

# The Sultan's Raiders

The Military Role of the Crimean Tatars  
in the Ottoman Empire



By Brian Glyn Williams



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Washington, D.C.  
2013

# THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION

Published in the United States by  
The Jamestown Foundation  
1111 16th St. N.W.  
Suite 320  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
<http://www.jamestown.org>

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Cover picture: Crimean Tatar guards before the Demir Kapi (The Iron Door) to the Crimean Khan's palace in Bahcesaray by Robert Brooks.

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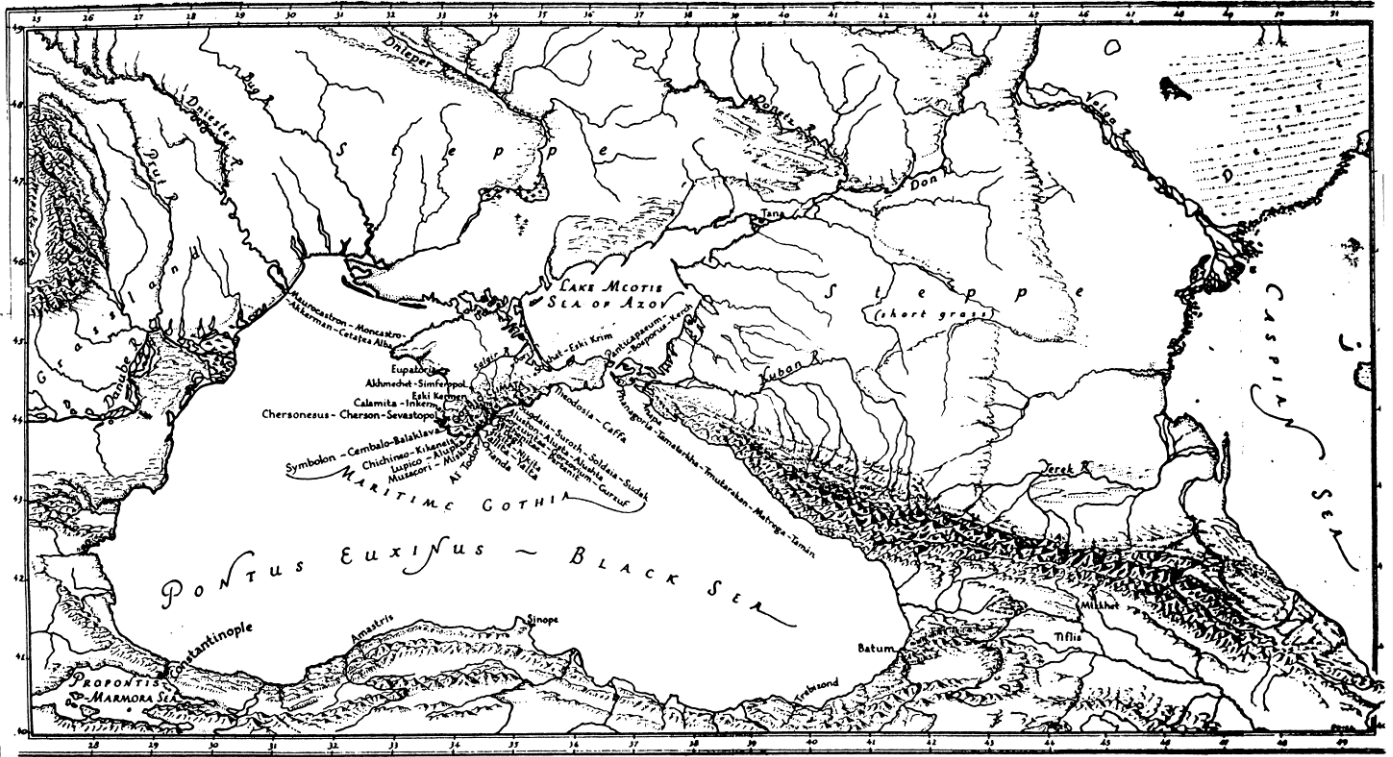
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# THE CRIMEA AND THE BLACK SEA DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD



Source: Brian G. Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Leiden: Brill, 2001)

## FOREWORD

On the 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Crimean deportations of 1944, The Jamestown Foundation is delighted to introduce to historians, policymakers and the general public a work of historical importance by one of the few American scholars specializing in the history of the Crimean Tatars. Since Brian Glyn Williams wrote his first book on the Crimean Tatars back in 2001, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forging of a Nation* (Brills Inner Asian Library), few if any readily-available works on the this nationality have appeared in any monograph-length format in the past decade. Indeed, the previously mentioned book by Dr. Williams is already out of print and rare, if not difficult, to find for resale.

Surprisingly, the United States has produced several scholars who specialized in the Crimean Tatars. One of the leading American experts on the Crimean Tatars is Alan Fisher, who produced several important books on this subject. His most well-known work is *Crimean Tatars* that appeared as part of the Hoover Series on Nationalities in 1978. It took another 20 years to pass before Dr. Williams made his important contribution in 2001. Sadly, more than two decades after the breakup of the USSR, interest in the former Soviet nationalities has experienced a major decline in the United States and only a handful of experts on the Crimean Tatars remains. Interest in the U.S. policymaking world has fared even worse; virtually no organization inside the Washington beltway has given much, if any attention, to the fate of the Crimean Tatars. However, the continuing significance of this important nationality with a long and glorious historical past based in Crimea means that the Crimean Tatars should not be overlooked. By releasing this short monograph, Jamestown hopes to contribute to again raising awareness about this proud people.

Given the strategic location of the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea; the on-again, off-again see-saw struggle between Russia and Ukraine over this region; and the pivotal, ethno-political role played by the Crimean Tatars who reside there, it is important to remind the general public that this nationality has a rich history.

Largely regarded as the elite shock troops of the Turkish Sultan, the soldiers of the Crimean Khanate were legendary for their military performance from the Caucasus, to the Polish frontier, to the gates of Vienna. Hence, by releasing this work, it is our aim to remind Jamestown readers that the Crimean Tatars played a notable role in European history for over 300 years and remain an important people to understand among the nationalities that make up Eurasia.

To this day, just as they did under the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Tatars retain a strategic relevance in the balance of power in Eurasia that should not be overlooked. At a Jamestown event on Crimea, held on November 5, 2010, former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor said that as ambassador he had urged planners in the U.S. State Department to open a consulate in Sevastopol so that Washington could better understand this region. There was much wisdom in that advice but, regrettably, Taylor was ignored and American policymakers continue to maintain a poor understanding of developments in Crimea.

For this reason, The Jamestown Foundation concluded that it would be useful to make a minor contribution to kick-starting some renewed effort to seek a greater understanding of the Crimean Tatars and their martial prowess, which was legendary throughout the history of the Ottoman Empire. Understanding the history of a people is the key to unlocking their future as a nation. To date, over



300,000 Crimean Tatars have returned to their homeland from the diaspora, but hundreds of thousands more remain abroad in Europe, North America and Central Asia. As a people, the Crimean Tatars continue to experience a major awakening in their national identity, which did not wither with the fall of the Soviet Union but only strengthened. This nationality will continue to remain an important player in Eurasia, and understanding them is vital for developing a coherent comprehension of this complex, geostrategic and multifaceted region.

Glen E. Howard  
President, The Jamestown Foundation

Washington, D.C.  
May 18, 2013



“Besides these regular troops, the Turks were formerly assisted by numerous hordes of Tatars, whose mode of warfare exceeded even their own in barbarity.”

*A Survey of the Turkish Empire*  
- William Eton, 1799

“The Ottoman empire was a lavish provider of booty for daring and resourceful employees.”

*The Ottoman Impact on Europe*  
- Dorothy Vaughan, 1954

## INTRODUCTION

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, the Christian nations of Europe and the Shiites of Persia were forced to defend their lands against the inroads of an ever expanding Ottoman Empire, an empire whose awesome war machine at times appeared strong enough to absorb its immediate neighbors. During the course of these campaigns, much of Europe was introduced to the world of the Orient as Ottoman *ghazis* (holy warriors) from Asia settled throughout the Balkans and Central Europe.

In the Sultan's host, one encountered a variety of peoples who made up the Grand Turk's ethnically diverse empire. Turks, Arabs, Circassians, Kurds, Maghrebis, Bosniaks, Pomaks, Albanians and a variety of other peoples of whose existence Western Europe was not even aware, could all be found fighting together under the Sultan's banner. One of the most interesting, and militarily effective groups utilized by the Ottomans in their seemingly endless wars were the Tatars of the Crimean Peninsula.

In their three hundred years of service, the Crimean Tatars contributed more to the Ottoman military than did any other of the Sultan's non-Turkish subjects, and the account of their service with the Sultan is one of the most unusual chapters in European history. This work will explore the role of the Crimean Tatars in the Ottoman Empire's military campaigns against its neighbors with the aim of providing some insight into the controversial relationship between these two states and peoples.



## BACKGROUND

In order to fully understand the alliance between the Crimean Tatars and the Ottoman Turks, one must first look back to the Crimean Khanate's predecessor, the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde, which was formed by Genghis Khan's grandson Batu encompassed much of what is today Russia and Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula in the south. In the centuries following Batu's death, the Crimea became a haven for unsuccessful aspirants to the Horde's throne.

By 1443, one of these contenders, Haci Giray, had succeeded in breaking away from the Golden Horde and establishing himself as independent ruler over parts of the Crimea and the adjacent areas of the steppe. His family was to rule over the Crimea with few exceptions until the end of the eighteenth century.

One of Islam's greatest successes over Christianity, the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehemed the Conqueror, occurred ten years after the establishment of the Khanate and undoubtedly caught the attention of the Crimean Tatars who began to look to the Ottomans for assistance in their struggles with the Khans of the Golden Horde. With Constantinople's fall, a fellow Turkic Muslim power was in control of the Dardenelles and Bosphorous.

One of the Sultan's first actions upon gaining control of the entrance to the Black Sea, was to move against the Genoese trading posts on the southern coast of the Crimea. In the summer of 1454, an Ottoman fleet of 56 vessels entered the Black Sea to begin the process of enforcing Mehemed II's rule in an area that would eventually be known as the "Ottoman Lake."

Haci Giray Khan led a troop of 7,000 Tatars to assist the Ottomans in an unsuccessful siege of Kaffa, the largest of the Italian coastal trading centers.<sup>1</sup> Although this joint military adventure did not result in any major conquests for either of the participants, it set the precedent for future collaboration between the two states. For the next ten years Haci Giray and Mehemed devoted their attention to more immediate concerns and the two powers remained relatively distant.

The Ottoman Empire did not involve itself in the Crimea again until 1466. In that year, Haci Giray died under mysterious circumstances, possibly poisoned by Tatar clan leaders who were jealous of his growing power.<sup>2</sup> After his death, two of his sons, Nurdevlet and Mengli, began a struggle for the throne. During the course of this civil war the Crimean clans grew to play an increasingly important role.

In 1475, the head of the powerful Shirin clan, Eminek, invited the Ottoman Sultan Mehemed II to intervene in the civil war. Mehemed II was easily convinced of the benefits to be incurred from interference in the Crimea. He saw it as an opportunity to gain influence among the Tatars, as well as a chance to strike a blow at the Kaffans who were also involved in the dispute.

On May 19, 1475, an Ottoman fleet left for the Crimea to intervene in the struggle for the throne and conquer the Italian trading cities of the peninsula. Two weeks later, the Ottoman commander, Mehemed Pasha, once again assembled the famed Turkish cannon before the walls of Kaffa and commenced a second siege of the city. The Kaffans resisted the intense Ottoman bombardment for only four days before unconditionally surrendering to the Sultan's forces.

The Kaffans suffered heavily for their resistance to the Ottomans, and most of the Italian population was

enslaved and carried off to Istanbul. The Ottomans, not satisfied simply with the capture of Kaffa, continued their invasion of the Crimea's southern coast eventually taking the Genoese cities of Inkerman, Sevastopol, Kerch, Balaklava, Sudak, and the strategic fortress of Azov on the Don Basin.

After completing the conquest, the southern coasts of the Crimea came under direct Ottoman rule and the Tatars found themselves sharing the peninsula with a new and extremely powerful neighbor, the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were also successful in their efforts to influence the outcome of the war between Mengli Giray and Nurdevlet forces and, by 1478 they had placed their candidate, Mengli Giray, on the Crimean throne. In return for this assistance, Mengli promised Mehemed to "be the enemy of your enemy and friend of your friend."<sup>3</sup> The Sultan was given various rights in the Crimea in return for his assistance, the most important being the right to confirm the Tatar clans' choice of Khan.

There exists an abundance of writings concerning the content of the agreement between the Sultan and the Crimean Khan. There is also a fair amount of controversy concerning the exact nature of the relationship between the two allies. There can be no doubt that the Ottomans were the senior partner in the agreement worked out between Mengli Giray and Mehemed II, as can be seen by recent evidence presented in *Turcica* by Victor Ostapchuk. After analyzing a series of correspondence from the Crimean court to Istanbul, he writes:

The uniqueness and significance of the Crimean letters to the Porte become particularly evident when they are compared with Crimean letters to non-Muslim States such as Muscovy, Poland, Transylvania, the Hapsburg Empire, Denmark, and others. The diplomatics of some of these correspondences has been analyzed in the past. With their resplendent tugras [royal seals] and lengthy intitulations listing subject peoples of the Khan, these documents, which within their texts are often referred to as yarlig or royal command, state edict resemble missives of powerful and independent sovereigns. By contrast, contemporary letters to the [Ottoman] Porte, lack all the trappings of sovereignty, including the tugra and intitulatio, while the seal of the Khan is almost always relegated to the back of the document.<sup>4</sup>

One must not however make the mistake of overemphasizing the Ottoman Porte's authority in the Crimea, especially when discussing the early days of contact between the two states. Historians who speak of an Ottoman "conquest" of the Khanate in the fifteenth century are exaggerating the Sultan's influence in the Crimea. In his work on the Cossacks, Albert Seaton makes this mistake when he writes:

At about this time the Tatars were threatened by the appearance of the Ottoman Turks who arrived in the Don in 1471 and seized the important Venetian depot of Tana (Azov).<sup>5</sup>

The Ottomans became involved in the Crimea not as a threat to the Crimean Tatars but as an ally to settle an internal dispute and, according to some accounts, to assist the Khanate in its struggles against the Golden Horde. The Ottoman-Tatar alliance was in many ways similar to the Polish-Lithuanian alliance that had begun to coordinate its activities on the steppe at about this time.<sup>6</sup> Henry Howorth's suggestion that the Khanate be looked upon as "Egypt and Tunis were in latter days, as provinces dependent in a measure upon the Ottoman crown, although enjoying a great measure of independence" is perhaps the most accurate summary of the Khanate's position in regard to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup>

That the Crimean Khans were by no means "mere puppets that could be changed anytime the Porte desired" as William Munson describes them in *The Last Crusade*, can be seen by the fact that the Crimean Khan's standard had the rank of five horsetails.<sup>8</sup> Lesley Blanche ascribes even greater importance to the Crimean Khan claiming that he actually had six horsetails on his standard, putting him on the same level as the Sultan himself.<sup>9</sup> The Sultan also recognized the leading Giray clan's claim to royal lineage and used the title "Chingizye" (Genghisid) in addressing the Crimean Khan. According to Alan Fisher "Of all the subjects of the Ottoman Sultans, the Crimean Khans held a special position because of the importance of their genealogy."<sup>10</sup>

When the Sultan required Crimean assistance in a campaign, an invitation and gifts were sent to the Khan and various officials in his court. For his part, the Khan received a bejeweled sword, a robe of honor and a payment known as the "quiver price." The Khan was also given the honor of having a full dress parade upon his arrival in the Ottoman camp before a campaign and was considered to have a higher rank than even the Grand Vizir.

Eventually, the Ottomans did increase their influence in the Crimean Khanate, as shall be seen, but it must be remembered that the Crimean Tatars were never subjects like the Serbs or the Greeks, but rather subordinate allies.

Although historians may disagree about the exact nature of Ottoman-Tatar relations, there is no controversy concerning the importance of Mehemed II's accomplishments in the Crimea for the security of both the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate. In his summary of the Ottoman Empire's expansion, Donald Pritcher has the following to say about Mehemed II's successes in the Crimea.

