

THE BATTLE OF CHALDIRAN: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

The general trajectory of Ottoman-Safavid relations during the 235 years period between 1501 and 1736 outstandingly marked by persisting hostility and military conflict with brief and rare intervals of tranquility. The Battle of Chaldiran that took place in 1514 was the first major Ottoman-Safavid military clash and it was an important event in the history of Islam. The battle tested the military strength of two Muslim powers of the time and ended in favour of the Ottomans. The battle occurred for a good number of reasons and finally it left a long lasting legacy for both the Ottoman empire and for the Safavid state. This article makes a humble attempt to critically present the battle of Chaldiran from a historical point of view. To that purpose, the article first addresses the points of contention that ultimately resulted in the armed clash between the Safavids and the Ottomans at Chaldiran. The article next looks into the devastating consequences of the battle.

Introduction

The first significant Ottoman-Safavid military conflict, which took place at the plain of Chaldiran on August 23, 1514, was a turning point in Islamic history. The Safavids were originally Sunni,¹ however, they eventually adopted Shi'i Islam and converted most of Persia (present-day Iran) to Imami or Twelver Shi'ism.² In 1501, they established Shi'i Islam as an official state religion of Persia under the leadership of Shah Ismail, and as a political force they ruled the country till 1736. By making Shi'ism the state religion, Shah Ismail, the founder of the Safavid dynasty and the state, distinguished his country from its Sunni Muslim neighbors and adversaries: the Ottomans and the Uzbeks. The establishment of the Shi'i Safavid state in Persia in 1501 caused significant consternation among Ottoman rulers. Shah Ismail and his Qizilbash³ (meaning red-heads) fighters soon initiated an era of conquests and captured Persian cities one

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by one. The newly established Safavid state soon expanded over a large area in the following twelve years and thus, Shah Ismail created an empire extending as far as Qandahar and Balkh in the east and Baghdad and Basra in the west. This fact plus the increasing influence of the Safavid over the Qizilbash-Anatolian tribes of the Ottoman empire posed a serious challenge to Ottoman authority.

Sultan Bayzid (1481-1512) abstained from the confrontation with the Safavids as a result of domestic and international problems. However, his son and successor, Sultan Selim (1512-1520), who was critical of his father's policy of appeasement towards the Safavids, vehemently opposed the emerging Shi'i Safavid power and made a decision to take military action against Shah Ismail. This resulted in the battle of Chaldiran, the first military conflict between the Safavids and the Ottomans that occurred on August 23, 1514. This article makes an attempt to critically present the battle of Chaldiran from a historical point of view. To that end, the article first deals with the areas of hostility that eventually led to the military conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavids at Chaldiran. Then the article tries to find out the devastating consequences of the battle.

Early Ottoman-Safavid Low-intensity Hostile Relations

Historically, the Safavid began their journey as a Sunni⁴ Sufi movement, the Safaviyya, which had been initiated by Sheikh Safiuddin Abul Fath Ishaq Ardabili (1252-1334). However, the process of transforming the Safavid order into a viable political entity was begun by Sheikh Junaid (1430-1460)⁵ and it culminated under Ismail in 1501, when Ismail founded the Safavid dynasty, proclaimed himself the Shah, and declared Shi'i as the state faith in Persia. The emergence of the Shi'i Safavid state in 1501 on the north-eastern frontier was an unpleasant development to the Sunni Ottoman empire. Despite this reality the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid II (1481-1512) congratulated Shah Ismail for his victories, offered him fatherly advice and asked him that he should cease the destruction of the graves and mosques of the Sunnis and refrain from the use of religion as a means of grasping political power. It is pertinent to state here that the establishment of the new Safavid dynasty in Persia resulted in imposing Shi'ism as the official religion, which was forcibly converting the Sunni population. The advice of Sultan Bayzid II came in this background; however, Shah Ismail paid little heed to the advice and continued his policy of expansion of Shi'i faith at Sunni expense even into the Ottoman

