

Warfare and History



OTTOMAN WARFARE 1500–1700

Rhoads Murphey

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*Ottoman warfare,
1500–1700*

Rhoads Murphey
University of Birmingham



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Published in the UK in 1999 by UCL Press

UCL Press Limited
Taylor & Francis Group
1 Gunpowder Square
London EC4A 3DE

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001.

The name of University College London (UCL) is a registered trade mark used by UCL Press with the consent of the owner.

ISBNs: 1-85728-388-0HB
1-85728-389-9PB

British Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-203-01597-5 Master e-book ISBN
ISBN 0-203-17347-3 (Glassbook Format)

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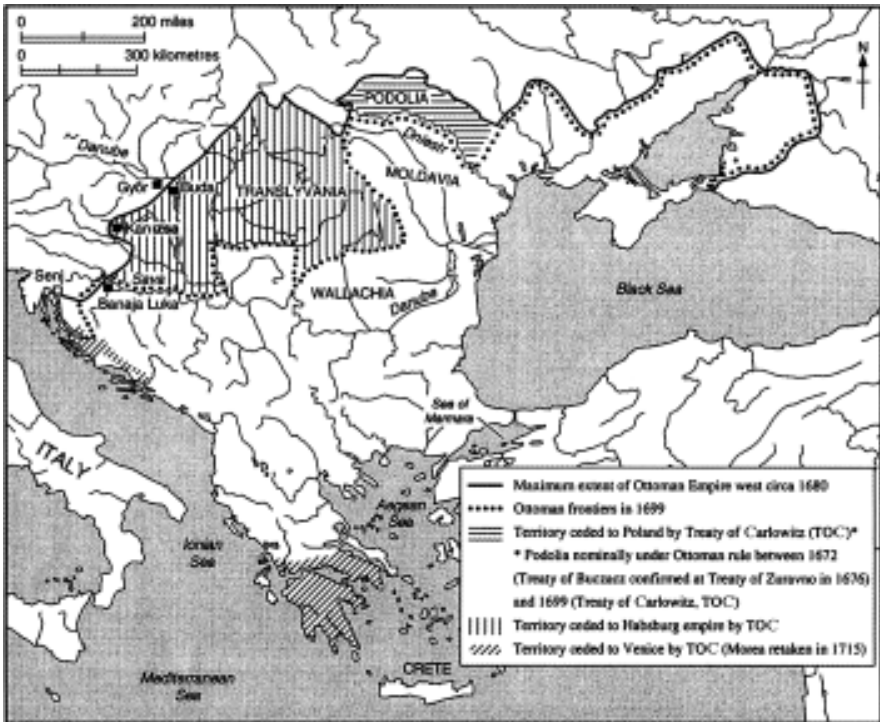
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1. The Ottoman position in the West at the end of the seventeenth century



MAPS

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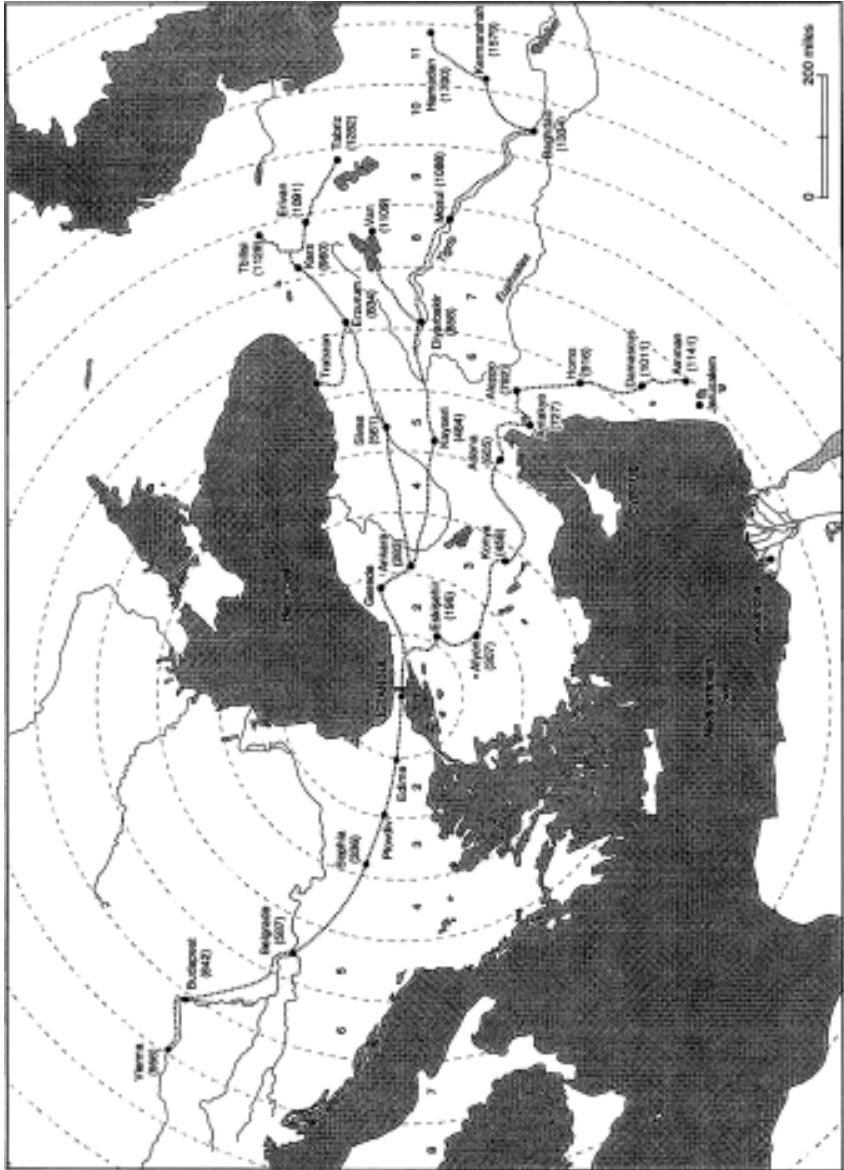