The Crimean venture, though it has received comparatively little attention from historians (except in Russia) was undoubtedly one of the most important and far-sighted of all the Conqueror's undertakings, and it proved to the mutual advantage of both suzerain and vassal.<sup>11</sup>

In his biography of Mehemed the Conqueror, Franz Babinger places even more importance on the Conqueror's successes in the Black Sea region and puts them in a broader context. Babinger states:

It is no exaggeration to say that even the discovery of the new Atlantic trade routes, with its crucial consequences for the economic life of the West, resulted in part from Ottoman expansion in the Black Sea area. The voyages to the New World were undertaken in the hope of creating a new, substitute route to India and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup>

Having set the stage for future cooperation between the Crimean Tatars and the Ottomans, a brief analysis of the Tatars' way of life, and in particular their methods of warfare, is in order. This will help demonstrate the nature of the military assistance that the Tatars were able to offer to their new ally. Finally, the various Ottoman fronts, each with its own particular conditions, foes and history, will be analyzed separately.

The areas of Tatar participation are from east to west, the Caucasus Front against Persia, the Russian Front, the Polish Front, and the Western Front, which involved actions against Habsburg Austria, Moldavia, Transylvania and Wallachia. These zones, which were never clearly defined, overlapped in many areas and are used here merely for convenience.



# THE CRIMEAN MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The Crimean Tatars' mode of combat was a product of thousands of years of steppe warfare, and their battle tactics differed little from those used by Attila and his Huns a millennium earlier. The following description of the Huns, recorded almost a thousand years before the Crimean Khanate's emergence is remarkable in its similarity to later descriptions of the Tatars and will show how unchanging the life of the steppe nomad was (this account differs little from a description of the Tatars given later in this section by William Eton).

When provoked they sometimes fight singly but they enter the battle in tactical formation, while their medley of voices makes a savage noise. And as they are lightly equipped for swift motion, and unexpected in action, they purposely divide suddenly in scattered bands and attack, rushing about in disorder here and there, dealing terrific slaughter; and because of their extraordinary rapidity of movement, they cannot be discerned when they break into a rampart or pillage an enemy's camp. And on this account you would not hesitate to call them the most terrible of warriors, because they fight from a distance with missiles having sharp bone, instead of their usual points, joined to the shafts with wonderful skill; then they gallop over the intervening spaces and fight hand to hand with swords regardless of their own lives.<sup>13</sup>

Raised to fight in the tough conditions of the harsh steppe, Tatar youth were taught to ride and fight at an early age in much the same way the Huns in 392 B.C. had. In the Tatars' society, there was no distinction between civilian and soldier.

Every man capable of riding a horse was required to participate in his Khan's campaigns. Disobedience often resulted in execution as can be seen from the following command sent out by the Khan Mengli Giray in 1501.

As God wills, I want to mount my horse and you must be all ready to fight alongside me. There must be one cart for five men, three horses to a man...a great quantity of arms and food. No one is to stay home save he who is less than fifteen years old. Whoever stays behind is no servant of mine, of my sons, nor my princes. Rob and kill such a man.<sup>14</sup>

The Khan's force, described as a "militia, albeit a militia of nomads accustomed from childhood to hunt with the bow, to ride, and to make great journeys," could assemble in as short a time as two weeks; a factor which gave them a distinct advantage over their slower assembling adversaries.<sup>15</sup>

When estimating the size of the Crimean army, historians are divided in their opinions. Alan Fisher is conservative in his estimate and claims that the Khan could field "at most 40-50,000 light cavalry".<sup>16</sup> Other sources claim that the Khan could assemble as many as 80,000 warriors.<sup>17</sup> Isaac Massa, a Western observer in Moscow during the sixteenth century, claimed that the Khan had 400,000 men in his army when it attacked Moscow.<sup>18</sup> This estimate is undoubtedly an exaggeration as is Demidoff's claim that "The Khan could field an army of 200,000 men without sensibly depriving the country."<sup>19</sup>

It is hard to estimate the size of the Crimean armies for the Khan's forces were usually supplemented by numerous Nogai nomads from the steppe. The Nogais (descendants of the Golden Horde who moved to the Kuban and steppe lands north of the Crimea after the destruction of this body in 1502) engaged in a

more primitive nomadic lifestyle than their kin in the Crimea and were rarely counted by the Khan's officials.

Massa can be forgiven for overstating the size of the Khan's force for the Tatars' fierce appearance often alarmed

Westerners who were unfamiliar with the lifestyle of the nomad. The following seventeenth century description of a Tatar contingent is typical of Western descriptions:

Many looked more like gypsies than soldiers. The most wretched creatures that one could observe were the Tatars...They are wild, raw and barbaric people and seem to be bad soldiers. In place of a flag they have horse's tails on a long pole. They have no weapons apart from handzars and poleaxes and no music at all. Their officers, however, had the fanciest weapons and their insigne was a spear like those carried by pig-gelders...They are very revolting in their eating habits. Their favorite tid-bit is horse meat or foal's flesh, which they toss on the fire and which, not even half-cooked, they stuff, unsalted into their mouths, so that blood runs down their chins.<sup>20</sup>

That a Westerner, used to the pageant of war in Europe could mistake the Tatars for gypsies is not surprising when one assesses the practical nature of the common Tatars' attire. A Tatar warrior usually wore an inverted sheepskin jacket known as a *chapan*, thick breeches, and a fur-lined hat to keep out the cold. For armor he wore a treated leather jacket or, if he were a little better off, a chain mail vest and spiked helmet. His weapon of choice was the powerful compound bow, which he could use with unparalleled accuracy while riding. The curved saber, short spear and horsehair lasso (used to unseat opponents) were also utilized with great effect by the Tatars.

The Tatars were not known for their proficiency with firearms which they considered too clumsy to be used in the fast riding battles of the steppe. The Tatars of the steppe were somewhat in awe of firearms when they were first introduced to this region as can be seen by Mengli Giray's request to Russians for these weapons in his struggles with the Tatars of the Golden Horde. "Send me by the Don some pieces of artillery, for form's sake merely, the enemy will fly directly he sees them."<sup>21</sup> The Tatars may have also felt, as Brent puts it, "that such mechanical devices detracted from the human element of personal bravery, which should always predominate in war."<sup>22</sup>

The Tatars' choice of weapons and attire was not the only aspect of their warfare that differed from those of the West. According to Parry, "The Tatars fought in a style which, if it had ever existed in Western Europe, had long since vanished."<sup>23</sup> The Tatars' unique style of warfare was a product of his environment. Inured to the harsh life of the steppe herder where cattle and slave raids, sudden attacks and tribal warfare were commonplace, the Tatars considered warfare to be a way of life.

Westerners used to a more "civilized" style of warfare were often appalled at the Tatars' seemingly senseless violence as can be seen by Eton's account of their tactics:

The Tatar mode of fighting has no resemblance to European tactics, it is one continued scene of confusion and tumult, though it gives occasion to the display of great agility, and no small portion of a barbarous kind of skill. Alternately flying and advancing in detached parties, many kinds of contest carried on at once; the saber, the pike, and fire arms, are all employed, and they fight alike on horseback or on foot, though the former is the most common mode.

The regularity and discipline of modern European battles has greatly contributed to produce correspondent mildness toward the conquered but in this desultory warfare the passions of the individuals are let loose, personal fury augments the savage horror of the scene, and the enemy is never spared, unless he be sufficiently unhurt to become a valuable slave.<sup>24</sup>

The Tatars' practice of engaging in large-scale slave raiding while on campaigns also horrified Westerners, one of whom left this vivid account of the Tatars' treatment of these captives.

The old and infirm men, who will not fetch much at sale are given up to the Tatar youths (much as hares are given to whelps by way of their first lesson of hunting), either to be stoned or to be thrown into the sea, or to be killed by any sort of death they might please.<sup>25</sup>

Booty and slaves were the object of much of the Tatars' military operations and the Tatars often avoided costly military engagements that hindered them on pillaging missions. The swift Tatar raiding parties, known as *chambuls*, had a disconcerting ability to overcome obstacles, such as rivers, that would halt a normal army. This skill, when combined with their amazing speed, made them almost unstoppable. Massa's account of a Tatar raid is perhaps the best description of the tactics used by the Tatars to overcome the problems that hindered most armies.

As soon as the Muscovites became aware of the enemy's flight, they sped large detachments of cavalry in hot pursuit to prevent him from burning everything in his path. Arriving in Serpukhov, they learned that the Tatars had already crossed the Oka that day. This seemed incredible to them. They could scarcely believe that such a vast army could, in one night and half a day, and in summer, make a march of 28 miles, and cross a great river.

Yet so it was, for the enemy were endowed with inconceivable speed in flight, as in war they encumber themselves with neither munitions nor victuals. The Tatars, who feed on horseflesh usually take two mounts for every man on their expeditions. When one of the two is tired, the rider jumps on the other, and the first follows his master like a dog, as these horses have been trained to do while very young.

When a man happens to die, his companions kill his horses. Each of them cuts a slice, which he places under his saddle, the lower part of which is dry. There this flesh softens and is warmed; when it is tender enough, they savor it as a delicious morsel.

Furthermore, pillage furnishes them with enough livestock for their subsistence. When they arrive at the bank of a river, each man attaches his horses to one another by their tails and bridles, throws his bow of wood and sinew on a horse's back so it will not swell through contact with the water, and, holding himself between the two mounts, crosses the river swimming with incredible speed. Clothed from head to foot in bearskins or sheepskins, these Tatars have the appearance of true demons.<sup>26</sup>

When he came to grips with an enemy, the Tatar made as good a warrior as raider. In battle, the Tatars maneuvered rapidly, following the orders of the Khan's standard bearers who used visual signals to

communicate and direct the mounted formations. The Tatars usually relied on flank attacks and surprise charges to break up the enemy's positions. When attacked by formed bodies of enemy cavalry, the Tatars would frequently scatter and fake a retreat, shooting arrows from the saddle, then quickly re-group and attack the enemy whose formations were often strung out in pursuit. When confronted with impenetrable enemy formations, the Tatars poured arrow fire into the enemy's ranks, harried their detachments and cut off stragglers often wearing down the resistance of a stronger enemy.

This was the nature of the Mehemed II's new allies the Crimean Tatars. From 1478, the Ottomans could usually rely on the assistance of the hardy Tatar horsemen who provided the Sultan with some of the finest cavalry in the world. The Ottoman army, which was made up for the most part of *sipahis* (horsemen), used light cavalry far more extensively than their European opponents and there was always a need for more riders in the Sultan's ranks. Cavalry units played a far greater role in the Ottoman armies than historians have given credit and greatly outnumbered the legendary *janissarys* (slave infantry) whose role has been exaggerated. A seventeenth century observer wrote that the Ottoman Sultan "maintaineth an hundred and fifty thousand horsemen, excellent well armed...So great a Cavalry can no other Prince maintain with the yearly expense of fourteen millions of gold...Herein consisteth the chieftest Preservation of the Ottoman Empire."<sup>27</sup>

The Crimean Tatars could usually be relied upon to send at least 20,000 riders to enlarge the already fearsome Ottoman army. Their forces were easily maintained on campaigns and, unlike the Ottoman *sipahis*, they did not require land grants from the Ottoman government in return for their services. Mehemed II must have, however, had his doubts about employing the Tatars. It was well-known that a Tatar defection during the battle of Ankara in 1402 had resulted in the death of his grandfather, Sultan Bayezid I, and almost caused the destruction of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>28</sup> Mehemed II must have wondered if the Crimean Tatars would be any more reliable or effective than their ancestors.

That the Crimean Tatars could fight effectively in steppe conditions was beyond doubt, the question to be answered is how effective was their assistance on the various Ottoman fronts from the Caspian to Vienna? It is to the answering of this question that this paper will now be devoted.

## THE CAUCASUS FRONT

In retrospect, the Ottoman Empire's wars with its neighbor Shiite Persia resulted in very few gains for either side and are considered by many historians to have been a drain on the resources of both Muslim powers. Starting in 1514, these costly wars were fought for several reasons, the most obvious being the religious differences between the Shiite Persians and Sunni Ottomans. The tone of the following letter sent to the Iranian Shah Ismail by the Sultan Selim I is a clear example of the religious differences between the two states. Selim wrote:

The Ulema [educated class of Muslim legal scholars] and our teachers of the law have pronounced death upon thee [Shah Ismail], perjurer and blasphemer as thou art, and have laid upon every good Mussulman the sacred duty of taking arms for the defense of religion, and for the destruction of heresy and impiety in thy person and the persons of those who follow thee.

The Persian Wars were also fought over more basic political differences, such as the desire on the part of both powers to dominate the mountain principalities of the Caucasus region. It was only natural that much of the warfare that took place between the Ottomans and Safavids be fought in this disputed region. It was just as natural for the Ottomans to call upon their Tatar allies to provide assistance which often proved to be crucial to Ottoman successes on this front.

The Crimean Tatars had several factors favoring them on this front which rendered their aid to the Ottoman cause here quite effective. The Tatars had a long history of involvement in the Caucasus and had actually been fighting in this region since the early days of the Golden Horde.

The Crimean Khans had subsequently gained control over several Circassian tribes in the Northern Caucasus after the destruction of this state and were therefore quite familiar with warfare in this region and its inhabitants. Circassians could be found in the Khan's armies and the Khan's bodyguard was usually made up of Circassian tribesmen. The Tatars' years of involvement in the Caucasus helped them greatly in their campaigns with the Ottomans in this region. Their forces were especially effective on the steppes of the Kuban (northern Caucasus) and plains of the southern Caucasus.

At the time of the Persian War of 1578-1590, the Crimean Tatars had in fact begun work on fortifications in Circassia in which they planned to settle Nogay tribesmen to defend the region from the incursions of the Kalmyk Mongols and Cossacks.<sup>30</sup> The Tatar presence in this area also placed them conveniently close to the areas in the Southern Caucasus which the Ottomans and the Persians had begun feuding over in the late sixteenth century.

It was for both these reasons that the Ottomans called on the Tatars for assistance at the start of their 1578 offensive against the mountainous Persian provinces of Shirvan and Azerbaijan. This campaign, which is analyzed in Carl Max Kortepeter's *Ottoman Imperialism During the Reformation*, is one of the best documented joint ventures between the Tatars and the Ottomans on the Persian front. The Tatar motives for participating in the campaign were varied, but stemmed to a large degree from a desire to acquire plunder in the Safavid's rich northern provinces.

The growth of Russian power in the steppe had begun to make incursions into Russian territory less and less

profitable for the Tatars who were constantly in search of new fields of plunder. The Persians appeared sufficiently weakened at this time to allow the Tatars to acquire sufficient booty to make a campaign in this direction lucrative. The Tatars may have also been inspired by a genuine religious zeal to partake in a campaign against the heretic Shiite Persians who were considered a threat to the Sunni Islam of both the Ottomans and the Crimean Tatars.

These reasons aside, an analysis of their role in this campaign should provide an accurate picture of the typical role played by the Tatars on this front as well as demonstrate the tactics used by the Khan's forces against the Safavids.

The Ottomans chose to invade Persia's Caucasus provinces in 1578 expecting to take advantage of Persian disunity. The Safavids were in the process of recovering from the effects of a bloody civil war and appeared to be too divided to resist a strong Ottoman thrust into their northern territories.

The Ottoman government also had great faith in the ability of the *Serdar* (General) chosen to lead the offensive. The man chosen for the task, Mehemed Pasha, was an experienced campaigner who had fought in the Caucasus previously and knew the area and its people well. Mehemed was well aware of the fierce nature of the Caucasian peoples and expected as much trouble from them as he did from the Safavids who exerted varying degrees of control over many of the region's tribes and principalities. It is therefore not surprising that he called on the Tatars to assist his forces at the beginning of the Ottoman offensive in April of 1578.

As was so often the case, the Tatars were involved in problems of their own and were initially unable to assist the Ottoman forces. The Tatars were preoccupied with operations against Poland, which had been unable to prevent Cossacks in her lands from raiding Crimean territory. It was not until September that the Grand Vezir succeeded in arranging a truce between the Poles and the Crimean Tatars, thus permitting the Tatars to come to the Ottomans' aid.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman army had commenced an assault on Persian-held Georgia, and in the battles of Childir and Alazan Mehemed Pasha succeeded in defeating the numerically superior Persian forces arrayed against him. By the end of the campaign season, the Ottomans had gained a tenuous control of much of Georgia and Shirvan. As Mehemed Pasha prepared to withdraw his army, he once again called on the Tatars for assistance. The Khan's forces were needed to bolster the relatively weak occupying force of 8,000 men, which had been left to hold the Empire's new possessions for the winter.

