Because the campaign season started in spring and ended in autumn (due to the technology available at the time), it was not unusual for the Ottoman army to be forced to lift sieges and discontinue campaigns because otherwise it would be impossible to overcome distance and bad weather and road conditions in order to return to its base. The most famous example is perhaps the lifting of the siege of Vienna by Süleyman the Magnificent in mid-October 1529, as winter was kicking in.<sup>18</sup> However, in order to better understand the importance of geography and weather, it may suffice to point out that, whereas winter, rain, and snow were a threat for Süleyman in central Europe, thirteen

<sup>15</sup> On its part, the fleet sailed extremely long distances only in the sixteenth century, but even sailing the eastern Mediterranean or the Black Sea was not a negligible feat.

<sup>16</sup> Finkel 1988:66; Murphey 1999:65–67.

<sup>17</sup> Veinstein 1983; Finkel 1988:56, 309.

<sup>18</sup> Finkel 2006:124–125.

years earlier, in 1516, in a very different geographic setting, winter and rain were not a problem when his father, Selim I, decided to campaign from Syria against the Mamluks of Egypt. The march southwards started on December 15, and in this case the rain facilitated rather than obstructed the march of the army through the desert.<sup>19</sup> It was, therefore, important for the marching army to correctly assess the terrain and the weather conditions, but also to maintain a pace that would be quick enough to allow it to reach the front in time and yet would not exhaust the soldiers and the animals before getting there. It also had to be taken into account that the army would need to march back home or to its winter quarters at the end of the season and/or the campaign.<sup>20</sup> Good planning and an effective leadership apart, the terrain, the weather conditions, the feeding capacity, and the human geography of the land were factors with a crucial contribution to this. Moreover, the selection of where to set camp also was very important, which again highlights the centrality of geographical and environmental factors. Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (1658–1730), a military man himself and an eyewitness observer of Ottoman military practice, noted that a camp should absolutely have access to water, forage, and wood, and be safe from enemy attacks.<sup>21</sup>

Marsigli distinguished three phases in the march of the Ottoman army. The first phase was the gathering of the troops from all over the empire at the location that had been arranged by the central authorities to be their meeting point; but he was quick to point out that he did not consider this a proper military march, since the troops did not arrive there in a disciplined manner. The second phase was the solemn parade of the military forces before the commander of the army, whether the sultan or another high-standing official. The last phase was, in Marsigli's view, the real march, and included the movement of troops from one place where they had camped to the next or to the location where they were expected to meet the enemy; there were four categories that moved or had to be carried in the context of this march: infantry, cavalry, artillery, and baggage. Geography, time, and thus correct scheduling, were important in all three phases; for instance, Marsigli noted that when a campaign to Hungary was organized, the troops who came from farthest away (he specified this as "Egypt and Asia") had to depart first from their places of origin and move faster than troops who came from places nearer the meeting point. Furthermore, he

<sup>19</sup> Emecen 2009:411–412.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Forster and Daniell 1881:I 219.

<sup>21</sup> Marsigli:II 72. The Ottoman imperial camp had its own micro-geography reflecting the hierarchical position of and the military value attributed to the various officers and units of which the army was composed, with the tent of the army commander positioned at the center. Likewise, the spatial arrangements of the Ottoman battle formation reflected the relative value of the various units, with the most expendable military forces placed at the front (Marsigli:II 72f.).

indicated the standard itineraries of troops to the meeting point, depending on where they had started from, which can help us visualize the simultaneous movement of troops from different locations across the empire to a common destination in the context of what must have amounted to an operation of gigantic proportions.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the imperial camp and the troops that belonged to it were a mobile population that was intended not only to fight but also to convey the message of imperial power and unity to the subjects of the sultan as it crossed the empire. However, on the other hand, disciplining the army during war is a serious challenge for every state. Apart from Marsigli's first phase described above, deserters, gangs of armed men who tried to benefit from the confusion of war, and disorderly troops that returned from a lost battle or an unsuccessful campaign turned the image of a glorious imperial army on its head; their behavior left a negative mark on the human geography of the lands that they crossed, as the reports of the Venetian consuls of Salonica in the second half of the eighteenth century suggest.<sup>23</sup>