MAPS

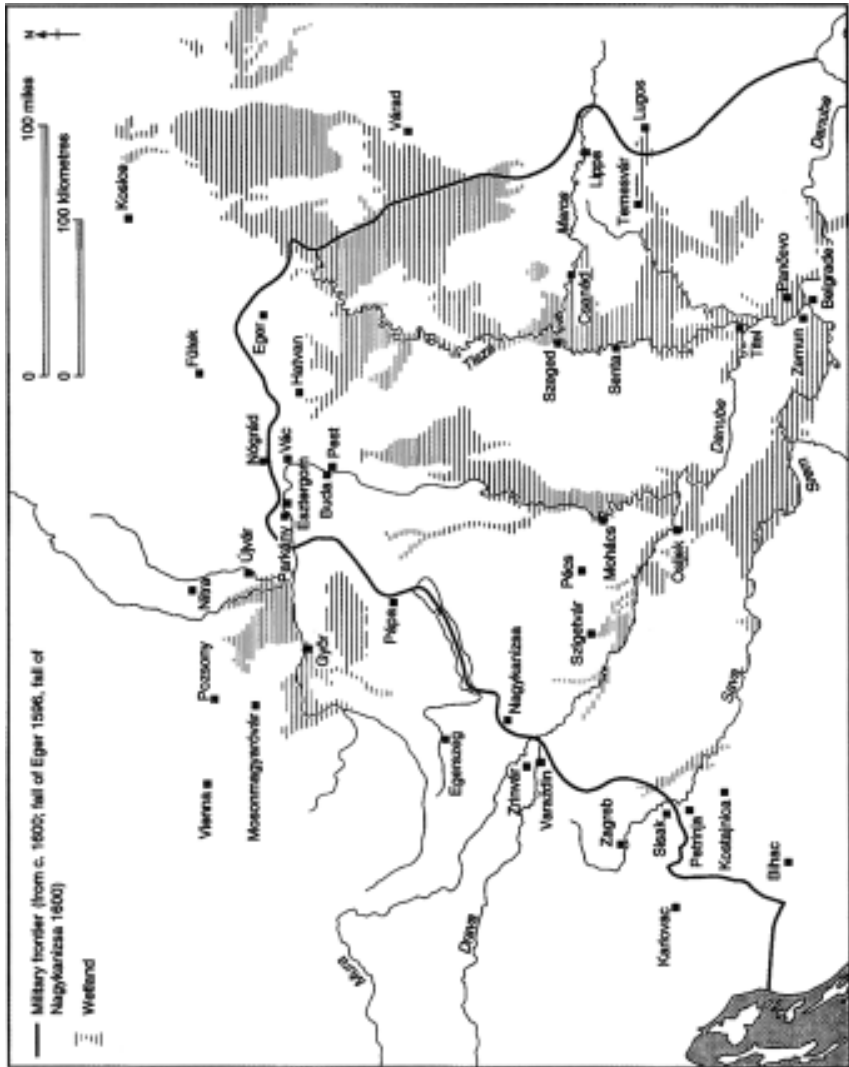
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Preface: Scope and purpose of work

