New Trends in Ottoman Studies

Papers presented at the 20th CIÉPO Symposium
Rethymno, 27 June – 1 July 2012

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University of Crete – Department of History and Archaeology
Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas –
Institute for Mediterranean Studies

Rethymno 2014



University of Crete, Department of History and Archaeology
Rethymno campus, 741 00 Rethymno, Greece,
e-mail: history-archaeology@ia.uoc.gr,
tel.: +30 2831077337, fax: +30 2831077338,
http://www.history-archaeology.uoc.gr

Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas,
Institute for Mediterranean Studies
P.O. Box 119, 741 00 Rethymno, Greece,
e-mail: info@ims.forth.gr,
tel.: +30 2831056627, fax: +30 2831025810,
http://www.ims.forth.gr

Cover: Ntina Ganti
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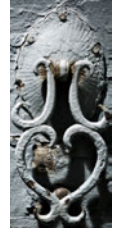
New Trends in Ottoman Studies: Papers presented at the 20th CIÉPO Symposium, Rethymno, 27 June – 1 July 2012 is a joint e-publication of the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Crete and the Institute for Mediterranean Studies of the Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas.

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ISBN 978-960-93-6188-0



OTTOMAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE MILITARY REFORMS OF TIPU SULTAN AND ŞAHİN GİRAY

Kahraman Şakul*

The question of military reform in Ottoman history is a highly tendentious issue. As the story goes, several unsuccessful attempts at Western-style military reform finally culminated in the mass destruction of the Janissaries in Istanbul in 1826. The abolition of the Janissaries proved to be a new departure, for it enabled the state to establish a modern army with European uniforms, drill and discipline. However the question of possible non-Western models for the Ottoman military has not been sufficiently addressed up to now. The Egyptian Muslim army of Muhammad Ali Pasha, which fought the Greek revolutionaries successfully in 1825, was such a model. Its influence on the Ottoman reformers is vaguely known. For one thing, it persuaded the public opinion in Istanbul of the permissibility of imitating European military organization, and Mahmud II capitalized the change when abolishing the Janissaries. However, neither the Egyptians nor the Ottomans were the first Muslim powers to experiment with Western-inspired military reforms in the 18th century. Şahin Giray, the Khan of the short-lived independent Crimean Khanate, as well as Hyder Ali and his son, Tipu Sultan, who ruled over the Kingdom of Mysore, undertook serious military reform along Western lines with a certain degree of success. So it is interesting to take a look on the Ottoman reactions against the military reforms undertaken by these two Muslim states.

The Ottomans had mixed feelings about these rulers and their endeavors. They regarded Şahin Giray as a puppet of the Russian tsarina, Catherine II, and detested his military reforms as a means of Russianizing the Tatars. Con-

* Assistant Professor, İstanbul Şehir University, Department of History, kahramansakul@sehir.edu.tr

versely, they admired the very same military reforms undertaken in Mysore and showed great respect to the Indian envoy in Istanbul. While the Ottoman reformers suffered a great deal from the harsh criticisms based on religion and tradition, they did not hesitate to accentuate the very same criticisms against Şahin Giray. This indicates that what was at stake was not so much upholding religion and tradition as real political objectives. Religion and tradition supplied the critics with a powerful language and meaningful terminology and thus constituted the repertoire of contention for different political factions.

The dynasty of the Tipus was renowned for the successful wars it had waged against the British in the 1780s, thanks to its army organized along the Western model. Hyder Ali (1761-1782) ruled over a large chunk of South India and became the main adversary of the British. He even defeated a British army in 1779 on the Malabar Coast at Pollilore. His son, Tipu Sultan (Feth Ali), had to face the British containment policy. In order to overcome the British supremacy, he attempted to seek friendship with France, the Ottoman Empire, Oman, Persia, Afghanistan and other countries. He sent a delegation to Istanbul under Ghulam Ali Khan via Muscat, Basra and Baghdad. The embassy was initially composed of 900 individuals but the Indian envoy was permitted to go to Istanbul from Basra with a retinue of 300 men only. It took almost 2 years to reach Istanbul on 25 September 1787. Tipu wanted to gain recognition as an independent monarch, to seek military assistance and to secure trade privileges with the Ottomans on a reciprocal basis. He proposed to exchange the port town of Mangalor on the Indian Ocean for Basra, in order to expand the commerce of his realm. In addition, he requested that the Ottomans send military and civilian technicians to Mysore and invited Ottoman Armenian merchants to trade high quality textiles with Mysore. The result was a mixed success. Sultan Abdulhamid I granted a Caliphal investiture recognizing Tipu as a sovereign and permitting him to strike coins.[1]