territory.⁶ Needless to say, during his territorial conquest between 1505 and 1507, Shah Ismail advanced as far as the western frontier with the Ottoman empire by capturing Diyar Bakr, Marash and Albistan. Thereby, Shah Ismail reached eastern Anatolia—the eastern frontier of the Ottoman empire which resulted in some tensions between the two Muslim powers.⁷ Yet, a sort of unwarlike relationship prevailed between the newly founded Safavid state and the Ottoman empire, chiefly due to the conciliatory policy of Sultan Bayzid II, who was known to be a friend and protector of dervishes and Sufis. It is also stated that the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid II had always observed the protocol necessary for a policy of close friendship and alliance, and that the two powers had followed the path of entente.⁸

Deterioration of the Ottoman-Safavid Relations and Prelude to the Military Confrontation

The early nonviolent, low-intensity hostile relationship between the Safavids and the Ottomans quickly followed a new course of hostility since 1512. In fact, after Selim, the son of Sultan Bayzid, assumed control in Istanbul, the two Muslim powers were fast heading towards a military confrontation which eventually occurred in 1514 at the plain of Chaldiran in Azerbaijan. There were a good number of factors, indirect and direct, accounted for the rapid deterioration of the Ottoman-Safavid relations which made a military conflict inevitable and unavoidable. These factors are explained briefly in the following.

a. Ideological or Religious Differences

The first thing that turned the prevailing Ottoman-Safavid unwarlike low-intensity hostile relations into an inimical one and set them to the path of military confrontation was ideological or religious differences. When Ismail founded the Safavid dynasty in 1501, he proclaimed himself the Shah and declared Shi‘i as the state faith and quickly built an empire directly to the east of the Ottoman frontier. With it, the Shi‘i Safavid Persia became a potential threat to its most powerful Sunni neighbor—the Ottoman Empire.⁹ Although Shi‘i Islam was a minority faith elsewhere, Twelver Shi‘i was dominant in Persia and this factor effectively guaranteed conflict between the Persian Safavids and the Ottomans. Shah Ismail himself was a bitter enemy of the Sunnis and he forced the inhabitants of Persia to become Shi‘i. Besides, by making Shi‘ism the state religion of Persia he thwarted the ambition of the Ottomans, especially of Sultan Selim, who

wanted to be the supreme ruler of the Muslim world.¹⁰ Moreover, the great schism between the Sunni and Shi'i is not merely a theological speculation upon articles of belief, but at the same time a practical point in politics, involving the succession to the throne. Shah Ismail's success depended on his followers' belief that his descent from Muhammad's (pbuh) son-in-law Ali (R.) made him the true and only legitimate successor to the Prophet. Such a claim implied that all other Muslim rulers including the Ottoman Sultans were usurpers. This doctrine was especially explosive because large numbers of people in Asia Minor of the Ottoman territory were predisposed to accept such an idea. In addition, for generations, a semi-secret Shi'i propaganda had taught that the rulers of Islam were all illegitimate, and that the true head of the Muslim community, the Imam, would appear someday to overthrow the mighty and set all things right. Shah Ismail's meteoric career in Persia seemed to match such expectations, and the many views which had developed about how and when the Imam would manifest himself tended to coalesce around his person.¹¹ On the other hand, as guardians of the Sunni Islam, the Ottomans considered Safavid Persia as heretical and saw themselves as the center of the Muslim Caliphate. According to Kaveh Farrokh, this factor alone was sufficient to rally the Ottomans for a holy war against Safavid Persia.¹² Particularly, Sultan Selim, being an ardent Sunni and supported by his anti-Shi'i orthodox Sunni advisors, was determined to crush the upstart Safavid power and the heresy it represented before it should be firmly established in Persia.¹³ This position of Sultan Selim made the military conflict between the Ottomans and the Safavid inevitable.