The period 1500 to 1700 forms a period of Ottoman dynastic history when the Ottomans gave particular emphasis to their frontiers with Europe. While other fronts were activated against Iran in 1514, Syria and Egypt in 1517, and into the lower Tigris-Euphrates in the decade following the Ottoman capture of Baghdad in 1535, from the fall of Buda in 1541 to the close of the seventeenth century the Ottomans were most consistently concerned with the defence (and, periodically, the extension) of their trans-Danubian possessions. This channelling of Ottoman effort was the product (and an Ottoman response to) contemporary political circumstances. While the rise of the Safavid dynasty in the East from 1502 posed a potential threat to the Ottomans, the unification of the crowns of Spain and Austria under Charles V from 1519 posed a present and real danger to Ottoman strategic interests. Despite the redivision of territories at the abdication of Charles in 1556 and the succession of his brother Ferdinand (the First) to his eastern possessions and of his son Philip (the Second) to his western and northern possessions, the Ottomans had by that time irreversibly committed themselves to anti-Habsburg alliances and strategic positions of their own that kept them at the centre of Middle European politics until the end of the seventeenth century. While it will not be possible, given the wide scope of our coverage of general military developments over a two-century period, to focus in detail on developments in any one of the lands that formed the post-1540 Ottoman empire, a natural bias towards events on the northwest frontier represents the actual pattern of Ottoman military involvements in the period. Of the three most active fronts – the Caucasian, the Mesopotamian and the Hungarian – it was the latter which persistently claimed the lion's share of Ottoman resources and concentration of effort.

The sheer size of the post-1540 Ottoman empire necessitated such a balancing of

interests and commitments. Resources and surpluses from one area were used by the Ottomans to good effect to subsidize and support military activity in another, and for most of the period the empire's size was a source, not of increased vulnerability, but rather of strength. From the mid-sixteenth century the Austrian military border along the northwest frontier, forming a 370-mile arch extending from Kosice on the north and east to Senj in the south and west, was guarded by a string of more than 50 forts and fortresses.¹ By 1600, with the addition of Kanice (Nagykanizsa) as the fourth province of Ottoman Hungary, the Ottomans were able to match the Austrians in number and kind, and the balance struck in the early years of the century was little changed until the 1660s. At the other extreme, although the Ottoman-Safavid frontier stretched over 600 miles from Batum on the Black Sea to Basra on the Shatt al-Arab, only a small proportion of the full extent was very heavily garrisoned or defended. Apart from confined periods of exceptional activity (as for example during the 1580s and again in the 1630s) the costs of maintaining the Ottomans' presence in this sphere could be offset by relying mostly on local resources. In view of these realities, the weight of evidence which we will draw upon for our narrative comes from the mid-sixteenth century onwards and predominantly from the European sphere of operations. References to events affecting other spheres and periods are unsystematic and included mostly to highlight parallel institutional developments or as illustrations of general phenomena.

In the book coverage of principal themes has been organized in accordance with the successive phases of warfare: before, during and after. The first part (Chapters 1–3) treats preparatory and planning aspects of warfare; Chapters 4–7 are concerned with operational matters; and a final chapter considers various aspects of the post-war impact of military activity. A unifying theme which links all three parts is constraints on and limitations of Ottoman warfare. This later preoccupation leads us to play down the importance of the planned and controlled aspects of Ottoman warfare, such as mobilization and finance, covered in the first part. These preparatory phases can be comprehensively quantified and verified from Ottoman archival sources, which record them in stunning detail. But it is the uncontrollable and unpredictable aspects of Ottoman warfare – in both its human and environmental dimensions – that will interest us most. The chapters which explore these dimensions are necessarily grounded (especially in the parts focusing on operational realities) in physical descriptions, operational reports, campaign journals and other Ottoman narrative accounts. The fiscal, technological, tactical and political dimensions of Ottoman military history have received considerable attention in print, but as yet little attempt has been made to recreate or evoke the physical and psychological realities of war as experienced by average Ottoman soldiers. Considering this former neglect and in hopes of providing a modest corrective, the balance of coverage in our book will favour operational matters. As an alternative to the all too common approach

to Ottoman military history structured on the detailed post-mortem analysis of Ottoman success or failure in particular campaigns, we will place priority not on explaining outcomes but rather on the understanding of process.

