

THE CHILDIRI BATTLE ACCORDING TO ŞECÂ'ATNÂME

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Abstract

To some extent, the Childiri battle determined the course of warfare being waged on the territory of Georgia at the initial stage of Ottoman-Safavid war in 1578-1590 years. It laid foundation for the success of the “Eastern Military Expedition” conducted under the command of Lala Mustafa Pasha in the Caucasus.

The battle fought between Ottomans and Iranians on the valley of Childiri on the 9th of August, 1578 is depicted by a number of Ottoman historians of Middle Ages: Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, Müneccimbaşı Ahmed B. Lütfullah, Ebubekir Bin Abdullah, İbrahim Peçevi, Mustafa Selaniki, etc. The vast narrative about the battle is provided by Âsafî Dal Mehmed Çelebi as well, whose *Şecâ'atnâme* has been hitherto unknown for Georgian historiography. The author is the eyewitness and direct participant of the military processes occurring in the Caucasian region. It is natural that the accounts represented in the source are worth relying on. The interest for *Şecâ'atnâme* is increased by the miniatures depicting the warfare, the seizure of fortresses or meetings of historical figures participating in the war. They are singled out by the diversity of content as well as the artistic value. The illustration of the Childiri battle, where the struggle of opposite parties are vividly represented, is of utmost importance to us. *Şecâ'atnâme* encompasses a lot of interesting information about the Ottoman-Safavid military actions conducted on the territory of Georgia in the 2nd half of XVI century. It increases and, to some extent, specifies our knowledge about the historical events developed at that time.

Keywords: Ottoman; Safavid; Lala Mustafa Pasha; Eastern expedition; Caucasus.

This work was supported by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (SRNSF) [PHDF-19-4072, Unknown Ottoman source about Lala Mustafa Pasha's military campaign in Georgia (1578-1580)]

Introduction

12-year-long continuous war triggered by Ottomans against Iran in 1578 aimed to defeat Safavids, subjugate the Caucasian countries and establish the control over the Caspian Sea. In that period, against the background of renewed warfare, the principal objective for Ottomans was to conquer the countries of Transcaucasia, so as to accomplish their goal set. Being disintegrated into the separate political units, Georgian kingdoms and principalities became the primary and pressing target for the “Eastern Military Expedition” launched under the command of Lala Mustafa Pasha.

Samtskhe -Saatabago located at the boundary line turned out to be the first principality where the Ottomans started the process of conquest of Georgian territories. The subjugation of Saatabago was preceded by the Ottomans’ confrontation with the Iranian and Georgian’s united army. In order to achieve the success at the initial stage of the war, the Childiri battle was attached the decisive importance for Ottomans and Safavids. In case of winning the victory, the path to Georgia was unbarred for Ottomans that signified weakening in the positions of Iran in the region.

The events developed on Childiri Valley is depicted by a number of Ottoman historians of the medieval period: Gelibolulu Mustafa Ali, Müneccimbaşı Ahmed B. Lütfullah, Ebubekir Bin Abdullah, İbrahim Peçevi, Mustafa Selaniki, etc. The detailed accounts about the struggle is provided by Âsafî Dal Mehmed Çelebi as well, whose work *Şecâ’atnâme* has been hitherto unknown for Georgian historiography. „*Şecâ’at*„ <شجاعت> is an Arabian word and means bravery, boldness, courage. The work mainly describes the heroism of Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha and tells us about the victories won by the Ottoman commander in the Caucasus and Iran in 1578-1585 years.

Upon starting the war with Iran, Âsafî was officially entrusted to describe the “Eastern Military Expedition”. He was the eyewitness of the military processes developed on the territory of Georgia and his accounts are mainly based on the facts witnessed by him in person. The interest taken in *Şecâ’atnâme* is increased by 77 miniatures depicting the warfare, the seizure of fortresses and the meetings of historic figures participating in the war. One of them is the illustration of the Childiri battle which vividly portrays the scene of the confrontation between Ottomans and Safavids.

Methods

The warfare conducted on the valley of Childiri was studied on the basis of analyzing the accounts recorded in *Şecâ’atnâme*. In addition, the identification of historical persons portrayed on the miniature and the interpretation of the events developed on the battlefield could be made through applying the artistic-cognitive method.

Discussion and Results

Âsafî considers the appearance of the strangely shining star in the sky at the night of Ramadan, which directed its face towards the East, to be the phenomenon prophesying the outbreak of Ottoman-Safavid war (pic.1). The eyewitnesses of this magnificent spectacle

compared the luminous star with the holly peacock and its revelation in the dome of heaven was perceived as the omen for triggering the holy war by Padishah, which should have finished with his undoubted victory (Özcan,2007). The artist represented the star predicting the success in the darkness of night against the background of the blue sky accompanied by little stars and the waning moon.

Picture 1: The illustration of the appearance of the bright star in the sky at the night of Ramadan.



Source: Abdülkadir Özcan, Âsafî Dal Mehmed Çelebi (Bey,Paşa). Şecâ'atnâme. Özdemiroğlu Osman Paşa'nın Şark Seferleri (1578-1585) İstanbul:Çamlıca,2007:26(13v)

According to the author, the fair and kind Sultan Murad was ordered by God¹ to launch the military campaign towards the East, and he, in its turn, entrusted the fulfilment of this mission to the conqueror of Cyprus – Lala Mustafa Pasha. The commander-in-chief immediately sent the letters and necessary clothing to the warriors. After preparing the military weapons he took only the necessary things and left Üsküdar together with the army (Eravcı,2009).