b. The Security of the Ottoman Empire

The security of the Ottoman empire also played an important role in the occurrence of the battle of Chaldiran. The establishment of the Shi'i Safavid state on the eastern borders appeared as a grave danger to the security of the Ottoman empire. The nature of this threat reflected on the Safavid ability to manipulate the Shi'i population and large Turkomen¹⁴ Qizilbash followers of Shah Ismail in the Ottoman territory. Since Shi'i influence was strong among the Turcoman tribesmen of eastern Anatolia, therefore, this issue had become a potential threat to the very foundation of the Ottoman empire.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, the Safavid movement had become a rallying point for the Turkomen Shi'i population of Anatolia and upper Mesopotamia whose territories were disputed among three powers: the Ottoman, the Safavids and the Mamluks. There is credible

evidence to suggest that when Ismail had made his bid for power in the late summer of 1499, the first contingent of troops to join him were Turkomen Qizilbash Sufis from Anatolia. Later, many Anatolian Qizilbashes flocked to Ismail's standard when he embarked on his first military exploits. Shah Ismail's military successes, his reputation for generosity in the distribution of booty, the revolutionary zeal of Twelver Shi'ism and above all the persistent economic crisis among the population of this region played their part to increase the influx of Anatolian Qizilbashes into Persia to join Ismail's army.¹⁶ The presence within the borders of the Ottoman empire of large numbers of Turkomen following the Shah Ismail's line thus actually constituted what in more recent times would have been referred to as a "fifth column"¹⁷ while their movement to Safavid Persia either as mercenaries or as true supporters and army of the Safavid state was viewed in Istanbul with growing disquiet since this confirmed of certain separatist tendencies from the Ottoman rule. Sultan Bayzid II during his time had faced harsh realities of possible mass Turkomen exodus into the Safavid realm and the possibility that eastern Anatolia might be detached from allegiance to the Ottoman empire. In response to these circumstances, in 1502, he issued the first edict for the persecution of the Qizilbash in Anatolia in an effort to stop the large migration of able-bodied Ottoman people and prevent the reinforcement of a future foe. The persecution included branding on the face of every inhabitant who was known to have Safavid sympathies and their deportation (large in numbers) from Anatolia to Morea, Modoni and Koroni in southern Greece. He also ordered the amirs or chiefs on the eastern frontier to prevent Qizilbash from crossing the border.¹⁸ In response to this Ottoman action, Shah Ismail sent Sultan Bayzid II a written appeal requesting him not to forbid his adherents to cross the frontier.

As time progressed, the Ottoman repression on its Shi'i Qizilbash subjects took a serious turn. The Shi'i Qizilbash subjects of the Ottoman province of Tekke or Teke-lli (capital Anatolia), on the Mediterranean coast of Asia Minor, rose to open revolt in late June 1511 out of fear of further deportation and resentment at not being permitted to enter into Persia. Led by Shah Quli Baba Takkalu, and inspired by Safavid missionaries, the Takkalu Turkomen of the Ottoman empire sought to replicate Shah Ismail's movement of Persia and rebelled against the Ottoman authority, perhaps in anticipation of a union with the Safavids. Reportedly, they received encouragement from Shah Ismail and the Ottomans had real grounds to fear that the tribes would abandon them for the Safavids. Soon

the Turkomen Qizilbash rebels were joined by the discontented soldiers (*sipahis*) of the Ottoman empire, and the joint forces revolted against the Ottoman rule in Anatolia. They roamed the whole region murdering and plundering.¹⁹ They also defeated and killed Beylerby—the Ottoman governor of Anatolia and captured Bursa—the capital of the first Ottoman Sultans. Without a doubt, this was a major anti-Ottoman rebellion in Anatolia and it shook the very foundation of the Ottoman empire. The insurrection in Anatolia gave Shah Quli Baba Takkalu the opportunity to spread the uprising to other parts of the Ottoman empire, which was worse for the Ottoman Sultan. The magnitude of the rebellion compelled the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid II to send his Grand Vizir Khadim Ali Pasha to suppress the rebellion. An encounter took place near Sivas on July 2, 1511, and the rebellion was crushed while Shah Quli was killed. The Ottomans were able to restore peace at the cost of their Grand Vizir in the encounter.