In writing a book of this scope questions concerning the appropriate terms of reference and the consistency (as well as intelligibility) of terminology are bound to arise. In such matters I have been guided in the main by practical considerations rather than a doctrinaire concern for historical precision. For example, while the use of the modern term “Austria” to stand for the Habsburg domains in the eastern portions of their empire may be imprecise or historically inaccurate, its avoidance seems unnecessarily pedantic. Rather than insisting on finer distinctions between “imperial Austro-Habsburg standing army units” and regiments loaned to it by individual electoral states within the Holy Roman Empire, or by other sovereign states in alliance with them in particular campaigns, we have opted to subsume all participating groups under broader all-inclusive headings such as “Austrian army” or “coalition forces”. Since no such ambiguity regarding the source of recruited soldiers existed in the Ottoman case (unless we consider the use of Tatars as auxiliaries for European campaigns or Kurds in campaigns to the East to be exceptions) we may, with considerably greater accuracy, refer to most military mobilizations as simply “Ottoman”. While the dynastic term “Safavid” covers most cases of the Ottomans’ relations with their neighbours along the eastern borders of the empire, the distinction between Imperial Austria (the hereditary lands), Royal Hungary and the Croatian borderlands – the latter enjoying a separate, semi-autonomous status as part of the *militargrenze* – defies simple classification as “Habsburg” or even such compromise alternatives as “Imperial”. These levels of administrative and jurisdictional complexity in the “Austrian” case gave a characteristic stamp to Austro-Ottoman warfare. To describe it as a battle of wills between Vienna and Istanbul is misleading, since war was frequently waged using the personal resources of powerful local families of the borderlands such as (in the Austrian case) the Zriny, usually with the blessing of but often with only minimal input from “The State”. By necessity we revert to the use of inappropriately monolithic terms such as “Austrian” as broad descriptors, but it is hoped that the analysis will serve to bring out some of the underlying complexities of frontier warfare along the Bosno-Croatian and Austro-Hungarian borderlands of the Ottoman empire. In this particular geographical environment local factors and particularisms decisively influenced the course both of inter-state and international conflicts.

The Ottomans’ own way of referring to their Habsburg contemporaries was to call them Nemeçe (Nemse) meaning German or Austrian.² Seemingly for them, too, finding a single term of reference for the confederation of Croatian, Czech, German, and Hungarian territories that made up the Holy Roman empire in the east was equally

PREFACE

problematic. We have opted with them to reduce complex social and communal relations to a more comprehensible uniformity by the arbitrary use of more inclusive terms. We are prevented from applying a similar logic to the Ottoman or Safavid case by the fact that the closest equivalents of “Turk” and “Iranian” cannot be used without seriously distorting contemporary political realities. In the final analysis it seemed to us preferable that such inconsistencies in terminology should remain, than that our attempts to create a false symmetry should be allowed to become a source, not just of distortion, but (worse still for our purposes) confusion.

Tables of equivalents for weights, measures and standard coins in use during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are provided as appendices at the end of the book (*see Appendices III-VI*). Within our narrative it seemed preferable to stick as closely as possible to the original terms of reference used in the sources cited. In order to facilitate identification on modern maps, however, a list of place name equivalents is provided in Appendix VII. For example, references in the text to the important fortress on the banks of the Nitra river north of Komárom are made in the form most commonly encountered in Ottoman sources, i.e. Uyvar. For comparative purposes the modern Slovakian (Nové Zámky) and contemporary Hungarian (Újvár) forms are both indicated in Appendix VII.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr Filiz Cagman, Director of the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, for permission to print reproductions of five miniatures from literary and historical manuscripts in the Topkapi collections as follows:

Hazine 1365, fols. 93a and 34b (Mustafa Ali, *Nusretname*); Bagdad Köskü 200, fol. 100a (Seyyid Lokman, *Sehinsabname-i Sultan Murad Han*, Vol. 2); Hazine 889, fol. 14a (Nadirî, *Divan*) and Hazine 1124, fol. 54a (Nadirî, *Sehname-i Sultan Osman Han*).

I am also indebted to three readers all of whom graciously agreed to comment on my manuscript at successive draft stages. Virginia Aksan, Jeremy Black and William McNeill all offered probing insights which, in their turn, encouraged me to have a second think. If I have failed in the end result to rise to the challenge of their collective wisdom I assume full responsibility for the lost opportunity. I would also like to thank Caroline Finkel for her professional courtesy and general *politesse* in responding to what must have seemed tiresomely persistent requests for practical assistance connected with my research for the book.