Having arrived in Erzurum on July 3, 1578 Mustafa Pasha stayed there for 20 days (Svanidze, 2008), and on the 5th of August deployed the army in Ardahan (Kütükoğlu, 1962). The Ottomans set the goal to invade Georgia and seize the castles and fortresses existing on the territory of Samtskhe-Saatabago. The Safavids intended to stand in the way of the Ottoman army heading to subjugate Georgian kingdoms and principalities controlled by them, that was followed by waging the fight on the valley called Childiri on the 9th of August.

According to the accounts represented in *Şecâ'atnâme*, the mighty commander, excited at the prospect of fighting, was encamped in Childiri together with his army, when he was

¹The author does not mention “God” in the text, however, he should have implied it since only God could order the Sultan

notified about the sudden appearance of the enemy. Mustafa Pasha sent Derviş Pasha- the governor of Diyarbekir to struggle against Iranians. Asafî says nothing about the number of soldiers who were at the disposal of Ottoman commander, however, according to Ibrahim Pechevi's accounts, he started fighting with 300-400 soldiers against the Safavids' numerous army (Jikia,1964).The Iranian army of about 20 or 30 000 soldiers was commanded by the Governor of Erevan – Tokmak Khan accompanied by the ruler of Ganja – Imam Kuli Khan and the well known Kara khan (Shengelia,1968). Based on the other sources, 7000 Georgians fought on Safavids' side (Demir,2017).

Âsafî points out that brave Derviş Pasha started fighting with a small detachment and a number of Kurd warriors were killed on the valley of Childiri. Despite the bravery evinced by the Ottoman commander, the author deems his facile decision to be inexpedient and critically evaluates the disregard of multiplicity of the enemy: “hey, be careful, you careless, don't dare to ignore the enemy, a wise man does not swell with pride, neither shows the arrogance country-wide”(Özcan,2007).

The governor of Diyarbekir had difficulty fighting against Safavids having the advantage of the number of soldiers. Mustafa Pasha took the immediate measures and sent Özdemiroğlu Osman Pasha to help him. (Eravcı,2018).

Şecâ'atnâme gives the detailed description of Osman Pasha's involvement in the Childiri battle. Âsafî compares the commander, the conqueror of Yemen, to the male lion, whose unexpected appearance threw the disorder into the battlefield and the enemy scattered. He provides the depiction of Osman Pasha's combating skills and the courage revealed by him: „Even the quick runners could not catch up with [commander] mounted on the horse. [Pasha] revealed the perseverance and firmness in the warfare. This courageous blood is the sign of St.Ali. [He] cleaved the heart into halves, the dagger girded around his waist became bloodthirsty, the spear in his hand turned into a dragon and was a friend with Moses' crozier” (Özcan:2007).

Upon the completion of the war, Âsafî notifies us about the convincing victory won by Ottomans and the escape of Iranian Khans. This fact is dated to 976 A.H.(1568-1569) instead of 986(1578-1579) and Kara Khan is mentioned here. The author says nothing in the text concerning Kara Khan being wounded, however, on the miniature depicting the Childiri battle he illustrates the episode of wounding Iranian Khan with the spear by the Ottoman warrior.

The miniature of the Childiri battle(pic.2) represents the specific episode of confrontation between the Ottoman-Safavid armed forces, when Osman Pasha came to the battlefield to help the Ottoman military leader – Derviş Pasha's small detachment being in the minority against the numerous army of the enemy.

The upper left part of the scene depicts Osman pasha mounted on the black saddled horse who is holding the sword in the right hand. And the lower part describes Derviş Pasha with the adjusted bow aiming the arrow to the enemy mounted on the white horse, who is shooting the spear in his direction. The right upper part of the miniature shows the scene of wounding the Iranian commander – Kara Khan by the Ottoman soldier. And below there is the image of Tokmak Khan drawing the bow(Arif,1914).

The illustration depicts 11 soldiers mounted on their horses and the corpses of warriors chopped by sword who are scattered over the valley. The artist indicates only the names of Ottoman and Iranian commanders as the most important persons on the illustration. In addition, the commander-in-chiefs are distinguished from the private soldiers by the valuable

harness of their horses. The scene of fighting of warriors evidences that they used swords, spears and bow and arrows as the weapons.

The battlefield located between the mountains is represented in blue colors, against the background of which the motifs of various flowers, the tree and the parts of pierced warriors' bodies with the military equipment belonging to them can be seen.

Picture 2. The battle fought between Ottomans and Iranians on Childiri valley



Source: Abdülkadir Özcan, Âsafî Dal Mehmed Çelebi (Bey,Paşa). Şecâ'atnâme. Özdemiroğlu Osman Paşa'nın Şark Seferleri (1578-1585) İstanbul: Çamlıca, 2007: 31(16r)

Upon finishing the struggle conducted on the valley of Childiri, Georgian governor-Manuchar, who solely ruled Samtskhe-Saatabago due to his brother's illness, came to Mustafa Pasha and declared his obedience. The united forces of Iranians and Georgians could not manage to block the numerous Ottoman army. As a result, the Ottomans continued to move forward in the inner part of Georgia and later subjugated the kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti as well.

Conclusion

The victory of Ottomans in the Childiri battle, to some extent, ensured the successful continuation of the "Eastern Military Expedition" and laid the foundation for the conquest of Georgian kingdoms and principalities by them.

The accounts represented in *Şecâ'atnâme* evidence that the main hero of the Childiri battle was Osman Pasha whose appearance changed the correlation between the opposed parties and performed the key role in winning the victory by Ottomans. Accordingly, the author focuses on depicting the combat capabilities of the Ottoman commander and highlighting the significance of his role.

The depiction of events developed on the Childiri valley and the reflection of the bloody antagonism in the miniature creates the real picture of the course of war fought on the 9th of August, 1578.

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