After the killing of Shah Quli, neither the Ottoman anxiety over losing much of their Asian possessions was eased, nor was their hatred for Shah Ismail diminished. When such was the Ottoman position, another serious revolt broke out in the province of Rum, now with open encouragement of the Safavids. The proximity of the Safavid frontier allowed the rebels an opportunity to withdraw on to the Safavid territory in face of Ottoman punitive action. This clearly showed the precarious state of Ottoman security along the eastern and southern Anatolian borders. Roger Savory has rightfully articulated that the active subversive of large numbers of Ottoman subjects in Anatolia by the politico-religious propaganda of the Safavid was the principal reason for the outbreak of war between the two states.²⁰ Sultan Selim, who was best known in English as Selim the Grim because of his cruelty or ferocity, took very seriously the subversive role of pro-Safavid Qizilbash sympathizers within the Ottoman empire and decided to put an end to it by means of force. Sultan Selim was also probably aware of the dispatch of Safavid envoys to the Mamluks of Egypt and to Hungary for forging an alliance against their common enemy—the Ottomans.²¹ Therefore, once firmly established on the throne, Sultan Selim wanted to deal with the roots of the problems that had threatened the security of the Ottoman empire. Instead of placating the Safavids as his father Sultan Bayzid II had done previously, Sultan Selim adopted clearly an aggressive policy towards Shah Ismail to prevent him from exporting Shi'i revolution to Ottoman lands. This aggressive policy, aiming also to protect the integrity of his realm, led Sultan Selim to carry the offensive

into his enemy's territory on the battlefield of Chaldiran on August 23, 1514.²²

c. Sultan Selim's Desire to Avenge on the Safavid for Humiliating the Ottomans

Sultan Selim's desire to take revenge on the Safavid ruler Shah Ismail for humiliating the Ottomans was another reason for the battle of Chaldiran. From the very beginning the Shi'i Safavid state was surrounded by two powerful Sunni political rivals: the Uzbeks in the east and the Ottoman in the west. The Uzbeks were making regular invasions in the Safavid territories. To contain the Uzbeks, Shah Ismail defeated Uzbek ruler Muhammad Shaibani Khan in the battle of Marv on December 2, 1510. Muhammad Shaibani Khan was killed along with his 10,000 men. Shah Ismail had Shaibani Khan's skull fashioned into a jeweled drinking vessel and the skin of the head of slain Uzbek leader stuffed with straw, was sent to the court of the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid II.²³ Sultan Bayzid II sent his representative to Shah Ismail with a message of friendship and to congratulate the Safavid ruler on his victory over Shaibani Khan despite his apparent humiliation after receiving the stuffed head of Shaibani Khan from the very man he was now congratulating.²⁴ The heinous act and apparent humiliation of the Ottomans by Shah Ismail, though not entirely outside the norms of the time, not only generated outrage in the Ottoman capital but also aroused a strong desire for revenge in Sultan Bayzid's son, Selim. Therefore, even before his coming to power, Selim developed in him a strong hatred for Shah Ismail. The Ottoman historians 'consider this to be the immediate cause of war between the two' that took place at the plain of Chaldiran on August 23, 1514 when Selim was the Ottoman Sultan.²⁵

History also records that as a governor of Trebizond (Trabzon) Selim ordered raids that were carried out against Shah Ismail's dominions in the environs of Arzinjan and Bayburt. Shah Ismail sent an envoy to the Ottoman court with an insulting message and a 'gift' consisting of feminine garments to Selim in an effort to defy Selim's raids into the Safavid territories and to complain for that to his ruling father, Bayzid II. An expert of the Ottoman-Safavid relations has stated that this Safavid gesture of injuring the dignity of Selim plus Shah Ismail's repudiation to send diplomatic envoy to congratulate Selim on the occasion of his coronation as Sultan in 1512 also contributed a lot to the encouragement

of Sultan Selim for a revenge on the Safavids.²⁶ Given this fact, upon assuming power Sultan Selim made his political goals clear. He ordered the execution of thousands of Qizilbashs who had participated in the 1511 revolts and resolved to crush Ismail and the Shi'is of Anatolia and Persia.²⁷

d. Territorial Disputes and the Safavid Provocative Military Campaign into the Ottoman Territory