I am deeply grateful to all the editorial staff at UCL Press for their patience and professionalism during the book's long journey, through co-operative effort, from editor's and author's pipe dream to handsome final product.

posterioribus

Chapter One

General political framework: the evolving context

Before considering the immediate context of specific Ottoman campaigns it is necessary first to develop a general sense of the enterprise within the framework of its limited political objectives (Chapter 1) and its physical and material constraints (Chapter 2). The Ottomans waged war at specific times for specific reasons. Both policies and strategies changed over time, and to reduce all Ottoman warfare to secular desires for world dominance or spiritual motives such as the triumph of Islam is a crude oversimplification of Ottoman thinking. While historians still debate over the purpose and timing of Ottoman offensives against Hungary in the 1520s, a recent reassessment openly challenges once standard views that Süleyman intended the conquest and annexation of Hungary from the very beginning of his reign, perhaps as early as 1521 after the capture of Belgrade.¹ Perjés is inclined to focus instead on the unforeseen dynastic crisis precipitated by the accession of a minor king (Janos II Zapolya) to the Hungarian throne in 1540 as the turning point, providing not just the opportunity and pretext but, more importantly, also the justification for Ottoman annexation of select districts of central Hungary (including the capital Buda). It can be convincingly argued that the Ottomans committed themselves to direct rule and annexation as opposed to rule by proxy in Hungary as a consequence not of preordained policy, but of fortuitous circumstance whose immediate effect was the removal of all other viable options. Individual sultans had particular views about the necessity or desirability of engaging in all-out war with the Austrians, and while Süleyman spent the last 25 years (1541–66) of his reign expanding and vigorously defending his new acquisitions north of the Sava and on both banks of the Danube, a succession of sultans who followed him in the eight decades between 1568 and 1649 entered into a series of

extended and little-disturbed truces with the former enemy.² While the “Long War” of 1593 to 1606 provides an exception to the usual pattern of peace, it began and ended with localized disturbances, and in the intervening years it only exceptionally (as for example during the Ottoman offensives against Győr in 1594 and Eger in 1596) assumed proportions normally associated with full-scale imperial warfare. For much of the period following Süleyman’s conquests the Ottomans were able to achieve their restricted political objectives – confined essentially to protecting the status of central Hungary as a buffer zone offering protection against further Habsburg expansion to the east – by the selective application of limited force. At the conclusion of Europe’s Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), during which the Ottomans had remained steadfastly neutral, the House of Austria entered a phase of their history which was to be dominated by post-war reconstruction efforts and confrontational politics, leading to a series of internal disturbances and local uprisings reaching crisis proportions during the decades between 1650 and 1680. Many historians agree in labelling this period the Habsburg “time of troubles”.³ During that period the Habsburgs were too distracted by wars on the western front (against France between 1672 and 1679) or internally (against the *kuruc* rebels in Hungary), or with both together, to mobilize the resources necessary to mount a serious attempt at dislodging the Ottomans from their well-entrenched positions in central Hungary. In the same period the Ottomans were in fact able to capitalize on such distractions, and between 1660 and 1664 undertook a serious offensive of their own aimed simultaneously against Transylvania in the east and Slovakia in the north. But at this time the Habsburgs were not prepared to become embroiled in a prolonged struggle in defence of their interests in Central Europe and a treaty was rapidly concluded at Vasvár in August 1664.

Local skirmishes, small-scale conflicts, the typical pattern of *klein krieg* did occur on a fairly regular basis during large parts of the extended period of general military quiescence that ensued after the death of Süleyman in 1566 and lasted until the resumption of full-scale war in 1683. But it would be a great mistake to judge the normal code and practice in Austria-Ottoman warfare across the whole period 1500 to 1700 by the yardstick set during the mass mobilizations of the mid-sixteenth century when the Ottomans were gearing up for their permanent installation in Hungary, or during the closing decades of the seventeenth century when they were pitted against a daunting international coalition of forces. Vigorous prosecution of war in the Central European theatre was (for both sides) a secondary priority during much of the period under study. From the Ottoman perspective the limited objective of maintaining the *status quo* in Hungary could be achieved by deployment of provincial forces.