The movement of troops is inconceivable without maps, or reconnaissance and preparation of the terrain so that it becomes passable or fordable (in the case of rivers).<sup>24</sup> The Ottomans were generally interested in mapmaking, with the works of people like Piri Reis (sixteenth century) and Ebubekir Dimişki (seventeenth century) being among the best-known examples. However, the use of geographical works and maps outside the palace and elite circles has not been positively ascertained, while maps were not always produced with a view to serving practical needs in the way that modern maps do.<sup>25</sup> Even though concrete information about the actual use of maps and sea charts during campaigns is almost nonexistent, there is evidence that suggests that maps and geographical works were used for practical military purposes. For instance, the grand vizier Kara Mustafa Pasha ordered a description of Hungary and Germany from Willem and Joan Blaeus's *Atlas Maior* ahead of departing for the campaign against Vienna in 1683.<sup>26</sup> There are also maps on silk, which appeared in the late eighteenth century and had military use.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Ottoman campaign journals contain notes about rivers, streams, and irrigation canals.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the imperial elite could use the maps as succinct and easy to grasp depictions of the empire, as well as of imperial political projects that were to be achieved

<sup>22</sup> Marsigli 1732: II 105–117; cf. Káldy-Nagy 1977:174–183.

<sup>23</sup> Mertzios 1947:404–418; cf. Faroqhi 2004:115; Finkel 1988:49.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Emecen 2009:412.

<sup>25</sup> Hagen 2000:191–192; Hagen 2006b:534–535.

<sup>26</sup> Hagen 2000:192; Hagen 2006a:233.

<sup>27</sup> Goodrich 1993:127.

<sup>28</sup> Murphey 1999:67. For more on Ottoman maps and their military use, see Soucek 2008; Brummett 2007:esp. 46–47, 50–54; Hagen 2006a:227–233; Faroqhi 2004:179–180; Marsigli 1732:I 97–98.

through war, and as such maps were brought to the attention of the monarch. For instance, it has been proposed that a map of Kiev and its vicinity was part of a proposal to the sultan to organize a campaign against it and conquer it, and that a map of Malta belonged to a report that was submitted to the sultan regarding the progress of the Ottoman campaign against this Mediterranean island in 1565.<sup>29</sup>

The Ottomans also used advance forces to scout enemy territory and prepare the terrain.<sup>30</sup> The technology of the day sometimes made delays in the march of the army unavoidable, particularly when bridges had to be built over rivers. However, as might be expected, within the Ottoman territory, the imperial campaigns followed specific, fixed, and thus familiar, routes.<sup>31</sup> Basically, on a wider scale, the combination of various geographical and environmental factors, in conjunction with the technology available at the time, determined to a great extent the realistic limits of Ottoman military expansion.

Stripped of its military context, the march of the army may be treated as a form of geographical exploration, in terms of both natural and human geography, as soldiers move to new regions, come across new landscapes, and become acquainted with new cultures. The sixteenth-century illustrated works of Matrakçı Nasuh can be seen as the end product of such an exploration: the author had eyewitness experience of a considerable proportion of the urban and rural landscapes that are included in his works, as he participated himself in at least two imperial campaigns. It should also be noted that Matrakçı's works were prepared for an elite readership and constituted, as majestic depictions of the empire's territories, a celebration of imperial grandeur and military success, but were at the same time intended for practical use.<sup>32</sup> Another example of an illustrated work that was presented to the sultan is the *Şeca'atname* by Asafi Dal Mehmed Çelebi, which celebrates the military leadership of Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha on the eastern front in 1578–1585. In this work, the author describes, for instance, the oil pits in Baku,<sup>33</sup> while the 77 miniatures depict towns, castles, forts, and landscapes.