The Ottoman-Safavid territorial disputes and the Safavid provocative military campaign into the Ottoman territory also contributed a lot to their first military confrontation in 1514. Before, his military engagement with the Ottomans, Shah Ismail had been victorious over the rulers of Shirvan, Mazandaran and the Aq-Quyunlu (White Sheep Turkomans) and Qara-Quyunlu (Black Sheep Turkomans), the latter's being the friends of Sultan Selim. Shah Ismail in this way extended his conquests westward as far as Iraq and eastward as far as Khorasan.²⁸ Then, Shah Ismail turned his attention towards the Ottoman frontier. It is recorded that the Ottoman-Safavid frontier stretched over 600 miles from Batum on the Black Sea to Basra on the Shatt al-Arab.²⁹ In 1507, Shah Ismail made a campaign against the principality of the Dulghadir which lay within the Ottoman sphere of influence. The Safavid ventures to Ottoman territory continued unabated. In the height of such territorial infringements, Shah Ismail had appointed Muhammad Khan Ustajlu as the Governor-General of Diyar Bakr, who with the help of the troops under him took control of some strategically important forts from the Ottomans. According to Safavid court historian Eskandar Beg Monshi, disputes over various forts in Diyar Bakr added fuel to the flames, and gradually, for a variety of reasons, the cause of war between the two sides increased. It is pertinent to state that when Sultan Selim demanded the return of his nephew Murad (who was given refuge in the Safavid court) from Shah Ismail by sending an envoy, his message also included a claim to strategically important Diyar Bakr province. However, in both cases, Shah Ismail responded negatively. Specially, with regard to the return of Diyar Bakr, Shah Ismail included an insulting refutation highlighting that this province was his by right of conquest and that only by the force of arms would he cede it. The failure of this embassy gave Sultan Selim grounds to open hostilities against the Safavids.

In the meantime, the Safavid aggressive and provocative military expeditions headed by Nur Ali Khalifa Rumlu, the governor of Arzinjan in eastern Anatolia in 1512, added new tensions to prevailing hostilities

between the two Muslim powers. Supported by the Ottoman subjects loyal to the Safavids, Nur Ali Khalifa launched a very damaging offensive incursion deep inside Anatolia and crushed several Ottoman armies which were led by Yular Qisdi Sinan Pasha, Husayn Beg and Tajuddin Beg. He sacked several Ottoman towns and the city of Tokat of Malatiya province was added to the Safavid realm. He finally entered the city of Tokat where he read the Khutbah (Friday sermon) in the name of Shah Ismail.³⁰ He then headed for Sivas. Fighting side by side with Murad (Ahmad's son, who was given refuge by Shah Ismail)—the fugitive Ottoman prince, Nur Ali Khalifa had defeated Ottoman army commander Sinan Pasha with heavy losses. He eventually levied on the spot from among the Turcoman Sufis of the Safavid order in these newly acquired territories. Earlier, Shah Ismail sent a Safavid expedition under Nur Ali Khalifa to effect an emigration of his followers from the Ottoman territory. Accordingly, Nur Ali Khalifa was able to collect 2,000 to 4,000 Qizilbashs at Qibla Hisar.³¹ Roger Savory has stated that this Safavid act was one of the two actual *casus belli* of the battle of Chaldiran.³²

e. The Ottoman Policy of Conquest

There is no doubt that the Ottoman policy of conquest had made a military engagement between the Ottomans and the Safavids inevitable. Sultan Bayzid II followed a conciliatory stance toward the Safavids due to his dual commitments to consolidating Sultan Mahmud II's (1444 to 1446 and 1451 to 1481) earlier conquests and regaining control over the Black Sea and Morea. The reign of his son and successor Sultan Selim was marked by a major shift in Ottoman expansionist policy. History documents that Sultan Selim was arguably the most successful field general of his age and in 1512, when he ascended the throne, the Ottoman field army was probably superior to any other in the world.³³ From this vantage point, Sultan Selim set on territorial expansion westwards into Europe and eastwards into the Middle East and thus he tripled the size of the Ottoman empire during his eight years (1512-1520) reign. However, at the core of Sultan Selim's rage was his fear of a Safavid offensive from the east, an old concern and humiliating memory of the Ottomans who were a century earlier routed with utter humiliation by Timur in the battle of Angora in 1402.³⁴ Given this reality, eastward expansion of the Ottomans would set them on a collision course with the Persian Safavids. To Sultan Selim, westward expansion into Europe with a hostile Safavid