Except in unusual circumstances the conduct of war and diplomacy in Central Europe after 1606 was left to the judgement and means of the Ottoman governors of Buda. Mass mobilization armies led against the Austrian frontier by even a grand vezier, let alone the sultan, became a rarity in the seventeenth century. The typical pattern of engagement was rather the small-scale border raid which resulted in the exchange of minor forts or ended without substantial change to the existing border configuration. The confrontation of provincial units and of local forces mustered from several semi-contiguous border garrisons along a limited sector of the frontier and directed against a more important, temporarily vulnerable, fortress could also be organized locally without calling for input from outside sources. Prolonged encounters involving upwards of 40,000 combatants on either side involved central planning and finance, whereas brief clashes between local militias numbering some 6,000–8,000 on either side could easily be undertaken through local initiative. For example, the force mobilized by Toygun Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Buda, to subdue the stronghold of Fülek (Filákovo) in 1554 is described by reliable contemporary sources as consisting of only 3,000 of his own provincial forces, expanded to a total figure of no more than 8,000 with contributions from county commanders and castelans in nearby districts.⁴ The escalation of such local conflicts into regional and occasionally international disputes depended on the favourable conjunction of political events and the reaching of a consensus among leading members of the *divan*. To think of the Ottomans' waging of war as a fulfilment of "the inherently bellicose character of the Turkish state"⁵ greatly exaggerates the power of the state in this period. It is not at all clear either that the state possessed a monopoly on the use of military force or that they could always successfully channel and control the performance of those forces they did possess. How troops actually performed in battle involved a complex matrix of physical and psychological factors which we will examine more thoroughly in later chapters (see especially Chapter 2 on physical constraints and Chapter 7 on motivation and morale in the Ottoman army). In this chapter we confine ourselves to a consideration of political conditions and the role they played in determining the scale, intensity and duration of Ottoman warfare. Our survey analysis applies most particularly to the empire's two main land fronts on its eastern and western borders.

War on the Eastern Front

The prospect of ideological warfare aimed at the extinction of the enemy and complete absorption of his territories arose early in the sixteenth century, not as an objective of

Ottoman war against the Christian infidel, but rather in the context of the Ottomans' relations with their heterodox Muslim neighbours in the East. During the eight-and-a-half-year reign of Selim I between 1512 and 1520 a hardline policy on religious conformity was for a time implemented, but the ferocity of Selim's attack against Iran in 1514 was conditioned in part by domestic considerations as well as his worries, still not fully resolved after two years on the throne, about the security of his succession. Selim's policies were repudiated, and eventually largely forgotten during the forty seven-and-a-half-year reign of his son and successor Süleyman.⁶ By the time of the Treaty of Amasya (May 1555) the two sides had reached a mutual understanding concerning their respective zones of influence. The resumption of conflict after this date can be traced to a failure (by one side or the other) to observe the spirit of the Amasya agreements, which had placed Iraq (the southern perimeter) in the Ottoman zone of influence and Azerbaijan (the northern perimeter) in the Safavid zone of influence. The Ottoman offensive of 1578 aimed at the northern perimeter was timed to coincide with a period of severe internal turmoil and weakness within the Safavid state under the rule of Muhammad Khudabanda (1578–88). The removal (in 1555) of the Safavid capital from Tabriz at the heart of the area contested with the Ottomans to Qazwin midway between the Safavids' eastern and western military borders in Khurasan and Azerbaijan was a first step in the demilitarization of the area. These realities were only partially and impermanently altered by the Ottoman onslaught between 1578 and 1590. The re-removal (in 1597) of the capital from Qazwin to Isfahan served further to accentuate the Safavids' shifting of emphasis away from the priorities and security concerns of their northwestern frontier. From this date, especially after the recapture by Abbas I of the region's two main strongholds at Tabriz in 1603 and Erivan in 1604, the sub-Caucasian frontier between the two empires remained fairly quiet. The failed siege against Erivan in 1616 and Murad IV's "capture" of the fortress in 1635 both had the same net result: minimal impact on existing arrangements.⁷

In the seventeenth century the centre of gravity in the Safavid state shifted decisively and permanently south. The Ottoman offensives in Mesopotamia mounted in 1624, 1629–30 and 1638 were aimed simply at restoring the former balance of power in the region, which had been upset by the defection of the Ottoman garrison at Baghdad to the Safavids in 1623 during a period of Ottoman dynastic crisis. Since both Ottoman prestige and their commercial position in the Persian Gulf were linked with the retention of Baghdad as a base of operations, Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623–40) made its recapture a top priority of foreign policy, a concentration of effort that was made feasible by the embroilment of Christian Europe in internal wars of its own between 1618 and 1648. A

restoration of equilibrium between the Ottomans and Safavids was achieved by the Treaty of Zuhab (Qasr-i Shirin) in May 1639, and its essential terms remained in force not just for the remainder of the century but until Mahmud Ghalzay's invasions from the east staged between 1719 and 1722 brought about the fall of the Safavid dynasty itself.⁸