Keep in mind, however, that geography was not crucial in war only in relation to the march of troops. There were also two other important political aspects to it. One is the geographical distribution of the military forces in peacetime, and the other is how the state recruited men and collected animals, provisions, and munitions for its military campaigns.

<sup>29</sup> Karamustafa 1992:210–213.

<sup>30</sup> Káldy-Nagy 1977:171–173; Finkel 1988:65; Murphey 1999:23–24, 66–68, 109, 126, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Finkel 1988:63–66.

<sup>32</sup> Yurdaydın 1991; Rogers 1992:235f.; Yurdaydın 2003; Brummett 2007:50–54 and n77; Ebel 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Özcan 2007:LXXIX, 242–243.

In terms of the geographical distribution of forces in peacetime, the military forces of the Ottomans were scattered across the realm, but a distinction was maintained between central and provincial troops. The central standing army, namely, the janissaries, and the horsemen and other corps of the Porte, differed from the rest of the army in a number of characteristics that we do not need to analyze here. For our purposes, it suffices to note that, in their great mass, they were stationed where the sultan was based, which was Istanbul from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. On the other hand, the majority of the troops came from the periphery (principally, the marches in the early period and the provinces in later times). The provincial governors, that is, state appointees, were the commanders of only some of these forces, while others were led by individuals who did not directly or fully depend on sultanic appointment for their power. These included the so-called lords of the frontiers (*uç begleri*) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the Muslim provincial notables (*ayan*) in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup>

The janissaries constitute an interesting case in the context of this discussion, because the establishment of janissary garrisons outside Istanbul and the great rise in their numbers from the late sixteenth century onwards meant that eventually even they, the central troops *par excellence*, were distributed across the empire. Formally, the imperial troops that were stationed in the provinces represented central state authority and symbolized the presence of the state in the lives of its subjects. But, in reality, distance hindered effective control of the troops from the center and prevented the constant reaffirmation of their bond with it, which led to their gradual integration into and identification with the local communities where they lived; the infiltration of the ranks of the janissaries by the *reaya*, as noted above, but also the participation of the janissaries in the local urban guilds, were aspects of this phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> Thus, geographical expansion resulted in the breach of the official dichotomy of society between the *askeri* and the *reaya*. For its part, the central state insisted on maintaining the separation between central and provincial troops even when the janissary regiments were established in greater numbers in the provinces. Thus, an official distinction was introduced between imperial (*dergâh-ı âli*) and local (*yerli*) janissaries, that is, between those regiments based in the provinces which, in principle, were sent from Istanbul and those that, again in principle, were staffed locally.

In other words, the distinction between central and provincial troops suggests that the location where the various troops were stationed was not a

<sup>34</sup> On the military organization of the Ottomans, see Murphey 1999, Imber 2002:252–317, Aksan 2007. On the role of the *ayan* during war, see, for instance, Nagata 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond 1991; Greene 2000:33–44.

mere matter of geographical positioning, but bore political connotations and implications mainly in terms of the power relations between the center and the periphery, but also in terms of the relation of the troops to the ruler. Thus, the creation of the janissary corps is generally attributed by historians to the need of the sultans to have a personal army as a counterweight to the troops of the lords of the frontiers, who were not always ready to submit unquestioningly to the will of the sultan. In other words, it happened at a time when the distinction between a geographical and political center and a periphery, as well as between a superior central authority and subordinate lords and officials, was coming into being.<sup>36</sup> In a way, this balance of power between the center and the provinces followed the opposite direction in later times, most markedly at around the turn of the nineteenth century, when some powerful *ayan* were able to question the absolute authority of the sultan in the areas that they controlled.<sup>37</sup> Part of this ability rested on their capacity to raise and maintain troops.