Persia on their eastern flank would mean that the Ottomans had to face the possibility of a two-front war. Moreover, given the fact that the Europeans were eager to forge alliance with the Ottoman foe—the Safavid Persia, the Ottomans under Sultan Selim resolved to strike the Safavid first.³⁵ Because of his expansionist policy Sultan Selim had good reason to view the development of the Safavid state as a threat to the Ottoman empire and he could not accept the risk of being attacked from the rear. Under the circumstance, Sultan Selim made his position clear and decided to wreak a havoc on the Shi'i Qizilbash Turcomen of eastern Anatolia and their Safavid patrons in Persia.³⁶ This position of Sultan Selim quickly paved the way for the battle of Chaldiran.

f. Shah Ismail's Reluctance to Accept Selim as the New Ottoman Sultan and His Support for Sultan Selim's Rival Murad

The political asylum and support provided by Shah Ismail to Sultan Selim's rival Murad is argued as the direct cause as well as the second actual *casus belli* of the battle of Chaldiran.³⁷ Sultan Bayzid II had three sons—Ahmad, Korkud and Selim—for the succession to the throne. Of them, Ahmad was declared as an heir apparent to the throne by Sultan Bayzid. Angered with this announcement, Selim rebelled and he forcibly took power on April 24, 1512 by deposing his father. This resulted in a struggle for power among three brothers: Ahmad, Korkud and Selim. This presented Shah Ismail with an immense opportunity to meddle in the affairs of the Ottoman empire. When congratulatory embassies to Sultan Selim had arrived upon his coronation from different parts of Europe and from Egypt, Shah Ismail declined to send such an embassy to the Ottoman court to congratulate the new Ottoman Sultan.³⁸ Instead, Shah Ismail supported the legal heir to the Ottoman empire—Ahmad against Sultan Selim and sent an embassy to the Sultan of Egypt for two reasons: to conciliate his friendship and to request his aid against Sultan Selim. There is no shadow of doubt that Shah Ismail's such gestures only doubled the trouble and Sultan Selim took these issues very seriously.

Meanwhile, when Ahmad was put to death by Sultan Selim, Shah Ismail lent his support to Ahmad's son Prince Murad who was governor of Amasya. Ismail's objective in this regard was to use Murad to mobilize an effective opposition to Sultan Selim, who was his virulent enemy. Murad, like his father, first disputed the succession of Selim and then advanced his claim following the murder of his father by Selim. Murad then joined the

Qizilbash rebels with thousand of his supporters and at the end of April 1513 the combined forces laid waste areas in the vicinity of chorum and Amasya. He then established contact with Nur Ali Khalifa—the invading Safavid general into the Ottoman territory. The combined forces burnt the city of Tokat. However, Prince Murad finally was routed in a battle and was forced to take refuge at the court of Shah Ismail in Tabriz. Sultan Selim dispatched an embassy to the Safavid court to demand the return of his fugitive nephew Murad. Shah Ismail responded that he considered Murad as a guest and that as such he could not turn him over to the envoys.³⁹ Shah Ismail even raised an army to invade the Ottoman territory in order to support Murad's claims. Sadly enough, around this time, Murad fell ill at Kashan *en rout* to Fars and died at Isfahan. With the death of Murad, Shah Ismail abandoned his scheme of mobilizing opposition to Sultan Selim. However, the irreparable damage was done since such attitudes of Shah Ismail created a very strong grudge in the mind of Sultan Selim which eventually blossomed into open hostility at Chaldiran.⁴⁰