It is interesting that at least one Ottoman chronicler considered Tipu Sultan's army as the real model for Sultan Selim's military reforms. Cabi's chronicle is a crucial source of information on the rumors circulating in Istanbul. Therefore his views on this matter are likely to represent the larger public opinion

1 Aftab Kamal Pasha, "Ottoman-Tipu Sultan Relations: A Critical Study of the Role of Armenian Merchants in Mysore – Sotuh India", Metin Hülagü et al., *Hoşgörü Toplumunda Ermeniler*, v. I, Kayseri 2007, 166-67; Azmi Özcan, *Pan-İslamizm. Osmanlı Devleti, Hindistan Müslümanları ve İngiltere (1877-1924)*, Istanbul 1997, 17-22.

in Istanbul. Apparently, inhabitants of the imperial seat misinterpreted the intentions of the Indian embassy. They thought that the Indian delegation had come to Istanbul to give military support to the Ottomans. Cabi narrated that the Indian envoy Ghulam Ali "travelled all the way from India to Istanbul in a palanquin carried on the shoulders of the Indian soldiers so as to show the discipline of the army of his sovereign". Rumors about how Feth Ali was praising his own army in his letter to Sultan Abdulhamid I circulated in the city. According to the story, Tipu Sultan had made use of the British prisoners to drill his soldiers in firepower tactics. This was no doubt in accordance with the Islamic principle of due reciprocity (*mukabele-i bi'l-misl*), i.e. the permissibility of learning from one's enemy. Rumors had it that the embassy had been sent to Istanbul with a concrete proposal for military assistance. Accordingly, Tipu Sultan offered to supply the Ottoman army with a military mission in order to teach them the European drill and discipline and to help them defeat the Russians. An Indian regiment even performed drill in Kağıthane in order to impress the Ottomans. Impressed as he was, Abdulhamid I had to turn down the offer, since the Janissaries would never accept this sort of drill and training. Nevertheless, the show drill impressed the heir apparent Selim "who dreamt of revenge [from the Russians] day and night".[2] But Cabi certainly errs in the details of the negotiations. The letter of Feth Ali recounted the victories over Britain but did not offer military assistance to the Ottomans. On the contrary he requested military assistance from the Ottomans. It did not narrate how the Tipus created the new army either. Thus, it is not certain to what extent Tipu's Western-style Muslim army had really fascinated the young prince Selim. Feth Ali, nevertheless, really offered an exchange of the aforementioned towns.[3]

Selim's birth was regarded as a fortunate event since no prince had been born since 1725. Therefore he was given a careful, thorough education and was raised as the potential savior of the empire. His uncle, Sultan Abdulhamid I (1774-89), granted him a degree of freedom in social interaction, whereas seclusion in the Topkapı Palace had been the norm for the princes in Ottoman political culture. Given this freedom, the young prince began forming his own circle of reformers and corresponded with Louis XVI of France concerning statecraft, social

2 Mehmet Ali Beyhan (ed.), *Cabi Ömer Efendi, Cabir Tarihi (Tarih-i Sultan Selim-i Salis ve Mahmud-ı Sani)*, Ankara 2003, v. I, 4-7, 18.

3 Hikmet Bayur, "Maysor Sultanı Tipu ile Osmanlı Padişahlarından I. Abdülhamid ve III. Selim Arasındaki Mektuplaşma", *Belleten* 7/47 (1948), 628-34.

institutions and military arts in Europe. His freedom of movement was restricted when his name was involved in the alleged plot of the Grand Vizier Halil Hamid Pasha against Abdulhamid I in 1785. Remarkably, he might be considered one of the three heir apparents in Ottoman history whose signature appeared on international treaties. The first known example of a "double treaty" in Ottoman history is the Ottoman-Venetian treaty (1446), signed by both Sultan Murad II and the heir apparent Mehmed II (the Conqueror). It was a period of turmoil in which the Ottomans were facing the danger of expulsion from the Balkans, because of the successful Hungarian and Serbian thrusts. Prince Selim, son of Suleiman the Magnificent, was also required to put his signature under the Ottoman-Polish treaty (1564) as the political future of the reign of the aging sultan was replete of uncertainties.[4] The case of Selim III differed from the cases above in the sense that the treaty he signed was not a treaty of trade privileges (capitulations), but one of a more political quality. According to Cabi, Russia demanded the heir apparent Selim to sign the ratification of Russo-Ottoman convention that recognized the Russian annexation of the Crimea (*Aynalıkavak Tenkihnamesi*). Once again the old age of the reigning sultan (Abdulhamid I) was the reason for such a demand.[5]