It was not until the middle of October that a Tatar detachment of 15,000 men, under the command of Adil Giray, the *Kalgay* (heir to the throne), departed for the battlefield in Transcaucasia. There was a sense of urgency surrounding the Tatars' journey south, for a Safavid army of roughly the same size had also begun moving toward the Ottoman force, which was stationed in the city of Aresh.

The Safavid forces, under the leadership of one Aras Khan, arrived first and quickly commenced an assault on the outnumbered Ottomans who resisted bravely for three days. On the third day, it appeared that the Ottoman defenses were close to crumbling when a messenger arrived to inform the disheartened troops that the Tatar contingent was only a station away.

Upon hearing this news, the Ottoman defenders rallied their strength and held out until the Tatars arrived later that day. In describing the ensuing battle, Kortepeter relates that the hardy Tatars quickly engaged the

enemy upon arriving at Aresh, despite the fact that they were undoubtedly weary from their long journey.<sup>31</sup> The Tatars' weariness did not seem to have affected their fighting skills and, in the ensuing battle, the Persian forces were quickly routed by Adil Giray's troops. The Tatar contingent's timely arrival doubtless saved the Ottoman mission from certain annihilation and Adil Giray's troops were dully honored by Osman Pasha, the new Turkish commander.

Osman Pasha's gratitude was limited, however, and, after the battle, he refused to allow the Tatars to plunder the territories under his control. Conflict between Adil Giray and the Ottoman commander over these restrictions was headed off only after Osman Pasha found an equally enticing task for the Tatars. Remnants of the defeated Persian force were re-forming to the south of the Ottoman's position and the Ottoman commander had discovered that they had much wealth removed from the province in their possession. The Tatars were easily convinced of the benefits to be gained from an engagement with an enemy so heavily laden with wealth, and eagerly set off to attack the Persian camp.

Once again the Tatars proved victorious over the Safavids and acquired their booty in a fashion that was definitely more beneficial to the Ottoman cause than pillaging the Empire's newly acquired possessions. According to some accounts the Tatars were quite fortunate on this occasion and found themselves in possession of more slaves and booty than they could carry off.<sup>32</sup>

These victories over the Safavids were actually rather Pyrrhic and merely succeeded in buying the Ottoman holding force time for the Persians were determined to expel the Sultan's small occupation force. In November, the Shah's Vezir, Selmam Khan, personally led an army of 30-40,000 men into the Caucasus to crush the combined Tatar-Ottoman force. Selmam Khan dispatched a small part of his army to surround Osman Pasha's forces, which were holed up in the city of Shemakha, while he led the main force against Adil Giray's mobile army.

On November 30, Selmam Khan's army met Adil Giray's troops on an open plain to the east of the city of Aksu and quickly became involved in a battle that lasted three days. On the third day, the Tatars seem to have actually gained an advantage over the numerically superior Safavid forces when a rainstorm swept the battlefield. The Tatars were forced to withdraw from the engagement during the storm for their maneuverability was hampered by the muddy conditions caused by the rain. This difficulty was also compounded by the fact that the Tatars' most effective weapons, their bows, were warped and thereby rendered ineffective by the moisture.

After hearing the news of this engagement, Osman Pasha decided to break through the Safavid containing forced lines and head to the stronghold of Derbent to camp for the winter. The Tatars, for their part, retreated to the Crimea for the rest of the winter.

In the following year, the Tatars once again assisted the Ottomans, this time under the leadership of the Khan, Mehemed Giray, who was given the title Commander-in-Chief of the Ottoman forces in Dagestan as a reward for his support.<sup>33</sup> The Tatars served with distinction in the campaign of 1579, assisting the Ottoman as cavalry units and long distance raiders. One Tatar commander who was soon to become Khan, Gazi Giray, served with particular distinction in the campaign, his most noteworthy success being the destruction of an encamped Persian army in a surprise night attack.

The Tatars' assistance proved crucial on several further occasions during the conflict and the Ottoman commander appears to have relied heavily upon the Khan's horsemen throughout the war. The Tatar



assistance in the Persian War of 1578-1590 undoubtedly contributed greatly to the Ottoman cause and may have been the deciding factor in the successful outcome of the war in the Sultan's favor. In the treaty of 1590, the Safavids ceded the provinces of Azerbaijan, Shirvan, Genje, Georgia and parts of Kurdistan to the victorious Ottomans.

The Ottoman government's control over these districts in the Caucasus proved to be very short lived, however; and, in 1603, Shah Abbas the Great led a newly unified Persia on a reconquest of its lost provinces. The Tatars appear to have assisted the Ottomans in their defensive struggle against the Shah according to John Malcolm who mentions the defeat of the Turks and their allies the "Tatars of the Kapchak."<sup>34</sup> Despite this assistance, the Ottomans had lost control over most of their hard-won conquests by 1612.

The Ottomans were able to maintain control over a small remnant of their conquests in Dagestan up until the mid-seventeenth century only with the assistance of the Tatar Khans. The Ottomans continued to supply this eastern region by using the Kuban steppe. The route from the Crimean port of Kaffa to Tamman (western Caucasus) and across Kuban to Derbent (eastern Caucasus) was the only route open to the Eastern Caucasus after Shah Abbas' conquest of Georgia, Armenia and Karabagh had effectively cut off the Ottomans' southern supply lines. The Circassians and Nogay tribes who roamed over the steppe were kept in check by the Crimean Khan whose right to exert authority over the area had been previously recognized by the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>35</sup>

The Tatars also continued to assist the Ottomans in their campaigns into Safavid territory, and they could be found participating in several lesser campaigns in the Caucasus in 1618, 1635 and 1639. It was not, however, until 1725, that they again made a major contribution to the Ottoman cause on the Persian front. An analysis of this campaign will demonstrate the effectiveness of the Tatars even at this late date.

In 1722, the Safavid dynasty collapsed before the onslaught of an Afghan army, and the Ottoman government considered the time once again ripe for expansion in the Caucasus. The Porte also had the alternate motive of halting the Russians who were taking advantage of Persia's weakness and advancing down the eastern coast of the Caucasus in the Derbent region. The death of Peter the Great in 1725 brought a halt to the Russian expansion southward, but the Ottoman advance continued with surprising success. By 1727, Yerevan, Ganja, Nakhichevan, Marand, Urmiyah and most of Azerbaijan, including Tabriz, had come under Ottoman control.

The Porte's control over this region proved to once again be ephemeral, and with the emergence of a newly unified Persia under Nadir Shah, the Ottomans were again forced on the defensive. From 1730 to 1735, Nadir Shah fought, with varying degrees of success, against the Ottomans for control of the Caucasus and Kurdistan.

In describing Nadir Shah's newly vitalized forces, V.J. Parry states "Without a doubt it was the most powerful army in western Asia during the eighteenth century."<sup>36</sup> The Ottoman commander assigned to defend the Sultan's new possessions against this formidable opponent, Topal Osman, felt it essential to call on the Crimean Tatars for assistance.

The Khan at that time, Kaplan Giray, responded by sending a distractionary expedition into the Caucasus under the leadership of the *Kalgay*, Fetih Giray. Fetih Giray began the campaign off by leading a force of Crimean Tatars, Circassians and Nogays across the Kuban where they received the submission of several

Kalmyk and Circassian tribes in the area.

Fetih Giray then proceeded to Dagestan where he received the submission of many of the area's emirs and *kadis* (judges) as far south as Eski Khodad in the Derbent vicinity.<sup>37</sup> His progress is remarkable when one recounts how long it subsequently took the Russians to conquer this area in the nineteenth century and is testimony to the Tatars' skill in fighting among the Caucasians.

The Tatars' progress caused alarm not only in Persia but in Russia as well. The Russian government had begun its expansion in the Caucasus during the reign of Ivan the Terrible and it viewed the Tatar advance as an infringement of its rights to control territory in the region. In previous years, the Tatars and the Ottomans had been rather successful in halting Russia's expansion into the region. This had begun to change by the beginning of the eighteenth century and, at the time of Fetih Giray's invasion, the Tsar's influence was considered especially strong among the Nogay and Kalmyk tribes in the northern Kuban region.

The Agrakhansk Cossack Host, which had been established by the Russian government to control the aforementioned tribes, was a constant reminder of Russia's growing power in the Caucasus.<sup>38</sup> This force was not yet, however, up to the task of halting a strong army such as that of the Kalgay and was soundly defeated when it attempted to impede the Tatars' progress.

According to Robert Olson, the Russian government also exerted diplomatic pressure on the Porte to prevent the Tatars from crossing Russian territory in 1734 and 1735, but this move does not seem to have resulted in any lasting results.<sup>39</sup>

In 1736, the Russian government moved to act forcefully against the Tatar threat and organized an army to invade the Crimean peninsula under the command of Count Munich. Munich's invasion was surprisingly successful and the Russian army actually succeeded in breaking through the Tatars' northern defenses at Perekok and sacking the Khan's capital Bahcesaray.<sup>40</sup>

This attack is an important event in the history of the Caucasian front since the Khan was campaigning against the Persians when the Russians invaded the Crimea. Had the Khan not been fighting with the Ottomans in the Caucasus with most of his troops, it is doubtful whether the Russians would have been so successful in their attack. Although the damage to the Khanate did not prove to be permanent, it was a great psychological blow to the administrations of both the Khan and the Sultan. For the remaining years of the Khanate's independence, the Porte utilized the Tatars in a more subtle fashion, using the Crimean Tatars mainly as political agents among the Nogays and Circassians.

### *Summary*

Historians are far from united in their evaluations of the effectiveness of the Crimean Tatars' support for the Ottomans on the Persian front. Kortepeter, for instance, is quite generous in his praise of the Crimean Tatars' contribution. Had the Tatars not come to the aid of the Ottoman forces in the 1579-1590 campaign, the Sultan's army would have undoubtedly been destroyed on several occasions according to this source. Parry is less generous in his summary of the Tatars' assistance on this campaign and mentions it only briefly in passing. Parry merely mentions that "the Tatar Khan had evaded his obligations as a vassal of the Sultan, refusing his horsemen to a war in the Caucasus."<sup>41</sup>

A broad analysis of the question will show that the Crimean Tatars' assistance was both a boon and a nuisance to the Ottoman commanders on the Persian Front.

An analysis of the Tatars' effectiveness in the Caucasus should begin with an examination of their opponents, the Persians. The Persian army consisted, for the most part, of Turkmen tribal cavalry. These irregular warriors were drawn from the various Persian provinces and usually showed more loyalty to their tribal emirs than to the Shah. Shah Abbas attempted to overcome this dangerous situation during his reign by creating arquebus and artillery units loyal to himself. That the Persians could effectively use their firearms against a steppe opponent at even earlier dates can be seen by Shah Tahmasp's use of cannons to defeat the Uzbeks in 1528.<sup>42</sup>

The Persian army was first and foremost a cavalry force, despite these reforms, and the Tatars were in their element when fighting such an opponent. The Tatars fought effectively against the Persians on several occasions regardless of the Persian's use of cannon. In 1578, for instance, a Tatar unit overran a Persian camp defended by both cannons and trenchworks.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the Tatars frequently served as more than just light skirmishers and in several cases fought in pitched battles against larger Persian forces.

The Crimean Tatars also served in their better known capacity as raiders, but their most valuable contribution on the Persian front was in defending the Ottomans' supply lines and baggage trains from the raids of the Persians' swift Turkmen horsemen.

The Tatar aid in the Caucasus, as on the other fronts, also had a dark side, and relations between the Ottomans and their wild Tatar allies were not always cordial. One of the main causes of conflict between the Ottoman commanders and the Tatars on the Persian front was the Tatars' predilection to pillage the population in territories under Ottoman control. The Tatars rarely differentiated between the peasants in newly conquered Ottoman territory and those in enemy lands. This often led to confrontations between Tatar leaders and the Ottoman generals who had been assigned the task of winning over the local populations to the Ottoman cause.

The common Ottoman soldier also resented the fact that the Crimean Tatars usually received the lion's share of the booty at the end of the campaign season as a reward for their services. The Tatars' tendency to withdraw to the safety of the Crimea at the conclusion of every campaign season also caused resentment among the Ottoman troops who were left to garrison the Empire's new conquests. The Ottoman commanders no doubt realized that the Tatars had little value as garrison troops, but their departure was nonetheless bad for the moral of the Ottoman troops who had to remain and serve through the bitter winter months.

The Ottoman leaders on the Persian front were also confronted with the problem of pressuring the Tatar Khans into participating in their campaigns at the beginning of every season. The Tatar Khans were often reluctant to send their forces off to fight in the Caucasus. The reasons for this were varied but stemmed, for the most part, from a hesitancy to leave the Crimea open to the attacks of the Cossacks and later the Russians. It must also be noted that the Crimean *bey*s (chieftains) were also less inclined to participate in extended campaigns in regions that had already been impoverished as a result of previous campaigns.

Despite these drawbacks, Osman Pasha, one of the Empire's greatest generals, obviously realized the value of the Tatar reinforcements as can be seen by his claim that "the only satisfactory means of holding the possessions newly acquired from Persia was to gain the full support and assistance of the Crimean Khan." Perhaps his qualified analysis should be the final judgment on the value of the Tatars' aid to the Ottomans on this front.

## THE RUSSIAN FRONTIER

Relations between the Ottoman Empire and Russia were, in the beginning, quite cordial. Friendly relations between the two powers were assisted by the Crimean Khan who was at times allied to the Grand Prince of Moscow. In one letter to the Khan Mengli Giray, Mehemed the Conqueror actually went so far as to write "if the ruler of Moscow is your brother he shall also be mine."<sup>45</sup>

This friendly tone changed with Russia's expansion on to the steppe after the destruction of the Golden Horde by the Crimean Tatars in 1502. The Crimean Khans, who saw their dream of reuniting the territories of the Golden Horde under their own control shattered by Ivan the Terrible's conquests of the Tatar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1554 and 1556, became aware of the Muscovite threat long before the Turks.

It was not until the year 1568, that the Ottomans actually began preparations to move against the Muscovites who had become a definite threat to Central Eurasian Islam. Until this time, the Crimean Khans had been left a free hand in their relations with the relatively unnoticed Russians. According to Akdes Kurat, during the first half of the 16th century the Porte took no specific steps to check the growth of Muscovite power and assumed that the Khans of the Crimea would always be able to restrain the Muscovites by means of their cavalry.<sup>46</sup>

The Tatars, not surprisingly, took advantage of this relaxed policy by making incursions into Russian territory on an almost seasonal basis. This changed with the Porte's growing interest in the affairs of the steppe. Gradually, the Tatars were required to come into line with Ottoman policy in their relations with the Russians. One of the first tasks assigned to the Tatars was to assist the Ottomans in preparing for a campaign against the Russian controlled city of Astrakhan. The Porte intended to strike at Astrakhan for, it was felt, that by gaining control of this strategic city, the Turks could not only halt Russian expansion in the Caucasus but open communications with their own coreligionists the Sunni Uzbeks.

The Porte's plan called for the construction of a canal linking the Don and Volga Rivers which could be used to ship the Ottomans' heavy artillery across the steppe to the walls of Astrakhan. This campaign is the best known Tatar-Ottoman expedition on the steppe and will be analyzed in depth to show how the Tatars' skills were used to serve the Ottomans on the steppe front.

The Astrakhan campaign of 1569 was slow in the planning, but once the details had been worked out the Ottomans moved with typical speed to carry it out. The Ottoman force that assembled in Azov in the summer of that year was overwhelmingly comprised of Tatars. The Khan provided some 50,000 troops while the Ottomans supplied 15,000 for the expedition.<sup>47</sup>

The Turks began their operations by attempting to build the proposed canal between the Don and Volga. The Porte's expectations appear to have been completely unrealistic and, according to Kurat, the canal plan was abandoned at an early stage.<sup>48</sup> The Ottomans were then forced to march across the steppe to Astrakhan leaving their heavy artillery behind.