Coming now to the second issue suggested above, war made necessary the raising of men, animals, funds, and provisions from a vast area, which practically required the involvement of the Ottoman population at large in the war effort.<sup>38</sup> This operation—which was huge and complicated, considering the size of both the army and the empire—had two aspects. One was technical (in that it was administrative and organizational), and centered on forward planning with a view to getting the troops to gather at the right time, at the right place, in the right number and composition, with the right quantities of provisions and ammunitions, and the right number of animals of various sorts (such as horses, camels, and water buffaloes). In major campaigns, the size of the imperial camp reached tens of thousands of men, that is, the equivalent of a major city by the standards of that era, and it should not be overlooked that such a number of men also needed tens of thousands of animals to go along.<sup>39</sup> The case of the district of Karaferye, in the southern Balkans, in the course of the 1768–1774 war between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, can give us an idea of the expectations of the state from its provinces during war in the second half of the eighteenth century. Karaferye was not near the actual war zones, but was dramatically affected by the war. The district was required to dispatch soldiers and auxiliary troops (for whom local notables acted as commanders, or guarantors towards the state regarding their reliability and discipline), as well as ox carts, water buffaloes, and camels, and also to deliver provisions (such as flour and sacks for the baking,

<sup>36</sup> Kafadar 1995:111–113, 138–150; Finkel 2006:75.

<sup>37</sup> Moutaftchieva 2005; Yayıoğlu 2008:192–293.

<sup>38</sup> On raising and paying the troops and provisioning the army, see the useful analyses of Finkel 1988, Murphey 1999:esp. 85–103, and Aksan 2007:esp. 67–75, 142–151.

<sup>39</sup> Forster and Daniell 1881:I 219.

storage, and transportation of hardtack) either for the army in the war front, or for troops and officials passing through the district (who required considerable quantities of foodstuff, firewood, packhorses, etc.). Obviously, all of these demands placed a heavy financial burden on the local population. Around half of the entries of the surviving registers of the local court of justice from this period are related to the war. It is also interesting to note that it took weeks, or even months, for an imperial decree to reach the Karaferye court of law, which doubled as the administrative center of the district. This meant that, if orders for war were to be in the hands of their recipients around the empire in time, they had to be issued well ahead of the actual beginning of the provincial troops' campaign season in March—and sometimes as early as the end of the previous September.<sup>40</sup>

The other aspect of recruitment and provisioning was political: attaining the recruitment and provisions goals that the state set in its many decrees was not simply a matter of good organizational and administrative skills, but also of testing and proving the taxpaying population's loyalty and obedience to the empire. Wars are major "imperial projects,"<sup>41</sup> and the subjects of the empire have to cooperate with the central authorities if they are to be, at least organizationally, successful. For instance, one may find many Ottoman decrees that demand the immediate execution of orders that were being sent for the second time, because their recipients had failed to carry them out the first time that they were issued. Such documents suggest that the state was not always able to impose its will on its population, and that there was considerable space for negotiation, as the massive use of coercion across the empire in order to force the loyalty of the population was both technically impossible and counterproductive (if only for the fear of generating reaction by the population subjected to it).<sup>42</sup> A sultanic decree of 1772 provides some evidence on the weakness of the center towards its provinces. The state had previously ordered the local *ayan* and the wealthy inhabitants of Karaferye to finance the dispatch of 300 foot soldiers to the imperial army. However, as the local Christians complained in a petition that they submitted to the central authorities, the *ayan* collected the money for these troops from them, contrary to what the sultan had stipulated.<sup>43</sup> Then the *ayan* were ordered to return the money to the Christians, and were warned that if it had not been for the war, they would have been severely punished

<sup>40</sup> Anastasopoulos 1999:142–161.

<sup>41</sup> I borrow the term "imperial project" from Sinopoli 2001:197.

<sup>42</sup> Aksan 2007:47; Anastasopoulos 1999:157–158; cf. Finkel 1988:51.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Mertzios 1947:419.