Selim III succeeded his uncle Abdulhamid I in 1789. His reign started in the midst of an ill-fated war with Russia and the Habsburgs. The period of peace that followed was only too short to be a relief for the young sultan. The Ottomans were already at war with France in late 1798 because of the French Expedition to Egypt; this time the Ottomans had the British and the Russians on their side against the French. Late September 1798 was also the time when Selim III sent a letter to Feth Ali. Almost a decade had passed after the visit of the Indian Embassy and hazards of diplomacy had hurled these two Muslim rulers to opposing camps. Napoleon allied Feth Ali against Britain in India; he wanted to assure the latter's military assistance before setting on his alleged expedition to India from Egypt. This caused dismay and consternation to Britain and to its Ottoman ally, since it could undermine the coalition against the revolutionary France. Thus, Selim III wrote a letter to Feth Ali at the request of

4 Darius Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomacy Relations (15th-18th Century). An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames and Other Documents*, Leiden 2000, 72, 80.

5 Beyhan (ed.), *Cabi Tarihi*, v. I, 7-8; other contemporary sources do not mention the incident, cf. Ahmet Öğreten (ed.), *Mustafa Kesbi, İbretnüma-yı Devlet (Tahlil ve Tenkitli Metin)*, Ankara 2002, 432-34 and İlgürel (ed.), *Mehasinü'l-Asar*, 100-7, 141-47.

the British, in which he tried to dissuade the Indian ruler from his dangerous political commitment to Napoleon against Britain. The letter and spirit of his correspondence was in harmony with the priorities of an *ancient regime* and of the caliph. Selim recounted how the French had violated the traditional friendship by invading the venerated land of Egypt. This amounted to treachery and deceit. He warned Feth Ali about the real intention of the likely French expedition to India. Accordingly, "these infidels" fancied to subdue all the Muslims in the world and erase the name of Muhammad's religion and nation from the earth. Wherever they had roamed, violation of the international law, destruction of property, homicide, pillage followed in their footsteps. The new administration of France was based on absolute freedom and, by refuting all sects, religions, God, prophets, it aimed at destroying all kings in the world. The Frenchmen were such "plunderers and liars" that they even overran the dominions of the Pope, who was their ally, killing all the priests. The case of Venice, Selim continued, spoke for itself. In fact, Venetians did not differ from "these evils" since they also had a republic. Therefore, Venice professed neutrality and friendship towards France. Nevertheless, the French "bandits" did not respect its neutral status and occupied the Republic of Venice. The Venetians suffered even more than the Pope at the hands of the French as Venice now vanished as a political entity. After reminding Feth Ali of the "misdeeds" of the French in a fashion similar to the European monarchs, Selim boasted that "Muslims" he had sent on giant ships recovered the former Venetian dominions of Corfu and other Ionian Islands from the French, capturing all the prominent French officers. Under the light of the evidence, Selim III concluded, Feth Ali must reconsider his pro-French diplomacy. He suggested that Tipu Sultan communicated to the Sublime Porte whatever grievances he held against the British, so that Selim would remove them to Ali's satisfaction in his capacity of caliph.[6]

It is interesting that another possible Muslim model for the Ottoman military reforms actually caused hatred in İstanbul: the reforms of Şahin Giray in the Crimea. Şahin Giray had spent some years in Venice and was well versed

6 Bayur, "Maysor Sultanı Tipu," 643-50. Turkish translation of the Persian letter from Selim to Feth Ali, dated 7 June 1799; another letter to the same effect was sent to Ali on 23 September 1798; that is, in the days when negotiations for alliance with Russia and Britain were in progress. Ali's answer to this letter is retained in English in M. Martin ed., *The Despatches, minutes and correspondence of the Marquess Wellesley during his Administration in India*, London 1837, v. 5, 24, no. XX.

in European political culture. Coming in power in 1777, he aimed at transforming the independent Crimean state along the European model under the Russian auspices. He planned his elite guard of *beşli*s to be the nucleus of a new Western-style Crimean army. 20,000-man strong, his army would include 1,000 *beşli*s and 2,000 *sekban*s. Prozorovskii, the Russian functionary in the region, found the idea ridiculous. Şahin started out with 800 *beşli*s and initially planned to take one soldier from each five households. Horses and arms were to be provided by these households as well. He required his soldiers to wear Western military dress and began to drill them along the Russian model. He adopted Russian titles for the military ranks. He composed mixed regular units of Muslim and Christian Crimeans. This scandalized the Crimean exiles in Istanbul. Şahin could never establish an army of 20,000, but he was successful enough to have an elite *beşli* guard of 1,000 soldiers and to purchase arms from Poland in 1781, including 30 cannons and mortars.[7]