This move across the Cossack-infested steppe would have been next to impossible if the Ottomans had not been assisted by the Crimean Tatars and their Nogay vassals. These auxiliaries served as both guides and skirmishers, to protect the slow moving Ottoman columns from the raids of the Don Cossacks.

The Tatars' valuable skills as guides on the steppe were noticed by a nineteenth century observer who wrote:

One might as well attempt to steer a vessel at sea without a compass, as to journey over one of these boundless plains without a Tatar guide, whose practiced eye can always estimate the distance by the position or peculiar form of tumuli, which he separately distinguishes, and with the same facility as a shepherd does his flocks and herds. Indeed, the Tatar of these Russian steppes is not less distinguished for the sharpness of his eyesight than the quickness of his hearing.<sup>49</sup>

The Ottoman force arrived at Astrakhan on September 16, 1569, without any mishaps and the *Serdar* quickly commenced siege operations. Despite the Porte's high expectations of success, the Russian's fortifications proved to be too strong for the Ottoman besiegers who had no heavy cannons to destroy the enemy defenses. This difficulty, combined with the early approach of winter and a mutiny among the troops, forced the Ottoman commander to withdraw at the end of September. W.E.D. Allen puts part of the blame for this retreat on the Khan, Devlet Giray, and claims the Ottoman troops revolted against their commander after hearing that the Khan's forces were returning to the Crimea for the winter.<sup>50</sup>

In describing the Ottoman retreat from Astrakhan, George Eversley claims that:

The expedition was a total failure. The Turks were unable to capture Astrakhan, and a Russian army completely destroyed that of the Tatars. The main Turkish army was compelled to retreat to Azoff.<sup>51</sup>

Massa's account, which may have been used as source by Eversley, makes the same claim but his writings are often unreliable on account of their pro-Russian bias. Kurat, on the other hand, claims that:

Their retreat was certainly not due to pressure from Russian forces who had remained on the defensive and never engaged the Turks in a serious encounter. What really caused them to leave Astrakhan was the approach of winter and the growing shortage of provisions and supplies.<sup>52</sup>

Kurat also goes on to give an interesting insight into the Tatars' hardy character:

The Turkish soldiers and horses died in their hundreds of hunger and thirst, and only a relatively small number arrived at Azak unscathed. By contrast losses were insignificant among the Crimean and Nogai Tatars who were inured to the hardships of this kind of march and avoided hunger and thirst by eating horse flesh and drinking mare's milk.<sup>53</sup>

Although this mission was certainly a failure, it was not a total loss according to Kortepeter who claims it taught the Russians an important lesson: "If the Ottomans so desired, they could always send another army to the steppe."<sup>54</sup> Devlet Giray, the Crimean Khan at the time of the Astrakhan campaign, more than made up for this failure in the next campaign to be analyzed, the great raid of 1571. In this attack a Crimean army broke through a Russian defense force and struck directly at Moscow itself. In the course of the raid, the victorious Tatars succeeded in carrying off tens of thousands of slaves into captivity and in burning down much of the Tsar's capital. The following account made by an English eyewitness observer, graphically demonstrates the effects of the Tatars' raid on a city that proudly called itself

## The Third Rome:

They say there is no house in the city; churches and steeples are burnt. It was accounted four times as great as London, and some say six times. There are above 200,000 people burnt. They had hope to have saved themselves in certain places, but the force of the fire would not permit it. There was a market kept, and thither thousands of people did resort for succor, but when the fire had entered the houses about, the people were smothered and burnt ten thick, one lying upon another, a lamentable case to hear.<sup>55</sup>

The raid of 1571 was actually made without the Sultan's authorization. According to one account, Devlet Giray (hence given the title "*Tahti Alan*," Taker of the Throne) was taking advantage of the Sultan's loss of authority in the Crimea following the Porte's "decisive" defeat at Lepanto earlier in the year when he made this unauthorized raid.<sup>56</sup> This raid is also interesting for the fact that it aided the Ottoman cause tremendously by reestablishing respect for the Tatars' military prowess among the Russians. Russia's generals were extremely reluctant to venture out on to the steppe against an army that had the power to strike at their capital with as much effect as the earlier Khans of the Golden Horde. The Russians were thus unable to pose a serious threat to the Porte's Ukrainian possessions for over a century.

Unfortunately for the Tatars, the sixteenth century saw the rise of a new force on the steppe that did have the ability to strike across the steppe at Ottoman targets as far afield as Istanbul, namely the Cossacks. Made up, for the most part, of runaway peasants from Muscovite and Polish territories, these freebooters combined the fighting techniques of the steppe nomad with the military technology of their former rulers to form extremely effective fighting bands of up to 3,000 men.<sup>57</sup>

In describing the martial skills of the Cossacks, a seventeenth century historian wrote "it can be stated with confidence that one cannot find bolder men on the earth who care less about life and...fear death less."<sup>58</sup> Tihany's observation that the Cossacks "were willing to die for liberty to fight with or against the Tatars for plunder and just for the sheer joy of fighting" is perhaps the best summary of this new threat to the Ottomans.<sup>59</sup> The daring Cossack raiders, who often used light field cannons in their attacks, were able to threaten fortified positions, such as Azov, Kaffa and Kerch, in a way the Tatars were never able to do.

The far ranging Cossack hosts did not limit their attacks to Ottoman positions on the steppe and were constantly raiding the Porte's possessions in both the Caucasus and Moldavia as well. By the seventeenth century, Cossack mariners had become bold enough to strike at Ottoman cities in Anatolia, such as Sinope, Trebizond and even Istanbul. These raids were more than just random assaults by a group of uncoordinated ruffians. According to Philip Longworth, "The Cossack raids had assumed a scale and regularity that almost amounted to war."<sup>60</sup> Longworth claims that "by 1630 the Sultan, the most powerful ruler in the world, was reduced to begging the Poles to destroy them."<sup>61</sup>

The Ottomans actually did more than beg the rulers of Moscow and Poland to control the unruly Cossack hosts and, by 1600, they had begun mounting seasonal retaliatory strikes against the Cossack *sechs* (hordes or forts) in the Ukraine. The Crimean Tatars, who had been skirmishing and fighting with the Cossacks for years, were given many opportunities to use their experience to assist the Ottomans in these sorties. The Tatars were particularly adept in these campaigns which involved surprise attacks, diversionary raids, ambushes and all the traditional tactics of steppe warfare.

In describing how the Ottomans retaliated against the Cossacks through their Tatar vassals, Longworth

claims that the Tatars were usually given freedom to act independently against their traditional enemies.<sup>62</sup> The Khan's independent raids were of great assistance to the Ottomans and one raid in particular, against the Zaporozhian Cossacks, prevented this host from participating in a crusade against the Turks organized in 1594.<sup>63</sup>

By the end of the seventeenth century, the threat of Cossack raids had begun to diminish as the Russian government began to strengthen its control over the various hosts and put an end to their independent activities. The Cossacks, however, found plenty of use for their martial skills in Russia's armies which soon proved to be more of threat to the Turco-Tatar alliance than the Cossacks had ever been. The Russians had gained a fair amount of control over their southern borders by the late seventeenth century and, although the Tatars did continue to make slave raids into Russian territory as late as the reign of Catherine the Great, the days of the great slave raids had most definitely come to a close.

By establishing forts at strategic locations, elaborate patrol patterns, wooden palisades, improved alarm systems and Cossack defense units, the Russians could finally say that they had begun to gain sufficient control of their southern borders to prevent the Tatars from moving freely through Russian territory on their own missions, or at the bidding of the Sultan. By the end of the century, the Russians were actually able to move out on to the steppe and bring war to the Tatars' own doorstep.

During the reign of Peter the Great, two Russian armies attempted to move out across the steppe and strike directly at the Khanate. In the first invasion, a Russian army of 100,000 men found the way to the Crimea blocked by steppe fires set by the Khan's riders and was forced to retreat, losing 45,000 men in the process.<sup>64</sup> A second attempt succeeded in reaching the Crimea and defeating a Tatar force but it too was forced to retreat for want of supplies.

The Crimean leaders could not but have noticed that the Khanate had been saved on both occasions by the harsh conditions of the steppe as much as their own martial abilities. Although the Khanate emerged relatively unscathed from both encounters, a strong warning had been sent to the Crimean Tatars. If she so wanted, Russia could carry the war to the Tatars in a way previously unimagined.

In 1696, the most telling sign of the Tatars' declining military superiority occurred. Peter the Great succeeded in conquering the Ottoman fortress of Azov and, in the process, separating the Crimean Khanate from its possessions on the Taman peninsula in the Caucasus. According to Henry Howorth, Peter would have conquered Azov in an attack during the previous year if a Tatar contingent, under Kaplan Giray, had not successfully stormed the Russians' entrenchments and defeated Peter's forces.<sup>65</sup>

The loss of Azov was only a temporary setback and, in the Pruth Campaign of 1711, the Crimean Khan, Devlet Giray III, joined the Ottomans in defeating a Russian invasion force in Moldavia. This disastrous invasion was launched with the aim freeing Moldavia from Turkish rule. The Russians were initially successful and, with Moldavian assistance, they were able to move deep into Ottoman territory meeting little resistance.

In May, however, an Ottoman army lead by the Grand Vezir Baltajai Mehemed Pasha stumbled into the Russian force and heavy fighting commenced. Massie claims that the Grand Vezir lost his courage during this fighting and would have withdrawn from the battle at an early stage had the Crimean Khan not steadied his nerves.<sup>66</sup> His encouragement paid off and, in the ensuing struggle, the Russians were defeated and forced to retreat to Jassy, the Moldavian capital.



The Crimean Tatars wreaked havoc on Peter's retreating columns with their constant raids, and Russian losses in this withdrawal were extremely high. Peter's army was gradually worn down as Tatar raiders galloped in and out among the Russian columns slaughtering the exhausted infantry, looting the baggage train and disturbing communications.

This lack of communications enabled the Grand Vezir's generals to outmaneuver Peter's army and eventually surround the now weakened Russian force. According to Howorth, the Khan's force of 40,000 men rendered the Ottomans valuable assistance in this operation by intercepting the enemy's convoys and cutting off his escape routes.<sup>67</sup> The fact that the Tsar could not get supplies or messages from outside or retreat, undoubtedly facilitated Ottoman operations.

The Russians were not slow in recovering from this defeat and, in 1735 and 1736, the Crimea was twice penetrated by Russian armies under the command of the highly skilled Count Munich. The Ottomans and Tatars fought side by side during these invasions, which threatened both their territories. In 1737, the allies finally succeeded in inflicting a defeat on the Russians who withdrew, content with the reconquest of Azov, which had been lost in the Pruth campaign.<sup>68</sup> Howorth claims that the Russians actually defeated the Tatars in 1737, but he may have relied on first-hand Russian sources, which are exaggerated, according to Fisher.<sup>69</sup>

By this time, it had become obvious to the Russians that the Crimean Khanate was not the unified Ottoman vassal state many had thought it to be. The Khanate's clan leaders frequently rebelled against the Khan's authority and the Tatars were unable to unite to oppose the Russian expansion. The Russian command was soon contemplating the actual annexation of the Khanate, which they considered to be nothing more than a predatory nuisance.

Despite growing troubles and disunity within the Khanate, it still had the potential to be more than just a nuisance. In the Ottoman-Russian conflict of 1768-74, the Tatars proved their worth by making a raid deep into Russian territory during the second year of the war. Baron de Tott, a French envoy to the Crimea, joined the Tatars on this raid and left a fascinating account of this last great Tatar plundering expedition. According to de Tott, "One hundred and fifty villages were burnt in the raid, extending a cloud of cinders for twenty leagues into Poland, a grim harbinger of the Tatar army." Baron de Tott also claimed that the Tatars and their Ottoman allies took 20,000 slaves and innumerable cattle even at this late date.<sup>71</sup>

The Tatars also assisted the Porte in defending Moldavia from a Russian invasion in 1771, but in this they were less successful. After several decisive defeats, the allies were forced to meet the Russian government's demands. The Ottomans were to give up their possessions in the Crimea, including the Sanjak (Province) capital Kaffa, and the Crimean Khanate was declared an independent state free of Ottoman domination. This independence soon proved impractical for the close ties between the Tatars and the Ottomans continued to threaten Russian interests. In 1783, Catherine the Great ordered the annexation of the Khanate, ending what one pro-Russian historian labeled the "Tartar occupation of the Crimea."<sup>72</sup>

### *Summary*

An overview of the Crimean Tatars' assistance on the Russian front will demonstrate that it was on this front that the Tatars were able to render their most valuable assistance to the Ottoman cause. Not only had the Tatars perfected warfare in this environment, but they fought with great determination against

both the Russians and Cossacks who presented a threat to the Khanate's interests as well as the Sultans. The Crimean Khans and *mirzas* (chieftains) were usually more than willing to participate in joint missions against their traditional steppe enemies.

The enthusiastic attitude of the Crimea's leadership combined with the Tatars' steppe skills to render their assistance against the Ottomans' steppe foes more effective here than on the plains of Hungary or the valleys of the Caucasus.

It must be noted that the Tatars were aided on this front by the nature of the steppe. The vast waterless expanses of this region suited the Tatars' methods of warfare far more than the Western tactics which Russia began to adopt during the reign of Ivan the Terrible. The orderly formations of foot-soldiers that dominated the battlefields of Western Europe were ineffective on the open steppe where the Khan's horsemen could destroy slow moving baggage trains, cut off supply convoys and burn the grasslands to hinder progress. Cannons were also rarely used on the steppe for the heavy artillery of the age was too awkward to be used against the elusive Tatar riders until the late seventeenth century.

Although the Russians did use artillery and Western style formations when fighting the Swedes, Livonians and Poles, they were forced to imitate the Tatars' mode of combat when fighting on their southern borders. In consequence, the Russian cavalryman, armed with a bow and saber, differed little from his Tatar adversary. The following description of Ivan the Terrible's warriors shows how strongly the Tatars influenced their northern neighbor's cavalry.

All his men are horsemen. He useth no foot soldiers but such as go with the ordinance or labourers. The horsemen are all archers with such bows as the Turks have, and they ride short as do the Turks. Their armor is a coat of plate with a skull on their heads. Some of their coats are covered with velvet or cloth of fold. Their desire is to be sumptuous in the field.

Although the Tsar's warriors did adapt admirably to the conditions of the steppe, their equine skills never matched those of the Tatars. The Khan's horsemen, who considered riding to be more than just a part-time occupation, were usually able to outride the Tsar's less capable cavalry as this seventeenth century account clearly shows. According to this observation, the Russians:

retire to certain rivers and woods to prevent their passage. But the Tatar is an enemy so light and dexterous that he understands this, and amuses the Muscovite army with 20-30,000 horses, meanwhile sending a number of people to raid the land by some other way, which is done with such promptness that they have dealt their blow before the Muscovites know of it.<sup>74</sup>

The Crimean Tatar's contributions on the steppe were once again not without a negative side. Many of the problems with the Tatars on the northern front stemmed from the fact that the Crimean Khans had political aspirations of their own on the steppe; most of which did not coincide with those of the Porte. The Crimean Khan's independent attempts to reunite the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan under Crimean authority posed a threat to the Ottoman control over the river basins of the Ukraine. The Ottomans feared that a reunited Golden Horde might not be as friendly or complacent in its dealings with the Ottoman Empire. On at least one occasion, the Astrakhan Expedition of 1571, historians have accused the Crimean Tatars of deliberately sabotaging an Ottoman mission for fear that its success would weaken the Khanate's

authority over an area already claimed by the Crimean Khans.<sup>75</sup>

Another bone of contention between the allies was the Crimean Tatars' tendency to engage in unauthorized raids into Russian territory. These raids, which have been called a "harvesting of the steppe," were usually carried out for economic rather than political reasons.<sup>76</sup> The Khanate's economy relied heavily on profits made through the sale of slaves to the Turks in the markets of port city of Kaffa. The Crimean tribal *mirzas* were reluctant to stop their lucrative slave raids against the infidel just because the Sultan happened to be at peace with their prey.