(as would the local judge for tolerating their illegal behavior).<sup>44</sup> My argument is that distance and the vastness of the Ottoman territories were factors that facilitated such oppressive acts, but also any other (malicious or benign) act of disobedience, and thus increased the bargaining potential of the imperial subjects vis-à-vis the state. Furthermore, war conditions made the latter more lenient towards such phenomena of disregard for its orders, since priority was given to obtaining the necessary men and provisions. Besides, the fact that each year Istanbul received very many petitions from very many districts about oppression meant that the state could not possibly deal proactively with each single one of them, and largely hoped that the issuing of a decree and possibly the dispatch of an envoy would suffice to secure the desired solution.

The bargaining limits of the state were tested by the combination of geography with war in another respect, as well. Difficult terrains and harsh campaigning conditions were important agents that could give rise to unrest among the soldiery, and possibly result in rebellion, and destabilization of the position of even the sultan. There are many cases that demonstrate that the army leadership needed to be flexible and able to find the fine balance between imposing discipline through coercion and negotiating with the mass of the army.<sup>45</sup> Maybe the best-known case involves the problems that Selim I had with his troops during and after the successful campaign against the Safavids and the battle of Chaldiran in 1514. The janissaries first mutinied on the way to Chaldiran, and a few months later refused to spend the winter in Karabakh, too far away from their base, with a view to a new campaign. The reason for the two mutinies was that the troops had experienced a very long march (some maybe up to 1,500 miles) under difficult environmental conditions, harsh terrains (which included barren lands devoid of grass and water), and lack of provisions. The conditions were aggravated by the scorched-earth tactics of the Safavids and their avoiding battle until the Ottoman army was exhausted and led to a location, like Chaldiran, that presumably was thought to be advantageous to the Safavids. Despite being nicknamed “the Grim” (Yavuz) and being notorious for his violent disposition, Selim was forced in the first case to placate the mutineers and talk them into continuing the march, and in the second to accede to their demands, retreat to Ottoman territory, and cancel the campaign.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Vasdravelles 1954:200–202. The original entry can be found in *Karaferye Sicil* vol. 93/page 353/entry 2 (evail-i Ramazan 1186 / 26 November–5 December 1772). The Ottoman judicial registers (*sicil*) of *Karaferye* are kept at the Imathia branch of the General State Archives of Greece in Veroia.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Finkel 1988:12–13.

<sup>46</sup> Shaw 1976:81; Uğur 1985:104, 126–127, 245–246, 248–249, 251–253, 272, 274; Murphey 1999:134–135; Varlık 1993:193–194; Emecen 2009:409–410, 413.

Another cause of disobedience and rebellion as an expression of the political repercussions of war was territorial losses as a consequence of military defeat. For instance, the English ambassador in Istanbul reported that, during the revolt against Mustafa II in 1703, one of the accusations that the rebels voiced against the sultan was that he had lost territory to the infidel Christians by accepting to negotiate and sign peace treaties with them to this end, which rendered him unworthy of keeping his throne.<sup>47</sup> Besides, defeat in war and the loss of territories had at that same time an impact on Ottoman mentality and attitude towards war, expressed, for instance, in the hesitation of one section of the governing elite to embroil the empire in further wars. This is apparent particularly in the early decades of the eighteenth century, following defeat in the war of 1684–1699. And, of course, territorial losses resulted in movements of populations (refugees and settlers), cultural changes, and social unrest.