The general trajectory of Ottoman-Safavid relations during the 220 years between 1502 and 1722 when their dynastic paths intersected was governed by a spirit of compromise and mutual recognition. The exceptions to this rule during the reigns of Selim I (1512–20) and Murad III (1574–95) and, to a lesser extent, Murad IV (1623–40) were the result of exceptional political circumstances and attempts to capitalize on fleeting opportunities. Such conditions were too ephemeral to provide a solid basis for the extension of Ottoman rule into Azerbaijan or beyond the Caspian. It is in the eastern theatre that we can see most clearly the limits of Ottoman warfare. If the distance of march, the inhospitable character of the terrain and the severity of climatic conditions were not in themselves sufficient to undermine the troops' determination to win at all costs, there was the added discouragement of negative Muslim public opinion. Although under exceptional circumstances the Ottoman ulema were willing to cooperate in the anathemizing of the heterodox "redhead" (*kizilbash*) supporters of the Safavids, a policy of continuous war against neighbouring Muslim states was unlikely to be sanctioned by them or, even with their sanction, to receive much popular support among the rank-and-file of the Ottoman army. Thus, if the conducting of "total war" on the western front was unnecessary (because of the internal divisions – both religious and dynastic – within the Christian camp during the era of the Reformation) restraint on the eastern front was dictated by the consideration that total war against a Muslim state was either undesirable or unthinkable. The use of military force against Muslim co-religionists to resolve specific disputes or to enforce treaty terms might be justified, but wars of conquest were another matter.

Large mobilizations such as those ordered and led by Murad IV in 1635 (against Erivan) and 1638 (against Baghdad), each involving in excess of 100,000 troops, made a symbolic show of Ottoman might, but neither of these armies remained very long in the field.⁹ The historian Katib Chelebi who was present in the Ottoman army during Murad's offensive against Erivan in 1635 openly admits that, although the sultan managed to stage an impressive troop inspection at Ilica (15km west of Erzurum) in July, only a small proportion of these forces remained at the sultan's side a month later when Erivan was put to the siege.¹⁰ Because of the relative quiet on other fronts during the 1630s Murad was able to commit unprecedented manpower resources and treasury funds to

his eastern wars. But his very successes only served to reveal the vulnerability of the Ottomans' position, especially in the northern perimeter of the frontier. For a variety of reasons and most particularly because of the costs involved (see below, Chapter 3: Military Manpower and Spending) the Ottomans could manage such full-scale mobilizations for war in the East only once or twice per century. Murad's record-breaking feat of mounting back-to-back sultanic campaigns in 1635 and 1638 was so exceptional as to inspire the construction of matching commemorative pavilions in the Topkapı Palace compound at Istanbul.

War on the Western Front

European awareness of the Ottoman empire far predates the sixteenth century, and certain dramatic events such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the Ottoman landing in the southern Italian peninsula at Otranto in 1480 could hardly be ignored. But, until the fall of Belgrade in 1521 (followed by Rhodes in 1522), the Ottomans remained a remote and somewhat academic concern for most of Europe. It was current events of the 1520s that sparked a retrospective interest in the earlier history of the Ottomans, reflected in works such as that published in 1528 by the Florentine Andrea Cambini on the origins of the dynasty.¹¹ Thereafter, the actual and potential military strength of the Ottoman empire became a lasting concern of the West. Venice in particular stood in awe of the sultan (*Gran Signor*)'s huge, by contemporary Western standards, reserves.¹² Such impressions of Ottoman military might were reinforced by image makers in the service of the Ottoman court who gave graphic demonstration of Ottoman invincibility in richly illustrated campaign histories commissioned by the sultan. Sultan Süleyman I (r. 1520–66) was the first Ottoman sultan to self-consciously produce a detailed pictorial record of his military achievements, thus ensuring the permanency of his legacy of greatness.¹³ The reality of Ottoman military involvement in Europe during the sixteenth, and even more so in the seventeenth century, was less orderly than either the contemporary European or the artfully-presented Ottoman accounts would have us believe. Both accounts present the profile of the Ottoman army at maximum strength, mobilized for "great" campaigns and led by the sultan in person.

It is worth remembering that the outbreak of war was not always or only the result of sultanic initiative. As an example of the sometimes haphazard quality of Ottoman warfare in the European theatre the chain of events leading to the declaration of war on Austria in 1593 is particularly instructive. Starting from the summer of 1592 the Ottoman