The Tatar slave raids often took on the nature of a jihad and the Khan's response to an inquiry into the fate of these slaves was typical of the Tatars' attitude concerning his northern neighbors. "They had resisted the armies of Allah, they had forfeited their lives. It is only Our beneficence which allows them to live."<sup>77</sup> The Russians were anything but tolerant to this attitude and one seventeenth century Christian observer described Kaffa as a "heathen giant who feeds on our blood."<sup>78</sup>

The embarrassed officials of the Porte were often forced to admit to Russian envoys that they could not control their allies, a point which often caused tension between the two states when neither wanted war. According to Donald Pitcher, the Ottoman government actually went so far as to warn the Russians of impending Tatar raids on several occasions in order to heal differences between the two states.<sup>79</sup> Obviously these differences in foreign policy hurt the Tatar-Ottoman alliance's ability to operate effectively on the steppe front.

By the seventeenth century, the two states were able to coordinate their activities to a greater extent and put up a more determined resistance to Russian expansion onto the steppe. The Ottomans often supported the Crimean Khans with cannons, janissaries and *sipahis* on their independent campaigns against the Russians and Cossacks. The Khanate's military assistance on the Russian steppe front (and in Moldavia against Peter) was of tremendous value to the Ottomans. The Tatars successfully thwarted the Russian ambition of acquiring an outlet to the Black Sea for over 200 years.

The Black Sea remained an Ottoman lake up until the second half of the eighteenth century, in part, because the Crimean horsemen were able to keep the Russians out of the southern Ukraine and protect the Sanjak of Kaffa. This important province, which extended from Akkerman in Romania to Kerch in the eastern Crimea, gave the Ottomans a lucrative monopoly on several of the great rivers of the Ukraine, which provided the Empire with the rich goods of the steppe. Without the Tatars' assistance, the Black Sea might well have become a Russian lake as early as the reign of Ivan the Terrible and the Ottomans would have been deprived of this valuable source of income at a far earlier date.

## THE POLISH FRONT

Prior to the Ottoman-Tatar alliance of 1475, the Crimean Khanate was on cordial terms with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In describing this early relationship, Howorth writes Haji Girai was clearly a protege of the great Lithuanian King Vtut, and on his death in 1430, he was a faithful friend of his successors Ladislas and Casimir. He did not make peace or war without their knowledge.<sup>80</sup>

This changed with the establishment of Ottoman alliance with the Khanate. The Crimean Khans had previously relied on the Poles for assistance in their struggles on the steppe against the Golden Horde, but with Ottoman protection this was no longer necessary. In the following centuries, the Crimean Tatars acted independently in their dealings with Poland. The Crimean Tatars took advantage of this policy by making frequent incursions into Polish lands for slaves and booty whenever the Polish government was late in its tribute payments. The Khanate's Polish foreign policy was anything but consistent during this period and the Tatars often allied themselves with Poland against Russia or vice versa depending on who was offering the most tribute.

This began to change with the emergence of Moscow as the main threat to Tatar dominance on the steppe in the sixteenth century. At this time the Crimean Khans began to place more importance on Poland as an ally. Muhammed Giray in particular made an unsuccessful attempt to alert the Porte of the Russian threat and form an anti-Russian alliance between the Turks and the Poles in 1521. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, far from listening to the Khan's advice, ordered him to attack Lithuania in order to stop the Poles from interfering in his Western campaigns.

Although the Ottomans did recognize Poland's potential as a counterweight to Russian expansion in the seventeenth century, they were initially not on good terms with the Polish state. There were two main areas of strife between the two states, namely Polish resentment over the Porte's control of Moldavia (which had been a Polish vassal prior to the great Ottoman expansion) and the raids of Polish Cossacks into Ottoman territories. The Sultan's government saw the value of the Tatars in dealing with both threats on this frontier at an early date.

The first joint Ottoman-Tatar campaign against Poland took place soon after the founding of the Tatar-Ottoman alliance. In 1498, Sultan Bayezid II ordered the Crimean Tatars to assist the frontier commander, Malkoch-oghlu Bali Beg, in a raid on the eastern Polish provinces of Podolia and Galicia. This raid was in retaliation for the Polish King, Jan Olbracht's Black Sea expedition in the previous year. Described as "one of the most far-reaching plans in the history of Poland," the Polish King's plan had called for the conquest of Muslim territories from the mouth of the Danube to the Crimea itself in order to break the Ottoman-Tatar barrier which blocked Poland's access to the Black Sea.<sup>81</sup>

Although the expedition had been a costly failure, the Sultan was determined to punish the Pole's temerity with a counter raid of his own. In the spring of 1498, a Tatar force joined the forces of Bali Beg and laid waste to much of Poland's eastern areas reaching as far as Lemberg in Galicia.<sup>82</sup> A similar campaign launched in the following year was less successful and met with disaster in a snow storm in the Carpathian mountains. Memories of the Ottoman-Tatar retreat can still be found in Romanian folk songs.<sup>83</sup>

These two expeditions set a precedent and clearly showed the Ottomans that the Crimean Khanate was in an ideal position to enforce Ottoman foreign policy on Poland's eastern borders in order to keep the

unpredictable Poles in line. In the following century, the Tatars were used on several occasions to punish the Poles for meddling in Moldavia, the most important expedition being Gazi Giray's raid in 1575. Norman Davies calls this foray "the biggest raid in Polish history" and claims that as many as 100,000 Poles were carried off into slavery.<sup>85</sup> That this raid had a tremendous impact on Poles can be seen by the fact that the Turks used the mere threat of a Tatar raid in the following year to get their candidate, Stephen Bathory, placed on the Polish throne.<sup>86</sup>

The Tatars also fought with great effect in this century against the Cossack bands that had begun to dominate Poland's Ukrainian lands. Upon being informed by the Crimean Khan that the Cossacks were finding sanctuary in Polish border castles when chased by Tatar patrols, the Ottoman government even went so far as to begin preparations for war on several occasions during the seventeenth century. This was avoided only after the Polish government agreed to control the Cossacks and pay the Crimean Tatars tribute payments in arrear.

Although the Porte frequently responded to the raids of the Cossacks by sending Ottoman-Tatar forces into Poland through the Pruth valley, they usually relied on the Crimean Tatars to conduct counter strikes. This was a task that the Tatar *mirzas*, many of whom were already engaged in unauthorized raids of their own, relished.

The Ottomans were not, however, always at odds with the Cossacks and on several occasions actually made common cause with these wild bands. When the Cossack Hetman Bogdan Khmelnytsky rebelled against the Poles and submitted to Ottoman rule in 1651, for instance, the Porte ordered the Crimean Tatars to support the rebels. The Khan's forces served with distinction in this uprising and Longworth claims that the Cossacks won no major battle in this uprising without Tatar aid.<sup>87</sup>

The Khan's assistance was not completely reliable, however, and the Tatars soon showed that they were using the rebellion for their own ends. Just when the Cossack-Tatar army appeared to be ready to crush the weakened Polish forces at Zwaniac, in 1653, the Khan withdrew his support for fear that the victorious Cossacks would become too powerful on the steppe. Despite the fact that the Poles and Turks clashed on several further occasions in the seventeenth century, tensions were never as high on this border as on the Habsburg or Safavid front. In 1654, the Ottomans approved of a Tatar alliance with the Poles against Russia—a move that has been described as "one of the most important factors in the development of the political situation in Eastern Europe for more than twelve years."<sup>88</sup> In adhering to this alliance, the Tatars fought with the Polish forces as far afield as Prussia and Warsaw, and Adil Giray was able to write to Jan Casimir in 1667 saying:

It is clear that on many occasions the Crimea was very helpful to you, for example, against Muscovy or when Sheremetev attacked you and they (the Tatars) fought very bravely on many occasions.<sup>89</sup>

This alliance was not, however, permanent and, by 1670, trouble had arisen between the Poles and the Ottomans over the latter's support of a Cossack rebellion in the Ukraine. In that year, the Cossack chieftain Petr Doroshenko, submitted to the Ottomans and requested Ottoman assistance in defying the Polish government. The *Pasha* (Governor) of Silistre quickly came to his aid and sent a combined Turco-Tatar force against the Poles in support of the Cossack's rebellion.

In the following year, the Ottoman government declared war on Poland and the Sultan ordered the

Crimean Khan, Selim Giray, to once again ravage Podolia. Selim Giray's forces also aided the Ottomans in their successful siege of Kamenetz, the provincial capital of Podolia. After the capital's fall, the Khan raided deeper into Poland capturing more than a thousand captives according to Howorth.<sup>90</sup>

The war continued with varying successes until the year 1676 when the Polish government finally bowed before the Ottomans' military supremacy and signed the humiliating Treaty of Buzacz. This treaty brought the Ukraine under Ottoman suzerainty and Podolia under direct Ottoman control. The treaty did not, however, bring lasting peace and, in the following years, the Tatars were called upon to defend the Empire's gains on several occasions. The rise to power of one of Poland's greatest warriors, Jan Sobieski, in the years following the Treaty of 1676 did not make the Tatars' task any easier.

Davies' description of Sobieski shows that the Poles had finally found a leader who understood the Tatars and could beat them at their own game.

He was born in a thunderstorm during a Tartar raid. His maternal grandfather, Hetman Zolkiewski, and his brother, were both beheaded on the battlefield by Tartars; and his uncle, Stanislaw Danilowicz, died in Tartar captivity. He could not but be profoundly affected by the family, and its inscription: O quam est pro patria mori. In 1653, he voluntarily submitted himself as a hostage in Bakchisaray; in 1654, he was in Istanbul; in 1657, he commanded the Republic's Tartar auxiliaries. No one was more experienced in, or fascinated by the ways of the East than he.<sup>91</sup>

One of Sobieski's greatest achievements was the creation of a highly mobile army that could catch and destroy the fast moving Tatar *chambuls* (raiding parties). One has but to look at his many victories over the Crimean Tatars to understand how the King was able to gain the respect of his Tatar adversaries. Sobieski was known for making lightning strikes of distances of over 150 miles in Tatar fashion. One of his more notable successes occurred in 1675. Sobieski was able to move against a Tatar force of 20,000 riders with only 5,000 men and inflict a costly defeat on an enemy that had only a few years earlier been considered almost invincible.<sup>92</sup>

The King's outstanding successes against the Tatars undoubtedly left an impression on the Khanate's leaders and may have influenced Murad Giray in his decision to flee before the Poles during the famous Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683. The following description of the Polish attack on the besieging Ottoman army from Sobieski's letters tends to lend credence to this theory:

It is said that when the Vizier realized he could not hold out against us, he called his two sons to him, and having embraced them, exclaimed in tears to the Tatar Khan, 'Save me if you can.' But the Khan replied, 'We know the King of Poland well. He is irresistible. Let us consider rather how best to escape.'<sup>93</sup>

Although the Tatars were able to assist the Ottomans against the Poles as late as 1687, their ability to strike at Polish targets with impunity had come to an end. Sobieski's reforms on Poland's eastern border succeeded in bringing this exposed area under Polish control by the end of the seventeenth century.

The Ottomans may have been equally influential in bringing the Tatar's raids to halt in these years for they had begun to consider the maintenance of a strong Poland as a counter weight to Russian expansion as

beneficial to their cause. With Poland's decline to the status of a second rate power in the eighteenth century, the Tatars' services were no longer needed on this front.

### *Summary*

Conditions on the Polish frontier strongly resembled those found on the Russian Front. The open steppe of the Western Ukraine and the plains of Eastern Poland and Lithuania were a continuation of the Kipchak Steppe (southern Ukraine) which had proved to be so suitable to the Tatars' tactics against Muscovy. The Tatars were able to move across this zone and strike at Polish cities as far west as Krakow with relative ease up until a surprisingly late date.

This ability gave them tremendous value here as Ottoman allies, for the threat of Tatar raids could often be counted on to make the Poles think twice about any action against the Porte. This threat was especially important on this front for the Poles were known for their crusading tendencies and it was important to prevent this unpredictable nation from joining in anti-Ottoman alliances.

The threat of Tatar attacks had actually served the Ottoman cause as early as the fourteenth century. In 1396, the threat of a surprise Tatar attack had prevented the Poles from participating in one of the West's best known anti-Ottoman crusades at Nicopolis. Dorothy Vaughan claims that the Poles who fought in the unsuccessful crusade to halt the Ottomans' early expansion, did so as individuals.<sup>94</sup>

Leslie Tihany puts great emphasis on the religious motives behind Polish actions and claims that:

The Turkish wars from 1589 to 1685 were not fought by Poland for nationally indifferent dynastic interests or chimerically imperialistic adventures for aggrandizement. They were waged in a common European cause, to repel the intrusion of another culture from another continent.<sup>95</sup>

Although the Tatars were unable to prevent Sobieski from launching Poland's greatest crusade against the Ottomans in 1683, the King's force was considerably weakened on this occasion by the fact that numerous troops had to be left behind to protect the country from a Tatar attack. The Tatars of course assisted the Ottomans in more tangible ways and their support in the Sultan's campaigns against the Poles made the Porte's efforts all the more effective. When operating with Ottoman armies against the Poles, the Tatars, who knew the land well, facilitated Ottoman operations by acting as guides, skirmishers, light cavalry and raiders. During battles, the Tatar cavalry probed for weakness and masked the main army's movements. It has been pointed out that during combat, the Tatar riders hindered the movement of Polish infantry with such effectiveness that Sobieski was usually forced to mount his foot soldiers behind his cavalymen in order to move them safely around the battlefield.<sup>96</sup>

The Tatars were usually of little value in attacks on Polish strongpoints, a task that was most often left to the Sultan's janissaries. While Poland's generals feared the Ottomans' ability to conquer important strongholds, it was the Tatars' raids that the Polish population most dreaded. These raids had disastrous effects on the Polish economy. For hundreds of years the Poles were unable to move out onto the fertile steppe and develop agriculture on this rich zone for fear of Tatar incursions. Polish settlers on what came to be known as the "Wild Plains" were forced to flee to local castles for protection at the approach of the Khan's raiders. From Kiev, Biala, Cerkiew, Braclaw and Kaminetz the Poles attempted to control the Ukraine and halt the Tatars' raids, but their actions were largely defensive.



The Ottomans usually considered the Poles to be inferior fighters and Sinan Pasha's claim that "the Poles had little skills in military matters and relied on Transylvanian mercenaries to win their battles" is an example of the typical disdain in which the Poles were held by the Turks.<sup>97</sup> The Tatars, who fought the Poles on a more regular basis, had more respect for the prowess of these opponents who, like the Russians, had adapted to conditions of the steppe.

The Tatars held the Polish heavy cavalry in particular respect. Thomas Barker's description of the Polish hussars will show how formidable these riders must have appeared to the lightly armed Tatars.

The hussar was doubtlessly the most magnificent cavalryman in the Western World. He was still heavily armored. His helmet included pieces covering the cheeks and the back of the neck; a ridge extended downward to protect the nose. Some riders were seen in brigandine. Their chests, backs, arms and thighs were encased in beautifully engraved, glittering steel.<sup>98</sup>

This heavy cavalry was often supported by light artillery making its charge all the more fearsome. Sobieski's army was especially proficient in combining cannons and horse to overcome the cavalry charges of both the Turks and the Tatars.

Although the Polish hussars were indeed capable of breaking a Tatar charge during combined Ottoman-Tatar battles, the Poles increasingly relied on their Kwarciany (light cavalry) to fight off the Tatar raiders who were usually too fast for the slow moving hussars. The light cavalry units, made up of Cossacks, Wallachians, Moldavians and members of the lower gentry, were more effective on the steppe where battles were usually fought at a faster pace.

Although these units were often able to catch small Tatar raiding parties on the run, they were no match for the Tatars in open battle. During battle the Tatars were able to surround and destroy the Polish light forces if they ventured out too far from their artillery support.<sup>99</sup>

The Poles also used more unorthodox methods to defeat the Tatars. One of the most interesting was their use of the defense wagons linked together with chains and often armed with small cannons known as *tabors*. This defensive tactic, first used by the Hussites, was also adopted by the Russians, Cossacks and on occasion the Austrians.