Finally, a political side effect of a different kind was produced by the fact that the Ottoman sultan was expected to lead the troops to battle in person. Thus, as a consequence of war, the locus of central decision-making had to be moved from the capital to the front, while, at the same time, a prince, who normally served as a governor in a provincial district, was summoned to the capital in order to substitute for his father, the sultan.<sup>48</sup> The displacement of the seat of authority was reflected in the imperial decrees (*fermans*), which during war did not bear Istanbul as the place of their issuing but the location where the imperial camp was. In the seventeenth century and later, this practice persisted, even though usually the sultans no longer led the troops to battle. Thus, decrees coming from the imperial camp still were *fermans* issued in the name of the sovereign. But, in this way, a curious dichotomy came into being: as a physical presence the sultan was in Istanbul (or elsewhere, such as Edirne, the preferred city of various sultans), but as the head of state he symbolically was wherever the imperial camp and his troops were.<sup>49</sup> Generally speaking, at this later period, the sultan often only reviewed his troops and maybe symbolically led them out of the walls of Istanbul,<sup>50</sup> or, maybe he led the army up to a safe point mid-way between the capital and the war front, as did Mehmed IV, who waited in Belgrade, while his grand vizier Kara Mustafa besieged Vienna in 1683.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Abou-El-Haj 1984:22, 71–72; cf. Faroqhi 2004:117. It has to be pointed out, nevertheless, that the fact that this claim is only reported through a Western source may justifiably give rise to doubts about its accuracy.

<sup>48</sup> For the case of Selim I and prince Süleyman, see Uğur 1985:236, 244.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Vasdravelles 1954:41–42; Anastasopoulos 1999:144–145; cf. Kolovos 2004:300 and n18.

<sup>50</sup> Zilfi 1993:185.

<sup>51</sup> Finkel 2006:284–287.

## Conclusion

In an era when, in the words of Tilly, “any state that failed to put considerable effort into war making was likely to disappear,”<sup>52</sup> an extensive territory with abundant human, natural, and financial resources gave its ruler advantage over his competitors.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, being efficient at extracting resources from a vast territory without possessing an extensive, competent, and well-staffed administrative apparatus, and with the technological limitations of the premodern or the early modern era, was a challenging problem for the central state authorities not only of the Ottoman Empire, but of every empire of its time.

Geography, distance, terrain, climate, and weather, were all factors that played a part in the success or failure of military campaigns, and made their appearance in all the phases of the war effort: preparation, troop provisioning, speed and ease of army movement, battle engagement or siege, and return home. Nevertheless, geography was not merely a natural agent, but had an important secondary political dimension: the distant (in psychological, but for many provinces also in physical terms) center of power, which during war formally had moved from the capital to the imperial camp near or beyond the frontiers, issued decrees through which it made demands, often urgent ones, in trying to address needs that arose from the progress of war. In this respect, geography—much more dramatically in times of war than in peacetime—was one of the factors which put to the test the capacity of the empire to show itself to be administratively and militarily efficient, and also to obtain its subjects’ obedience to and/or acquiescence with its commands. To put it in different terms, war was about logistics, but it also was about power and prestige. A well-run war suggested a well-run empire; and geography was a factor that had an impact on both war and imperial administration.

<sup>52</sup> Tilly 1985:184.

<sup>53</sup> On the admiration of the Venetian ambassadors in Istanbul for the resources and riches available to the Ottoman sultans, see Valensi 2000:35–40.

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Figure 2: Tiflis and its environs: illustration from the chapter of the *Şecâ'atnâme* about the conquest of Tiflis by Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha in the late sixteenth century.

Source: Abdülkadir Özcan (ed.), Âsafî Dal Mehmed Çelebi (Bey, Paşa). *Şecâ'atnâme. Özdemiroğlu Osman Paşa'nın Şark Seferleri* (1578–1585). Istanbul: Çamlica, 2007, 35 (folio 18r.). The original manuscript is kept at the Library of the University of Istanbul (T.Y., No. 6043).



Figure 3: Map (detail) of the Ottoman Empire that indicates janissary garrisons in frontier fortresses around 1680 (Co: company; So.: soldiers). The map has been drawn on the basis of a map by Ebubekir Dimişki.

Source: Luigi Marsigli, *L'état militaire de l'Empire ottoman*. The Hague-Amsterdam, 1732 (reprint: Graz: Akadem. Druck- u. Verlagsanst., 1972).