Apprehended by his pro-Russian policies, the Sublime Porte refused to officially appoint him as the official khan of the Crimea until 1779. Nevertheless, his extensive Western-inspired reforms caused widespread dissension in the Crimea. By 1782, Şahin Giray already had to leave the country, which then passed under the Russian rule.[8] In an audience with the *Reisü'l-küttab* (*Reis Efendi*) Es-Seyyid Mehmed Hayri Efendi, the Russian ambassador argued that the military reforms carried out in the Crimea should not have caused the dismissal of Şahin Giray from the office. Reis Efendi, however, tried to justify his dismissal by referring to the employment of foreign officers (Russians) and adoption of the Russian uniforms in his Muslim army. The Russian ambassador, in return, reminded him of Baron de Tott and of his men employed in the Ottoman Dockyards and the Arsenal in the 1770s. Embarrassed by the spiteful remark, the Reis Efendi claimed that those men were prisoners kept in the Dockyard, whereas he was at a loss to know "in which capacity Tott Beg-zade was used". Şahin Giray's insistence on using Russian drillmasters in his new model army was something unprecedented. On more than one occasion, he was criticized harshly for his Western military reforms: for instance, when he showed up in the region of Taman after leaving the Crimea, Ebubekir Paşa, the commander

7 Alan W. Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea 1772-1783*, Cambridge 1970, 86-88, 117.

8 Fisher, *The Russian Annexation of the Crimea*, 128.

of Bender, reprimanded him on this matter and advised him to take off the European costume.[9]

Historian Vasıf gives a very unfavorable account on Şahin Giray; he had confiscated the religious endowments, dispensed with Islamic conventions, levied new taxes that were "unjustifiable by tradition and by reason", and finally imposed "Frankish" uniforms on the Muslim troops who were forcefully recruited under the designation of *sekban*. Vasıf was known to be a supporter of the reforms of Selim III, who was also criticized for levying new taxes and creating new army with the Western uniforms. However, Vasıf did not find Selim's reforms "unjustifiable by tradition and by reason". Vasıf's comments on Şahin Giray indicated that the reforming ruling elite could resort to the discourse of their opponents as they saw fit.[10]

Şahin Giray was forced by Catherine II to reside in Voronetz in 1784-87. But by 1787, he was allowed to take refuge with the Ottomans. It is interesting that there were rumors on the Pontic frontier that Şahin Giray had converted to Christianity and was ambitious to set his own rule in Bogdan. The rumors were so serious that the Prince of Moldavia had a painter portray Şahin Giray in "Frankish" cloth. When sultan Abdulhamid I saw the drawing, he exclaimed: "His dress and appearance is completely Christian. No doubt remained as to his conversion to Christianity. May God destroy this infidel!"[11] Feyzullah Efendi, for instance, related an interesting case. When the Sultan wanted to reinstate regular drill and discipline in the army, the Janissaries revolted in arms in 1808. Street fights with the loyal troops in Western-style uniforms lasted many days and turned Istanbul into a battleground. At a moment of desperation during these clashes, the Janissaries thought of asking for royal mercy by promising unconditional support to any reforms. They would accept not only the new uniforms but even the European hat should the Sultan demand. According to Feyzullah, this was a scandalous idea since wearing the European hat amounted to

9 "*...ne hacet küffar askeri ile gelüb, Ümmet-i Muhammed'i tekdir ve tar u mar etmeğe, bu sevdadan fariğ ol, küffarın damenin boşla...*", Feridun Emecen, "Son Kırım Hanı Şahin Giray'ın İdamı Meselesi ve Buna Dair Vesikalar," *İÜEF Tarih Dergisi* 34 (1984), 318.

10 Mücteba İlgürel ed., *Ahmed Vasıf Efendi, Mehasinü'l-Asar ve Hakaikü'l-Ahbar*, Ankara 1994, 11, 21.

11 Emecen, "Son Kırım Hanı Şahin Giray," 325, fn., 35.

changing one's identity. It demonstrated that the rebels had doubtful religious convictions; they would turn infidel just to save their lives.[12]

In conclusion, it is pretty obvious that the political situation was unsuitable for either learning from the Tipu Sultan or drawing on the military reforms of Şahin Giray. However, the Muslim population of Istanbul was aware of Western-style military reforms undertaken in other Muslim countries. While they praised the Indian success, Şahin Giray's reforms never met popular support in spite of similar means and goals. Ottoman policy-makers also exhibited contradictory attitudes concerning the adoption of European uniforms. They did not hesitate to resort to the critical discourse of the political opposition based on religious symbolism. This shows that military reform was never a pure military issue isolated in vacuum. It was rather a function of political objectives.

12 Mehmet Ali Beyhan ed., *Saray Günlüğü (1802-1809)*, Istanbul 2007, 261.