Sobieski used the *tabor* with great success on several occasions but it was his implementation of a system emphasizing greater interdependence between infantry, cavalry and artillery that gave the Poles their greatest advantage over the Tatar horsemen. As early as 1667, in the battle of Podhajce, Sobieski used cavalry units placed between artillery posts to defeat an attacking Tatar army.<sup>100</sup> Sobieski later described the battle in the following terms:

we have done very well. Not only have they been unable to capture any people, they have not succeeded in taking any cattle either...They tried near Tarnopol and not a few were killed. With so few troops to defend such a large and open country, and to conserve the army, there could not have been a better way.<sup>101</sup>

By 1689 it has been claimed that "even the remarkable Tatar cavalry was no match for the small, but well-

armed mixed armies of their opponents" and their support here came to a halt in the early eighteenth century.<sup>102</sup>

The negative aspects of this support against the Poles stem mainly from the Tatars' predilection to raid Polish territories for cattle and slaves. Fisher estimates that in the sixteenth century Poland lost around 20,000 individuals a year and that from 1474 to 1694, as many as a million Poles were carried off into Crimean slavery.<sup>103</sup> The Polish government established a tax to buy off the Tatars so that "the people in His Majesty's states should not be carried off into slavery and captivity."<sup>104</sup>

Naturally, the large-scale slave raids of the Crimean Tatars often created problems for the Tatars' suzerain, the Ottoman Empire, in its dealings with the Polish government. In 1589, the two states almost came to blows over a particularly devastating Tatar raid in the Lwow district. These raids and the counter-raids of the Poles and Cossacks proved a double nuisance to the Porte for they often prevented the Tatars from participating in Ottoman campaigns elsewhere. In 1578, for instance, Adil Giray Khan's army could not reinforce the Ottomans on the Caucasus front because the Tatars were already involved in an unauthorized border struggle with the Poles and Cossacks.<sup>105</sup>

Despite these drawbacks, the Tatars' assistance against Poland was of course worth the troubles that came with it. Seen in a broad perspective, it was this assistance that kept the Poles off the "Wild Plains" for so long and prevented Poland from seriously threatening the Ottoman vassal states of Moldavia and the Vilayets of Silistre and Kaffa. The removal of this threat on the Ottomans' northern frontier enabled the Turks to exert their energies on other fronts, the most important of which was the Habsburg Front.

## THE WESTERN FRONT

Historian V. J. Parry has stated that:

The raids made by the Tatars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against their northern neighbors in Poland, the Grand Principality of Lithuania and Muscovy are of greater significance than their participation in conditions to which they were not suited in the Ottoman wars on the Danube.<sup>106</sup>

This summary is not completely accurate for the Tatars did have several advantages on this front that made up for the unfavorable conditions of this region. The Western Front, which for the purposes of this essay will include the buffer states of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania and the Habsburg lands, was comprised of several distinct zones. The easternmost territories of the Budjak and Dobruca (coastal Bulgaria and Romania) were made up of flatlands that represented a continuation of the Eurasian steppe and thus facilitated the Tatars' movements.

Moving westward however the conditions deteriorated as the grasslands of the steppe were replaced by the oak and beech forests of the Carpathian mountains. It was in these valleys, writes William McNeill, that:

a pastoral farming population survived; for in such a landscape Tartar horsemen and their bows were severely handicapped. Threatened communities could disperse into the woods and hide until raiders came by; and in case of large scale attack, local clan groupings among the Moldavians could gather together the fighting manpower of the principality and with the help of forest stockades and similar primitive but effective fortification could sometimes withstand cavalry attack quite successfully.<sup>107</sup>

Once past this difficult zone, the Tatars could move with greater freedom on the plains of the Great and Little Alfold of Hungary. This freedom of movement was hindered by the forests and Alpine valleys that confronted the Tatars when they passed Vienna. The conditions in and beyond the Wienerwald (Vienna Forest) were hardly suitable for the Khan's cavalry and many areas were thus rendered inaccessible to the Crimean raiders. The Tatars, as can be imagined, were more at ease making raids off the steppe into Wallachia and Moldavia than involving themselves in missions deep into the heart of the Christian West.

In the early stages of the Ottoman-Tatar alliance, the Khan's forces were not actually required to participate in campaigns in the far west against the Hungarians. The Tatars were, however, used against the Principalities of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania at an early date. The Tatars could be found operating in Moldavia as early as the year 1474 when Mengli Giray led a Crimean force against Stephen the Great to assist Mehemed II in his wars in this region. It was in fact Mengli Giray's predecessor's (Nurdevlet) earlier refusal to assist the Ottomans in this war that led to his removal as Khan.<sup>108</sup>

Mengli Giray proved himself to be worthy of the Sultan's support by continuing his assistance against the Moldavians. In 1484, he aided the Sultan Bayezid II in his conquest of the strategic Moldavian cities of Akkerman and Kilia. This important victory gave the Ottomans control of the Danube and Dniester basins and the Sultan was especially grateful for the Tatars' support. As a reward for his assistance, the Khan was given the permission to extend his territories across the steppe from Perekop right to Akkerman. The Khan was also given the right to collect tribute from Moldavia and Wallachia, a gift that went a long

ways in convincing the Tatars of the benefits that could be acquired from serving the Sultan.<sup>109</sup>

A brief summary of the position of the Principalities in the Ottoman Empire will show that the Crimean Tatars were of great value in controlling these states after their submission to the Ottomans. Wallachia (Eflak in Turkish) was the first of the Romanian principalities to accept Ottoman suzerainty in the fourteenth century, but its proud people had the resources to prevent outright annexation. Moldavia (Bogdan) agreed to pay the Sultan tribute after Stephen the Great's death in 1513, but she too was able to resist outright annexation. The principality of Transylvania (Erdel) was carved out of the Hungarian Kingdom in the 1540s and headed by an Ottoman appointed prince, but she too was spared Ottoman incorporation.

All three states could be counted on to exert their independence at the first sign of Ottoman weakness and it was often up to the Tatars to subdue the Principalities during rebellions. This was a job that the Khan's plunder-loving horsemen relished. The inhabitants of the Principalities greeted the impending arrival of the Tatars with horror and the mere threat of a Tatar invasion was often enough to convince this region's *voivodes* (princes) to resist Western attempts to instigate rebellion. Aaron the Tyrant, the Voivode of Moldavia, for instance, conceded to join an anti-Ottoman coalition in the sixteenth century only if his country received special protection against the Tatars whose ravages he feared more than those of the Turks.<sup>110</sup>

The route to the Principalities and Hungary, known as "The Tatars' Route" even today, became especially clear for Tatar intervention after Suleiman's annexation of Southern Bessarabia (Budjak) into the Ottoman Empire in the year 1538. After settling Tatar tribes in this coastal region, the Crimean Khans began to exert strong influence over this sanjak. Several Crimean Khans even used this area as a base to extend their own control over both Wallachia and Moldavia, a move that was strongly resisted by the Porte.

For the most part however, Tatar and Ottoman interests in this area coincided; both stood to lose valuable tribute payments if the Principalities left the Ottoman fold. The Tatars were busy preserving both states' interests as late as 1657. In that year, a Tatar force defeated and enslaved the army of the Romanian hero George Rakoczi II.<sup>111</sup> All three Principalities suffered greatly during their rebellions and, according to Vaughan, "the country never recovered from the damage inflicted during these wars by the Turks' Tatar allies."<sup>112</sup>

It was not against the Principalities that the Crimean Tatars exerted their greatest efforts on this front, but rather against the massive armies of the Habsburg Empire. It was in these campaigns that the Tatars gained their fame as *akinji*.

The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* defines *akinji* as:

irregular cavalry during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire, based on and primarily for service in Europe. Their name derives from the verbal noun *akin* (from *ak-mak* to flow, to be poured out) which means a raid, incursion into enemy territory. *Akindji* is the name given to those who carry out *akins* on foreign territory to reconnoiter, plunder, or spread destruction.<sup>113</sup>

This is actually a rather broad definition of the term that originally applied to specific dynasties of

Ottoman frontier raiders such as the Mikhal-oghlu and the previously mentioned Mallach-oghlu. Halil Inalcik claims that the organization of these great *ghazi* dynasties was weakened in the sixteenth century and that the Crimean Tatars gradually replaced these families as the main Ottoman raiding force.<sup>114</sup> Terminology aside, the Tatars were so successful in the role of *akinji*, or sackmen as the Germans knew them, that their service in other capacities on this front have been overlooked. An analysis of their contributions against the Habsburgs will show that the Crimean Tatars served the Ottomans as more than just raiders in their struggles with Emperor.

Suleiman the Magnificent was the first Sultan to fully utilize the Tatars on the battlefields on the Ottomans' western frontier. From his time on, the Tatars were utilized almost continuously in the Habsburg wars. These wars, fought mainly for control of Hungary, went on intermittently for around two hundred years, during which time Pitcher claims the Tatars made seventeen contributions. Strangely enough this author fails to mention Tatar assistance in either of the famous Ottoman attacks on Vienna.<sup>115</sup>

In his bibliography of Suleiman, Harold Lamb makes several references to the Sultan's lavish use of the Tatars in both the 1529 and 1532 invasions of Austria. In his historic siege of Vienna, Suleiman's *akinjis* wreaked considerable damage on the Austrian countryside while his main force pounded away at the walls of the Austrian capital. Although Suleiman's diary does expressly say that the Sultan had forbidden the *akinji* to ravage the countryside, he does not seem to have enforced this command.<sup>116</sup>

It was not in the unsuccessful siege of Vienna that the Tatars were able to render their greatest services to Suleiman, but in the great raid of 1532. This campaign, which confused many Austrians in the sixteenth century and is still not fully understood today, gave the Crimean Tatars an opportunity to use their talents to the fullest. Suleiman began the campaign by besieging the Austrian town of Guns in an attempt to bring Archduke Ferdinand's forces out into the field of battle. When the Austrians prudently remained in Vienna, the Tatars were let loose on Austria in a massive raid that reached far into Habsburg lands.

In his bibliography of Suleiman, Lamb gives a vivid description of the confusion caused by these raiders in the Austrian camp.

They never saw Suleiman, or his main army. They heard tidings enough of the Turks. In the mountains south of them, towns fell before Turkish assaults; refugees began to come in from further west. The Turks were seen where no one expected them to be, between Vienna and Europe proper. Other, terrible horsemen who were not Turks drove through the upland valleys, turning to sweep through undefended villages, bridging rivers, or swimming them. These mysterious riders proved to be the Tatars from Asia. The flying columns were seen at Steyr and along the Enns a hundred miles west of Vienna.<sup>117</sup>

The Tatars acted with relative impunity against a country that was not experienced, like Poland or Russia, in dealing with a steppe foe. The Austrians' differing views on the use of cavalry may have hindered their defensive efforts. In the West cavalry units were usually made up of heavily armed *cuirassiers* with light cavalry being used mainly for communication and reconnaissance.<sup>118</sup> The heavy Austrian *cuirassiers* were often unable to come to grips with the highly mobile light Tatar raiders.

The Austrians did have the terrain on their side and, on several occasions, Habsburg forces were able to block off valleys and annihilate Tatar raiding parties. This, however, proved to be the exception rather than the rule. In the campaign of 1532, one historian estimates that as much as two thirds of the inhabitants of

Lower Austria were either killed or carried off into slavery.<sup>119</sup>

The Tatars assisted Suleiman on two further occasions, namely the 1543 siege of Szekesfehervar and the siege of Szigetvar in 1566, but the Sultan did not make heavy use of the Crimean Tatars after the great raid of 1532. Kortepeter's claim that this was because the Sultan did not trust the new Crimean Khan, Devlet Giray, seems like a plausible explanation for the Tatars' lack of participation in later campaigns.<sup>120</sup>

The Tatars made up for this lack of action during the "Long War" fought from 1593-1606. This war, described as a "slaughter house of men" by a Christian source, was undoubtedly one of the bloodiest of the Ottomans' foreign ventures.<sup>121</sup> It was the almost constant presence of the Khan's forces on the Habsburg front during this war that led to the gradual erosion of much of the Khanate's independence.<sup>122</sup>

The Tatars first saw action in the 1594 Ottoman siege of Raab, but it was during the subsequent campaign of 1596 that they made their finest contribution. In that year the Sultan, Mehemed III, made the decision to lead the Ottoman army in person to boost the morale of the troops. The Sultan's army began operations in August by moving against the Habsburg fortress of Eger. After successfully besieging this stronghold, the Ottoman force began hearing reports of an approaching Habsburg relief force.

A Tatar contingent under the command of the Kalga, Feth Giray, was immediately sent out to scout out the enemy's position and report on its movements. Upon hearing that the enemy force was actually the main Habsburg army, the Sultan decided to offer battle in the nearby plain of Mezo Keresztes.

The day started out badly for the Ottoman army which soon appeared close to defeat when, suddenly, Feth Giray's contingent discovered a weakness in the enemy's rear and attacked it in force. According to Kortepeter, this diversionary maneuver in the enemy's rear drew off enough of his forces to allow the Ottomans to break through the Habsburg lines and win the day.<sup>123</sup> This victory proved to be the only decisive battle of the entire war, and it was quickly ranked by the Ottomans alongside the most famous of Suleiman and Selim's victories.

This victory was important strategically as well as morally for it denied the Habsburgs all hope of evicting the Ottomans from Hungary for almost a hundred years. From this date on, the Habsburgs avoided giving battle and the war settled down to a war of sieges and counter sieges. In this warfare the Tatars also had their place and Tatar contingents served with particular distinction in the relief of Buda in 1598.

In the seventeenth century, the Tatars continued to send Tatar contingents to serve on the Habsburg front achieving their greatest success in the year 1663. In that year, the Tatars were ordered to ravage Austria in retaliation for Habsburg border provocations. The Tatars were able to make two particularly devastating raids into Silesia and Moravia and continued their operations westward as far as Liechtenstein, where Howorth reports they managed to destroy thirty two villages.<sup>124</sup> This author compares the great destruction of these raids to that caused by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, writing "Thus were the scenes of Batu's campaigns in central Europe re-enacted even so late as the second half of the seventeenth century."<sup>125</sup>

The Tatars' participation in Kara Mustafa's historic siege of Vienna in 1683 is the most famous scene of Tatar warfare in Western histories. An in-depth analysis of the Tatars' activities on this campaign will present an excellent picture

of the Tatars' role on this important front. Kurat makes the comment that:

the main objective of his [Kara Mustafa's] campaigns was the gaining of booty and prestige, and not the annihilation of the forces that threatened the security of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>126</sup>

This objective fitted in well with Tatar aims and the Crimean Khan sent 20,000 men to participate in the Grand Vezir's invasion of Austria in the summer of 1683. Kurat's claim that the Tatars sent up to 50,000 troops to Austria is exaggerated and probably comes from Christian sources that understandably overestimated the size of the Sultan's massive host.<sup>127</sup> The combined Ottoman-Tatar army was nonetheless enormous and Kara Mustafa is generally estimated to have had 200,000 men in his invasion force.

Kara Mustafa appears to have kept his objective, the conquest of the "*kizil elma*" (the red apple), a secret during the early stages of the campaign. The Grand Vezir claimed to have the intention of conquering the Imperial fortresses of Győr and Komárom and, according to some, even the Sultan was unaware of his general's desire to campaign as far west as Vienna.<sup>128</sup>

When the Grand Vezir proceeded past these fortresses into Austria, the Crimean Khan, Murad Giray, criticized the *Serdar* for leaving enemy strongholds in the army's rear. This criticism earned him the resentment of the Grand Vezir and for the rest of the campaign there was tension between the two. This hostility between the army's two highest ranking commanders was to hinder the Ottomans' efforts throughout the campaign and may have been a decisive factor in the army's later defeat.

By early summer, the Ottoman army was well on its way to Vienna and the Austrians had no doubt that the Turks were coming to strike once again at their capital. During the march to Vienna, the Tatars divided into two forces, one group forming a vanguard for the main army while the other group moved ahead to carry out "the traditional shock function of rapine, murder and arson."<sup>129</sup>

An observer in Vienna at this time left the following account of the destruction wreaked upon Austria by the marauding Tatars:

The Tatars covered the place, and, ravaging wherever they went, carried fire and sword, and destroyed everything in such fashion that you might have thought no man had ever dwelt there.<sup>130</sup>

Once past Vienna, this source claimed

the Tatars pursued their road, burning and ravaging the Christians and their property, violating honorable women, outraging virgins and enslaving the most comely as a present to the Grand Vezir and their Khan. The men whom they found they took, and set them like brute beasts to draw their wagons and to carry their booty, and to work at their trenches, slaughtering the innocent babes like kids, as well as the weak old men. This bestiality they manifested everywhere till they came near Linz.<sup>131</sup>

The Tatars' seemingly senseless raids were actually carefully coordinated operations planned to spread panic among the population and confuse the retreating Habsburg forces. The Tatars succeeded in achieving both objectives. On several occasions, Habsburg commanders mistook Tatar advance parties

for the main Ottoman army and in one instance even the legendary Duke of Lorraine panicked when he mistook a Tatar force in his rear for the Ottoman army.<sup>132</sup> On another occasion, a Magyar unit sent to destroy a strategic bridge fled at the sight of a Tatar scouting party before they could finish their task.