Sultan Selim's Precautionary Measures on the Eve of the Battle of Chaldiran

When the ground for military confrontation between the Ottomans and the Safavids became more evident, Sultan Selim declared his intention of attacking Persia in his war council. The war council spontaneously approved his plan. Previously he had expressed his intention to attack Persia three times and every time he was supported by his Janissary troops. After taking the final decision to attack Persia, Sultan Selim was seen to take the following precautionary measures.

i. The Securing of Fatwas or Religious Decrees to Fight the Safavids

Sultan Selim was deeply concerned that the local pro-Safavid Anatolian Qizilbashes could harass his army when it would march towards Persia. Therefore, after his successful struggle against his brother for the throne, Sultan Selim moved to deal with this internal issue. To that end, he secured two fatwas or religious decrees from the influential Sunni Ulama (theologians) namely Hamza Saru Gorez and Kemal Pasazade condemning the Qizilbash and sanctioning their persecution. The fatwas declared the Qizilbashes and Safavid followers in the Ottoman empire as 'unbelievers', 'heretics' and 'anti-Muslims' and it was the duty of the Ottoman Sultan to fight these unbelievers in accordance with the Qur'anic

verses: “O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell, an evil refuge indeed.” The Sunni Ulama also decreed that the eternal reward for killing one Shi‘i was equal to killing 70 Christian infidels. After securing these fatwas Sultan Selim followed a policy of annihilation of the Qizilbash in his empire. He now proscribed Shi‘ism in his dominions, prepared a register of the Turkomens Shi‘i Qizilbash of Anatolia and massacred some 40,000 out of a total of 70,000 that included able-bodied, young and old Safavid sympathizers. Those who were not put to death were arrested and branded and sent to Ottoman territory in Europe.⁴¹ The act of terror also involved atrocities, rape, enslavement of Shi‘i women and children. The fatwas of the Ottoman Ulamas have another significant part since these provided the Sultan with the necessary license to fight the patron of these pro-Safavid Qizilbashes: Shah Ismail in Persia. Adel Allouche has stated that having obtained legal justification for fighting the Qizilbash, Sultan Selim ordered his army to prepare for a military campaign against Safavid Persia.⁴² Referring to the Ottoman historian Sir John Malcolm has stated that Sultan Selim declared a religious or holy war against Shah Ismail after securing the fatwas from the Ulama and made his expedition against Persia.⁴³

ii. The Encouragement of Uzbek Leader to Attack the Safavids

Sultan Selim’s second move was to weaken his adversary—Shah Ismail—by conspiring with the Uzbeks, the enemies of his enemy. In late March 1514, Sultan Selim wrote a long letter and sent it by the hand of an especial envoy to Ubaydullah Khan in order to summon him as an ally (he being a Sunni) against Shah Ismail.⁴⁴ In the letter he informed him of his intention to march against Persia and suggested joint action against their common enemy by highlighting the Shi‘i Safavid menace. He also encouraged Ubaydullah Khan to avenge the killing of his uncle and former Uzbek ruler Muhammad Shaibani Khan who was defeated and killed by Shah Ismail in the battle of Marv in 1510.⁴⁵ Sultan Selim thus provoked Ubaydullah Khan to attack Shah Ismail from the east while he himself moved to do so from the west.⁴⁶

iii. The Confirmation of the Allegiance of the Aq-Qoyunlus and Kurdish Chieftains

As the third precautionary measure, Sultan Selim sent embassies to the last Aq-Qoyunlu (White Sheep Turkmen) ruler Murad as well as

Farrukhshad, another Aq-Qoyunlu prince (who governed Bayburt and threw off his allegiance to the Safavids) to call them to oppose Shah Ismail. Both leaders confirmed their allegiance and cooperation prior to Sultan Selim's final move against Shah Ismail.⁴⁷ Sultan Selim also received the allegiance of a number of influential Kurdish chieftains prior to the start of his campaign against Shah Ismail.