governor of Bosnia had already begun his own private war against the Croatian frontier by subduing the fortress of Bihac after an eight-day siege,¹⁴ and constructing a new fortress at Petrinja on the southern bank of the Kulpa river facing the Croatian stronghold of Sisak on the opposite bank. Acting thus far only with provincial forces at his disposal and without open approval or assistance from the capital, Hasan Pasha's attacks, while a serious provocation, fell short of being an irreparable rupture of the peace. On the other hand, the dispatching of imperial troops from other provinces in support of such frontier raiding with the clear authorization of the Grand Vezier left no room for ambiguity about Ottoman intentions.¹⁵ One of Koca Sinan Pasha's first acts upon his return (for the third time) to the Grand Vezierate in January 1593 was to appoint his son Mehmed commander-general of the Rumelian troops with responsibility for directing (and expanding) the attacks already under way against the Croatian frontier. Apart from providing the Austrians with advance warning of Ottoman mobilization plans, this achieved little, and the fall of Sisak to Mehmed Pasha in September 1593¹⁶ was soon reversed by an enemy counter-offensive.¹⁷ Thus, by the autumn of 1593, a condition of open war existed between the two sides that was not anticipated, nor yet very enthusiastically supported by wider court circles on either side of the conflict. The war that had begun in 1592 as the private war of Hasan Pasha was continued in 1593 as the personal war of the recently re-installed Grand Vezier whose judgement in embracing and whose competence for successful prosecution of the war were openly challenged.¹⁸ During the gradual escalation from reciprocal border raids to open war over the 30-month period between July 1591 and the closing months of 1593 the burden of Ottoman defence fell heavily on the border districts,¹⁹ and it was not before the summer of 1594 when Koca Sinan Pasha's offensive against Győr took shape that the Ottomans were able to mobilize a force of sufficient size to pursue the war with conviction. The Ottomans' unpreparedness for full-scale war in Hungary after more than two decades of relative inactivity in the north can be measured by the fact that, as late as May-June 1594 when the Austrians launched a determined assault against the Ottoman stronghold of Esztergom (measured, in traditional narrative style, as a "seventeen hundred shot siege"),²⁰ the only reinforcements the Ottomans could muster were 2,000 border guards and horse grazers (*voyunuk*) from the frontier provinces of Semendire (Smederovo) and Bosnia who, soon after their arrival, defected to the enemy.²¹

While the Austro-Ottoman conflict of 1593–1606, also called the "Long War", should not be regarded as typical of Ottoman warfare in Europe, it is noteworthy that both its beginnings and its conclusion were closely connected with spontaneous events at the margins of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. The Bosnian governor Hasan Pasha's

raids against Croatia as the prelude to war in 1591 and Bocskai's rebellion in Transylvania in 1605 – which sparked a civil war in Hungary proper and a general breakdown of order in the Austrian borderlands – as the prelude to a negotiated settlement at Zsitva Torok in November 1606 were events that set off chain reactions, whose consequences and outcomes neither Istanbul nor Vienna could fully control. Such spontaneous events recurred periodically in the frontier lands between the two empires from 1521 onwards, but prevailing political conditions only exceptionally nurtured the unanimity of purpose required for cohesive and sustained military efforts. The halting pace of war in the fifteen years between 1591 and 1605 is one sign that even in periods of formal and declared hostilities such unanimity was not consistently or continuously present.

For their part, the Holy Roman emperors had only a modest number of standing troops they could call their own and relied heavily on units supplied, on a semi-voluntary basis, by the “armed provinces” consisting of (after 1648) the eight electoral states in Germany. Leopold I (r. 1658–1705) managed to coax as many as 34,000 troops from member states to supplement his own forces for an exceptional mobilization against Buda in 1686,²² but such feats were highly unusual. Wartime mobilizations might temporarily swell the ranks of the standing army, but as late as the period of Montecuccoli's presidency of the Imperial War Council (*Hofkriegsrat*) between 1668 and 1680 the full strength on paper of the imperial army was still no more than 25,000.²³ The deployment of more than 12,000 of these at any given time to any single front was exceptional. If we put the 34,000 loaned troops together with the 12,000 mustered from the emperor's own regiments, the resultant figure comes close to what Montecuccoli had envisaged, remembering always that such numbers represent ideals that were rarely achieved in practice. Big armies, recruited, financed and provisioned from the centre never (as far as warfare in the Central European theatre was concerned) became the norm during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For most of this period the Ottomans faced small “private” armies led (and to a very large extent recruited and even financed) by Hungaro-Croatian magnates of the border districts, such as the Nadasdy, Berceny, Batthany and especially the Zriny clans who themselves possessed extensive lands in the frontier zone and had a vested interest in the protection of their estates.

Accounts of the largest mobilizations and the sieges of key fortresses manned by considerable imperial garrisons which Ottoman sources record in greatest detail describe conflict of a scale and intensity that was by no means the norm. Most conflicts involved combatants numbered not in myriads but thousands. An accurate assessment of the overall scale of conflict will take on particular significance in the context of our analysis in Chapter eight which deals with the impact of Ottoman warfare. It is worth