In Vienna, the results were even more dramatic. When reports of the Tatars' activities reached the city from the countryside, the city fell into a panic which, according to Barker, seriously impeded efforts to organize its still imperfect defenses.<sup>133</sup> One unexpected result of these forays was the fear it caused at the Imperial court. Upon hearing of these raids, a terrified Emperor Leopold decided to flee his capital and move his court to the safety of the western city of Linz.

This decision had an extremely negative affect on the Viennese population and many of the city's leading officials and nobles followed suit and fled the city to the comparatively safe western areas. A contemporary claims Vienna was thus deprived of many a "tested arm bearing lackey" who might have been able to organize the citizens' defensive measures.<sup>134</sup> Everywhere confusion reigned and conditions in Vienna were soon rendered even more chaotic as droves of terrified refugees began to stream into Vienna from the surrounding countryside.

Even the main army was not safe from the highly mobile Tatar bands. In one particularly daring attack, a Tatar force of 6,000 men almost succeeded in routing a retreating Habsburg army of around 9,500 men. It apparently took the Duke of Lorraine great effort to stand up to the Tatars' onslaught on that occasion.<sup>135</sup> The Austrians were eventually able to beat off the Tatar attack but only with great losses.

It is interesting to note that Louis Julius of Savoy was killed in this action. His death caused his younger brother, Eugene of Savoy, to enroll in the Imperial army as a volunteer where he eventually became the most famous Habsburg general on the Ottoman front.<sup>136</sup>

As the main Ottoman army made its way towards Vienna, the Tatars continued to extend their operations further to the west. The retreating court was in a constant state of panic as rumors of the Tatars' activities followed them on their route to Linz. Their fears were not unfounded for the Tatars had succeeded in overcoming most of the Austrians defensive measures with ease. Barricades were skirted, patrols outdistanced and rivers forded with amazing speed. One fast moving Tatar column almost succeeded in capturing the Habsburg dynastic archives on their way to Linz.<sup>137</sup>

In the second week of July, the main Ottoman army arrived before the walls of Vienna and quickly commenced siege operations. The Tatars, who were of little value in assaults against fortified positions of this type, were encouraged to forage throughout the country. Some of these wide ranging bands actually made it as far west as Bavaria where they succeeded in plundering the Alpine villages in a fashion unknown in these parts. It was not until Kara Mustafa received news of a Polish relief effort, that the Tatar *akinji* were recalled.

Jan Sobieski, the well-known crusader was unable to resist the opportunity to partake in an expedition to relieve the capital of Christendom. By July, the Poles had succeeded in organizing a relief army of 20,000 men to partake in what most historians consider to be the last religiously inspired crusade. Made up for the most part of heavy cavalry and armed with artillery, Sobieski's army posed a distinct threat to Ottoman siege operations.

Kara Mustafa underestimated this foe and seems to have taken few defensive actions in the days



preceding the Polish army's arrival. His greatest mistake was to send the Crimean Tatars, whose army was of roughly the same size as that of the Poles, to block the Polish advance. The Khan's forces were unwilling to take on this army in combat. Kurat claims that even if they had been so inclined they were not up to the task of defeating the heavy Polish cavalry which had artillery support.<sup>138</sup> The Khan's hostile feelings toward the Grand Vezir may have also influenced the Tatars' decision to avoid combat with Sobieski's forces.

In the Tatars' defense, it should be noted that the Polish advance was hindered by supply problems caused by the fact that much of the territory on the route to Vienna had been ravaged by the Tatar *chambuls*. Despite this difficulty, Sobieski was able to arrive in the hills outside Vienna by the second week of September. Offensive operations were quickly carried out in coordination with the Austrian forces under the command of the Duke of Lorraine. Both Sobieski and the Duke agreed on making a heavy charge into the enemy's camp, which had not been adequately prepared for a surprise assault.

The ensuing charge won Sobieski fame throughout Europe and succeeded in completely crushing Kara Mustafa's army. A Tatar force struck a blow at the attacking force, but this had little effect on the Christians' progress. By the end of the day the Ottoman army was in full retreat toward the Hungarian border. The victorious Christians were too shocked to give chase and appear to have considered the Ottoman retreat to have been a feigned maneuver to draw them out of position. Had the Christians reacted quicker, they might have been able to completely annihilate Kara Mustafa's army. As it was, the Ottomans were able to retreat with comparatively few losses.<sup>139</sup>

The inability of the crusaders to follow up on this victory cost Austria dearly. One contemporary source claims that the Crimean Tatars alone were able to make off with some 80,000 captives after the defeat. This excess baggage does not, however, seem to have slowed down the Tatars who proceeded the main army in flight by a full 24 hours.<sup>140</sup> The enraged Austrians actually considered striking at the distant Crimea in retaliation for travesties committed by the Tatars in Austria but their forces were clearly not up to the task.

The victorious Christian allies were, however, capable of carrying the war into neighboring Hungary with a vengeance. By the end of the campaign season the Emperor's forces had succeeded in pushing the demoralized Ottomans out of Hungary. In the following year, the Porte was confronted by a Christian alliance that now included Venice, and the Ottomans were forced to defend their borders from Poland to the Mediterranean. The Tatars served with distinction against the Poles during these defensive wars crushing a Polish offensive in 1687 and defeating a Polish army attempting to conquer Moldavia on another occasion.<sup>141</sup>

In 1688, the Tatars assisted the retreating Ottomans on several occasions. In this year Selim Giray Khan defeated an Austrian force in the battle of Kapchak and in the following year this same Khan helped drive the Imperials from the Belgrade vicinity.<sup>142</sup> In 1689, Kurat claims that the arrival of Selim Giray's troops on the Habsburg front saved Bulgaria and Thrace from Austrian conquest.<sup>143</sup> Howorth mentions that six years later the Tatars:

contributed greatly to the capture of the towns of Lugos, Nissa, and Belhn, and took an active part in the terrible struggle for Lippa, where the Imperial general Frederick Veterani and so many of his men were killed.<sup>144</sup>

With the signing of the Treaty of Karlovitz in 1699, hostilities came to a halt and the Tatars were able to return to the Crimea and concentrate on the more pressing issue of Russian expansion. Howorth mentions only one combined Ottoman-Tatar expedition on the Habsburg front in the following century and this appears to have led to no great successes.<sup>145</sup> For all practical purposes Crimean support against the West had come to an end by the turn of the century.

### *Summary*

As previously mentioned, many historians believe that the Crimean Tatars were not well suited to conduct military operations on the Western front. This has been blamed on the poor terrain, while McNeill concentrates on the superior technology of the Tatars' Western opponents. Fisher barely mentions the Tatars' participation on the Western front and, in most histories, if this support is mentioned, it is pointed out that the Tatars were of little assistance against the modern armies of Christian Europe.

It was of course on the Western front that the advances in firearms had their most effect. There can be no doubt that much of the Habsburg Emperor's successes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was due to Austria's superior technology. A look at the weapons and tactics of the Habsburgs will clearly demonstrate the potential these advances had to decide the outcome of a battle.

The Pole Jan Tarnowski made the observation that the Ottomans excelled in their cavalry, while the Christian armies of the West had superior infantry.<sup>146</sup> This was especially true on the Habsburg front where, by the mid-sixteenth century, the "professional" Spanish and Italian arquebusiers, German artillerymen and Austrian pikemen had gradually gained an advantage over the once superior janissaries. The Habsburg's artillery and small firearms were generally of better quality than those of their opponents and this gave them an advantage that often made up for the smaller size of their armies. The Habsburg General Bernardino Mendoca in particular attributed most of his successes over the Ottomans to superior firearms of his soldiers.<sup>147</sup>

The Austrians also made great defensive improvements on their exposed eastern border that lessened the effects of the Turkish raids. A series of small wooden forts (palankas) were established in this region from which cavalry forces could emerge to destroy raiding columns and alert the border population to impending raids. The Spanish, Wallon, Italian, Serbian and Croatian mercenaries who served in these forts were well experienced in the tactics of border warfare and in the use of firearms.

The small cannons (falcons) used by these troops were especially effective against the Sultan's raiders. In 1602, for example, a Habsburg border garrison used these weapons to destroy a Tatar contingent making its way to the Hungarian front.<sup>148</sup> Defeats of this nature obviously made an impact on the Khanate's leaders, and Gazi Giray in particular seems to have been alarmed at the danger these weapons posed to his warriors. This Khan went so far as to establish a tax in the Crimea for the establishment of a 500 man arquebusier division.<sup>149</sup> Despite attempts such as this, the Crimean Tatars never really adopted this new technology and retained their traditional tactics until the time of the Khanate's annexation.

The Austrian's tactics were anything but traditional and, by the mid-seventeenth century, they had developed new tactics similar to those used by Sobieski to defeat the large Ottoman cavalry forces in which the Tatars served. In the 1590s, the Habsburg general Giorgio Basta implemented a system emphasizing close cooperation between pikemen, cuirassiers and musketeers that was so successful that it was used by Imperial armies right up to the eighteenth century.

In the seventeenth century, troops serving under Montecuccoli invented the bayonet to help them overcome the Sultan's cavalry forces.<sup>150</sup> Austria's musketeers were thus rendered far more effective for they no longer needed to retreat behind a wall of pikes at the approach of Sultan's riders.

The advantages given to the Austrians by these advances were definitely significant, but not as telling as might seem. The Tatars' maneuverability often rendered the Habsburg's cannon useless and the Tatars' bow was still used with deadly effect against massed troops. It is also interesting to note that the Austrians made little progress in developing tactics to overcome the Tatars' raiding skills despite their improvements in tactics on the battlefield.

In the Austrian countryside, the Khan's raiders were able to move with a freedom that must have surprised the Tatars used to the elaborate defense systems of Poland and Russia. The Austrian provincial aristocracy proved to be especially inept in its attempts to halt the forays of the Tatar *akinji*. They, unlike their counterparts in Poland and Russia, were inexperienced in dealing with a highly mobile steppe foe and often fled their estates at the approach of an Ottoman army.<sup>151</sup> Signal fires, warning bells, and defense patrols that required higher organization were often rendered ineffective by a lack of local organization. The rural population was thus left at the mercy of the Turco-Tatar raiders who could engage in raiding with relative ease. Barker notes that:

Although the Muslims were for the most part only lightly equipped—the Tatars lacked even firearms—the population virtually paralyzed by fear, offered little resistance, preferring precipitate flight or meek submission.<sup>52</sup>

There were of course exceptions. On several occasions local castles held off Tatar assaults with relative ease, for the plunder hungry *akinji* were reluctant to waste their time attacking fortified positions. The most interesting case of local resistance to the marauders occurred in Lilienfeld, in 1683, when a Cistercian monk managed to organize a surprisingly efficient peasant defense force. The naked corpses of Turkish and Tatar raiders slain by the monk's men were displayed along the country roads in this vicinity to warn off other raiders.<sup>153</sup>

In the border regions, where Turkish raids were more common, the local resistance was of course better organized. Villages here were placed on hills and surrounded by walls and castles were more frequent. This region was, however, the exception and most of Austria was left practically defenseless.

The *akinjis'* raids were especially destructive in Lower Austria where a document written in 1689 claims that as many as 500,000 people were killed or enslaved during a single campaign.<sup>154</sup> Barker makes the claim that this region "did not fully recover from its wounds until the middle of the eighteenth century."<sup>155</sup> It can thus be seen that the Austrians' poor defensive planning often went a long way in facilitating Tatar raids in a country that admittedly was not well suited to the Tatars' style of warfare.

During a siege, this ability to move throughout the Austrian countryside on foraging missions was of great assistance to the Ottomans. The Khan's raiders greatly facilitated Ottoman siege operations by supplying the army with the important slave labor needed to construct the Turks' massive siege works. They could also be counted on to gather lumber and capture food supplies for the preoccupied siege forces. Their operations provided additional help to the main army by hindering enemy communications and causing confusion among the terrorized population.

Although the Tatars' involvement on the Western front was not as consistent or important as their efforts on the steppe, it nonetheless boosted the Ottomans' offensive campaigns in this theatre to a later date than is usually recognized. The Porte also owed a great debt to the Tatars for their support in keeping the Principalities in line. It was largely due to the Crimean Tatars' influence in the Danube region that the Porte was able to maintain control of the Principalities.

The Tatars' assistance during the Ottoman Empire's defensive wars following their disastrous defeat at Vienna in 1683 must also not be overlooked. One cannot help but notice that the Khan's forces were generally victorious in their struggles against the Christian alliance during the late seventeenth century, while the Ottomans suffered defeat after defeat. Kurat's work on the retreat of the Ottoman Empire in these days is full of references to the amazing feats of "the fierce horsemen of the Crimea."<sup>156</sup> Kurat's comment that the Tatars' efforts saved Bulgaria and Thrace from Habsburg conquest is an accurate reflection of the Khanate's value even at this late stage.

Clearly McNeill's remark that the Tatars were "militarily obsolete" by the time of the Long War is slightly misleading.<sup>157</sup> It can safely be stated that the Crimean Tatars' role on this front has been seriously underestimated by most historians for it was on this frontier that the Tatars were able to make some of their finest contributions to the Ottoman cause.

## AFTERWORD

It was on these four battlefronts that the Crimean Tatars saw the most service but they were not restricted to these frontiers. Crimean Tatars could be found serving in military capacities throughout the Ottoman Empire. Tatars from the Crimea served in almost every corner of the Empire as messengers, the Ottomans actually used the word "Tatar" as synonymous with courier.

Crimean Tatar armies frequently fought in the Empire's internal struggles as well. Selim I made the most use of the Tatars in this fashion during his struggles to overthrow his father Sultan Bayezid II in the early sixteenth century. One source mentions Crimean Tatar participation in Selim's victory over the Mamelukes in Syria during the battle of Aleppo.<sup>158</sup> Selim may have in fact earned his reputation as "one of the most ruthless men of the renaissance age" from his upbringing in his father-in-law, Mengli Giray's court.<sup>159</sup>

Selim, who had himself been a great *gazi* before becoming Sultan, definitely recognized the value of the Khanate's forces as can be seen by his comments on the Tatars:

I fear the Tatars most of all. They are as fast as the wind upon their enemies, for when they march they cover five or six days' road in one day, and when they run away they disappear as quickly. Especially important is the fact that their horses do not require shoes, nails or fodder. When they come to a river they do not wait for a boat like our troops. Their food, like their bodies, is nothing much; their strength is shown by the fact that they do not care for comfort.<sup>160</sup>

According to Kortepeter, the Khan's forces even served in Anatolia to help put down the Jelali rebellion.<sup>161</sup> Perhaps the best example of the Tatars serving in an atypical capacity was the Sultan's request to the Crimean Khan to send him 20,000 Tatar rowers for his fleet in 1612.<sup>162</sup>

It should also be mentioned that the Crimean Tatars' military assistance did not come to an end with the Russian annexation of the Khanate in 1783. Turkish sources claim that as many as 595,000 Muslims fled the Crimean region in the decades following the Khanates' conquest.<sup>163</sup> Most of these were settled in Dobruca where they were organized into provisional military units by the Ottoman authorities. According to Cooke it was these forces, "bands of bashi-bazouks (irregulars) consisting of Tatars from the Crimea," who harshly put down the famous Bulgarian uprising of 1876.<sup>164</sup>

Members of the Giray family also continued to serve the Ottomans as Khans of the Budjak. As late as 1789 they could be found leading the Tatars of this steppe region into battle against their traditional foes the Russians.<sup>165</sup> It should also be noted that at least some of the Tatar population that remained in the Crimea during the nineteenth century gave their support to the Ottomans and their allies in the Crimean War.<sup>166</sup> As fascinating as the continued service of Crimean Tatars was, it was never as extensive as it had been during the earlier days of the Ottoman Empire and is mentioned here merely as a curiosity.

## CONCLUSIONS

After surveying the Crimean Tatars' military role on these four fronts, it should be apparent that many of the established notions of the Tatars' military performance are justified. To use a few adjectives from histories dealing with the Tatars, the Tatars were indeed "fickle", "uncontrolled", "erratic" and at times "untrustworthy." From an Ottoman perspective, the Crimean Tatars surely had their faults. Ottoman sources complain that the Tatars put more emphasis on plundering than fighting for the Sultan, were often late for battle, fled during decisive conflicts and frequently refused to follow Ottoman orders.

These faults are often overemphasized and, as this work will have made clear, many of the established notions concerning the Tatars' role in the Ottoman military establishment are quite incorrect. An analysis of these misconceptions and a re-examination of the aforementioned problems with Tatar assistance will shed new light on the relationship between the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire and will, in the process, provide a more rounded picture of the Tatars' military role in the Sultan's army.

To most Ottoman historians the word Tatar is synonymous with raider and it is indeed as marauders that the Tatars have acquired most of their fame. The Tatars' ability to serve as front line shock cavalry has often been overlooked as a result of this emphasis. Barker describes the Tatars as "a motley assemblage that could not be trusted under fire,"<sup>167</sup> while Stoye claims the Tatars "would never stand against the cavalry of the Christians."<sup>168</sup> A look at the Tatars' cavalry tactics and successes on all four Ottoman fronts previously outlined will demonstrate that the Tatars were in fact able to make valuable contributions even in pitched battle.

The Crimean Tatars were definitely not unfamiliar with hand-to-hand combat and it must be remembered that they were the descendants of Genghis Khan's warriors, their tactics were often as effective as those used by the Mongol's world-conquering army. Historians are wont to describe the Tatars as a horde of undisciplined rabble and in this they are far from correct. The nomads of the steppe had always been capable of executing the most complicated maneuvers and formations through the use of banners, drums, hand signals and speedy couriers:

their tactics required great discipline. Baron de Tott mentions the Tatars' ability to move into battle position without a word and Fisher claims it was the Tatar army's superior leadership that gave the Tatars an advantage over their enemies.<sup>169</sup>

When charging an enemy position, the Tatar army formed a half moon and attempted to crush their opponents in a pincer movement. Archers in the rear of the army swept the enemy's front with a deadly wave of arrows to cover the advance of the roaring saber wielding front ranks.

The Tatars were considered masters in the use of the curved saber and contemporaries noticed that the Khan's warriors were superior to the Russians in close quarter fighting.<sup>170</sup> Seaton claims that:

whereas the Russian horse became speedily discouraged if the enemy did not break at the first onslaught, a Tatar would rarely give up, and once forced to fight, would slash till he dropped.<sup>171</sup>

The Tatars' ferocity in battle was legendary and it was rare that a Tatar gave himself up in battle. Russia's armies were reluctant to confront these warriors on the field even as late as 1591. Massa's description of a Tatar attack on Moscow in that year is a vivid testimony to the Khan's ability to launch a frontal assault against even the most protected of sites.

The two great armies came face to face. On the first day they did not move. On the second day, two Tatar horsemen advanced to the foot of the Muscovite entrenchment. The Muscovites began firing their heavy artillery on them, though to no good purpose. Then hundreds followed by thousands of Tatars moved up, falling like hail upon the entrenchment and firing arrows in such numbers that the sky was dark with them.<sup>172</sup>

Contemporaries were frequently impressed by the Tatars' archery and, in many respects the Tatars' reflex compound bow (known in the West as a Turkish bow), was superior in battle to the firearms of their opponents. The bow was powerful enough to shoot an arrow several hundred yards and could even pierce armor.<sup>173</sup> A Turkish ambassador to London is reported to have fired an arrow 482 yards with such a bow and then complained that the bow was weak.<sup>174</sup>

During the Long War, the Habsburg General Giorgio Basta found the Tatars' bow to be especially destructive and was eventually forced to arm his troops with extra long arquebuses to overcome his opponent's superiority. Kortepeter remarks that the "The Tatar bow, in other words, still had a longer range than the ordinary arquebus."<sup>175</sup>

The Tatar bow also had the advantage of being more accurate than the firearms of the time. One observer noted that "Tatar chieftains shoot so well that birds are afraid to fly."<sup>176</sup> The bow had the added benefit of being lighter and much easier to reload than an arquebus or musket. Brodie claims that "In 1600 it still took ten to fifteen minutes to load and fire an arquebus," while a Tatar could notch an arrow in a matter of seconds.<sup>177</sup>

Even the advent of the musket, which had a longer range than the arquebus, gave the Tatars' sedentary opponents few advantages for it was heavier and clumsier than the arquebus. It can be seen that Barker's comment on the inferiority of the lightly equipped Tatar raiders' lack of firearms is not necessarily a disparaging summary of the Tatars' firepower. The bow does not seem so archaic when one recalls that even the English used the long bow in their armies up until 1595.<sup>178</sup>

On all of the fronts analyzed, there have been examples of the Tatars using their combat skills to turn the tide of battle in the Ottomans' favor. A summary of some of these victories will show that the Crimean Tatars did have the potential to stand and fight with great effect if they so desired.

On the Persian front, the Tatar cavalry frequently proved to be superior to that of their opponents. In the previously described battle of Aksu a Tatar force was able to outfight a larger enemy force without Ottoman assistance for three days before a rainstorm forced them to withdraw.

On the Russian front, the Khan's forces were able to crush the Tsar's forces in head-on combat up until the end of the seventeenth century, despite Moscow's use of artillery and tabors.

In Poland, the Tatars were able to break Polish assaults as late as 1673 when a Tatar army routed a Polish force attempting to reconquer Chotin.<sup>179</sup> On the Austrian front one has but to recall the battle of Petronell in

which 6,000 Tatars almost overwhelmed an Austrian force of 9,500 men to realize that even here the Tatars were effective in battle.

As to the Tatars' inability to stand up to cannon fire, this too had been overcome by the late sixteenth century. In the Caucasus, for instance, the Tatars seemed to have had no qualms about attacking Persian camps even when they were defended by cannons and trenchworks.<sup>180</sup> A Polish observer writing in 1649 claims that in the battle of Zborow, a Tatar horde "flew into the [field of] fire as though it had robbed them of their sight."<sup>181</sup> Baron de Tott noticed the ineffectiveness of artillery against the Tatars during his participation in Khan Kirim Giray's campaign as late as the eighteenth century. On this occasion Baron de Tott wrote, "The Canon of Sibilloff, which was heard on our Route, could not prevent the Detachment, sent tither, from burning the Suburbs and carrying off a great number of Slaves."<sup>182</sup>

The Ottoman troops who served with the Tatars respected the Tatars' fighting skills and their arrival during a campaign was usually greeted with enthusiasm. It must have been encouraging to the Ottoman soldiers to know that they were not alone when it seemed the whole world was arrayed against them. The Crimean Khan was usually treated as a head of state during ceremonies to encourage the moral of the troops. Westerners noticed this and, in their accounts, the Ottoman army is often described as that of "the Turks and Tatars." Kortepeter claims that:

The presence of the Khan was a matter of no small importance for the success or failure of the Ottoman campaign. The Tatars, in number alone increased the striking force of the Ottomans.<sup>183</sup>

Kortepeter goes on to mention that:

Of no mean significance was the psychological impact of their presence on the discipline of the Ottoman troops. As the Sultan rarely took part in the campaigns, the presence of the Tatar Khan without doubt added to the discipline of the troops and the chances of any given campaign. The Tatars were considered invincible by ordinary people.<sup>184</sup>

A Western ambassador in Hungary, Ghiselin de Busbeq, mentioned that a Tatar serving in his Ottoman escort was held somewhat in awe by his Turkish comrades for his insensitivity to weather and disdain for protection in battle.<sup>185</sup> The Tatars' ability to swim across rivers with ease while the Ottoman army was forced to construct bridges and rafts to traverse them also impressed the common Ottoman soldier.

Having sufficiently described the Ottoman soldiers' attitude towards the Tatars, it is surprising that much of the Tatars' bad press can be found in Ottoman sources. Many of the misconceptions about the Tatars' abilities in battle come from these historical sources. There are several reasons for this bad coverage, but it stems mainly from a desire on the part of the Ottoman court and historians to use the Tatars as scapegoats to cover their own failures in battle.

The failure of the Astrakhan expedition, for example, was blamed almost entirely on Khan Devlet Giray. Turkish historians today are unanimous in their criticism of this figure as a result of his "sabotaging" of this campaign. Kurat refutes this criticism and puts the blame for the mission's failure on poor planning and bad weather. As to the claim that the Khan purposely misled the Ottoman army during its terrible retreat across the steppe, Kurat writes "it should be said in the Khan's defence that no shorter and better route existed."<sup>186</sup>



During the Long War in Hungary, Sinan Pasha used the Tatars as scapegoats to explain his poor performance on at least one occasion.<sup>187</sup> Barker mentions that Kara Mustafa also went to extraordinary lengths to put the blame for his failure at Vienna on his enemy the Crimean Khan.<sup>188</sup>

Kurat claims that it was actually the Grand Vezir's poor planning that enabled the Christians to overcome the Ottoman army in 1683.<sup>189</sup> Had the Vezir listened to the Khan's advice and sent the Janissaries against the Poles, the outcome of this battle might have been different. Howorth actually gives the Tatars special credit in the battle at Vienna claiming that it was the Khan's forces that retrieved the standard of the prophet during the Ottoman retreat.<sup>190</sup>

On occasion, even the Tatars' own sources are not exactly flattering about their battle skills. A frustrated Crimean Khan once wrote of his warriors:

The Tatars, the wretched fellows, are incapable of carrying out distant or difficult campaigns, and the equipping of a detachment of select brave men, in relation to its numbers, would cost the Sultan very dearly and would amount to useless expenditure.<sup>191</sup>

As for Western sources, they too are frequently untrustworthy on account of their bias against the Tatars. Eton's claim that "The whole reign of the Tatars has been an insult to mankind, and a disgrace to human nature, not inferior to the Ottoman sultans," is typical of Western accounts.<sup>192</sup>

The Tatars' tactics were, without a doubt, frequently barbaric by Western standards but it should be noted that clemency to enemy of the faith was not common among the Tatars' crusading opponents either. Leaders on both sides encouraged raids on the enemy whose right to live was often nullified by his religious beliefs.

The following quote from an Ottoman war manual clearly demonstrates the attitude of the Muslim *gazis* who served on the borders of the infidel from Shiite Persia to Catholic Austria. The manual gives advice on what a Muslim general should do when confronted by a weaker enemy:

Under these circumstances, opposing the enemy, being prepared for him, and raiding him in his own country are necessary. God had commanded His Prophet to fight the unbelievers and treat them roughly, when He said, exalted be His power, Struggle with the unbelievers and hypocrites, and be thou harsh with them. [9:73] And He ordained engaging those of the unbelievers who were near neighbors of the Muslims when He said, exalted be the Sayer, 'Find the unbelievers who are near you; let them find in you a harshness' [9:123].<sup>193</sup>

Although historians admit that Christian slaves were often treated relatively well in the Crimea, few can deny that the Tatars' military operations were carried out with an extreme brutality. The Tatars had few qualms in following the kind of advice given in the previously quoted manual by attacking and plundering the lands of the infidel.

Having analyzed several of the misconceptions concerning the Tatars and their role in the Ottoman military, the Tatars' faults should also be examined. Perhaps the Crimean Tatars' greatest fault on all fronts was their penchant for plunder. Adil Giray's comment that "for the Tatars, raiding was as necessary as worldly goods

were for the repose of ordinary people" applied to the Tatars wherever they served.<sup>194</sup> All armies engage in plundering to a degree, but few have out-plundered the Tatars. There can be no doubt that the Tatars' wholesale looting often lessened their military effectiveness in the Ottoman military. A Polish observer in seventeenth century noticed this and wrote:

May God be praised because the paradox—that the Tatar is hard to defeat when entering Poland, but can be defeated when he is leaving laden with plunder—now appears to have been qualified.<sup>195</sup>

This activity not only lessened the Tatars' value as an ally but caused the Ottomans considerable trouble within their own lands. Eton's comment that the Tatars "subsisted on plunder, whether the country belonged to a friendly or inimical power" held true throughout the Ottomans' frontier *sanjaks*.<sup>196</sup> The Crimean Tatars plundering devastated areas under Ottoman control and their passage to the Ottoman front was usually strongly protested by *sanjak beys* en-route.

The Ottoman historian Ibrahim Pechevi gave this sarcastic summary of the Gazi Giray's participation in a campaign on the Austrian front in 1603. He "laid waste six [Ottoman] *sanjaks* and gone on only one raid; moreover, he had come at the end of one campaign season and left at the beginning of another."<sup>197</sup>

The Tatars' tendency to plunder came from both economic necessity (the Crimea frequently suffered from plagues that killed flocks) and from a desire to gain prestige as a warrior. Sobieski claimed that Tatar women were known to mock their husbands if they returned from a campaign empty-handed saying "You are no warrior to return without booty."<sup>198</sup> For the Tatars who were used to the plundering life of the steppe, booty was seen as both a symbol of success in battle and a reward for their military services.

The acquisition of booty was often considered more important to a Crimean warrior than participation in battle operations. This frequently angered Ottoman commanders who had little authority over the Khan's troops. On more than one occasion Ottoman commanders found themselves deserted during crucial stages in battle by the Tatars who feared losing their booty in case of a defeat.

The Ottomans' difficulties of this nature were caused by the fact that the Crimean Tatars were not regular troops serving under Ottoman commanders, but allied Muslim warriors from a neighboring state. These difficulties tend to support Fisher's remark that the Crimean Tatars were not "marionettes in Ottoman hands" as many historians claim.<sup>199</sup>

Much of the problems confronted by the Ottoman government in its military dealings with the Tatars stem from the fact that the Crimean Khans were, in fact, independent heads of state with their own political prerogatives. High on the Crimean agenda was the halting of Russian expansion, reestablishment of the Golden Horde under their suzerainty and of course acquisition of booty. Although the Porte was eventually able to strengthen its hold over the Crimean government in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it could never enforce its authority here as elsewhere in the Empire. The fact that the Crimean Tatars had a sense of ethnic identity and internal cohesion that was unusual among Muslim groups compounded problems.<sup>200</sup>

Regardless of how strong the Ottoman government's authority was in the Crimea at any given time, the Porte's officials had to realize that the Crimean Khans could not ignore the interests of their own state's tribal leaders and officials. These leaders were often reluctant to commit their horses and warriors

to costly engagements in Ottoman campaigns of aggrandizement. The Crimean Khans and *mirzas* were far more interested in making it back to the Crimea with their slaves and booty after a campaign than in losing men in distant battles that offered them few political benefits.

This divergence of interests hurt not only the Ottomans. The Tatars were often unable to mount defensive operations on the steppe to protect their own interests because they were involved in Ottoman campaigns. In the 1670s, for example, the Crimean Tatars were unable to come to the aid of the Muslim Bashkirs who were revolting against Russia because they were involved in a Russo-Turkish conflict. Had the Tatars not been too occupied on the Ottomans' campaigns against Persia and Austria in the eighteenth century, they would have been able to maintain greater control of the Nogays who eventually ended up under Russian control.

Despite the relationship's difficulties, it was in final analysis an overall success. The Tatars gave over three hundred years of military support to the Ottoman Empire in defense of their common Turco-Muslim culture. They in return received the protection of one of the world's most powerful states.

By the time of the Crimean Khanates annexation in 1783, the Tatars had lost much of their ability to aid the Ottomans in their losing struggle against the modern armies of their foes. It is doubtful if the Khanate could have made any serious contributions to the Ottoman military establishment in the nineteenth century had they maintained their independence.

The fateful destruction of the British Light Brigade during the Crimean War of 1853-56 was ample evidence to the Khanate's descendants that the sedentary war technology of the West had finally overcome the superiority of the mounted warrior. Although the Crimean Khanate has disappeared as a state and its significance in Eastern European history has generally been forgotten, it is still interesting to look back on the Tatars' military career and marvel that a tribally organized fighting force could carry on the tradition of the steppe nomad in a modernizing Europe right up until the late eighteenth century.

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