iv. The Maintaining or Securing of the Neutrality of the Mamluks

Maintaining or securing the neutrality of the Mamluks before launching his assault against Shah Ismail of Persia was Sultan Selim's fourth strategy. His strategy in this regard consisted of aborting a possible Safavid-Mamluk rapprochement during the time of his military engagement with Shah Ismail which might force him to fight on two fronts. That is why, Sultan Selim sent his envoy to the court of Sultan Qansuh al-Ghawri of the Mamluk Egypt with a message of his impending move against Shah Ismail and for that both the Ottomans and the Mamluks may unite against him. Sultan Selim also wrote another letter to the Sultan of Egypt while he was moving from Erzenjan to Tabriz, requiring him to march and fight Shah Ismail.⁴⁸ Analysts consider Sultan Selim's such message as a veiled ultimatum to the Mamluk Sultan al-Ghawri not to support the Safavids, rather than a genuine invitation to join an anti-Safavid alliance.⁴⁹

v. The Sealing of the Ottoman Border

Sultan Selim's fifth and final precautionary measure before his military engagement with Shah Ismail was to seal the Ottoman-Persian border which was extended over 600 miles. This was indeed a difficult task but Sultan Selim did it for two reasons. Firstly, by sealing the Ottoman-Safavid border he sought to initiate a commercial blockade against the Safavid Persia. Sultan Selim wanted to deliver a crippling economic blow to Persia by preventing it from exporting its silk to the Ottoman markets and to the west. Secondly and most importantly, Sultan Selim sealed the border in a bid to cut off all potential sources of supplies of weapons from the west into Persia.⁵⁰

Sultan Selim's Ultimatum to Shah Ismail and the Declaration of War

After taking the above-mentioned precautionary measures Sultan Selim wasted no time and began final preparations for the invasion of Persia. On March 20, 1514, Sultan Selim left Adrianople and arrived in

Istanbul on March 29, 1514. He mobilized an army of more than 100,000 the size of which was unprecedented and remarkable in the Middle East warfare of the period and left Istanbul for Karaman on April 19, 1514.⁵¹ On the way, a Safavid spy by the name of Kilij, who was entrusted with the task of reporting on the strength and movements of the Ottoman army, was captured. It was by his hands, on April 23, 1514, Sultan Selim sent to Shah Ismail his first letter of ultimatum and the declaration of war addressing Shah Ismail *amir* not Shah 'who clothed in the garb of falsehood and hypocrisy, had spread abroad uproar and insurrection, had planted the standard of impiety and heresy, had given the reins to his passions, had been guilty of the infamous abuse of the pure, of the murder of the virtuous, of the profanation of the mosques, of the overthrow of the sepulchers, of the contempt of the learned expounders of the law, of the imprecation of the three first chalifs [Caliphs], of the ill treatment of the holy writing of the Koran: that, therefore, he (the Sultan) had on these accounts put on helmet and cuirass instead of silk and gold, and had grasped the sword of battle'.⁵² Thus accusing Shah Ismail of blasphemy, perjury and wrongdoing Sultan Selim asked him either to return without delay of all the lands which formerly belonged to the Ottomans or to prepare for a war. Sultan Selim also informed Shah Ismail in a second letter that he had secured fatwas from Ottoman theologians sanctioning a war against him and that he was marching immediately on Persia. In the second letter Sultan Selim called on the Shah to repent for his past actions and become his vassal.⁵³

On July 20, 1514, when Sultan Selim was at Aq-Dih near Kamakh, a reply came from Shah Ismail which accused Sultan Selim of aggression against fellow Muslims, killing innocent people and violation of sexual mores,⁵⁴ and questioned Sultan Selim's improper language in his previous letter to him. Shah Ismail in his letter also lamented on the deterioration of Safavid-Ottoman relations under Sultan Selim and reminded the good days during his father's time. Referring to the majority inhabitants of Anatolia who were his followers, Shah Ismail boasted that he could have moved against Anatolia, but had decided against it. He slighted the Sultan by mentioning that his aggressive activities might have invited chaos as it did in the time of Timur. Shah Ismail finally concluded his letter with an insult, remarking that Selim's letter showed a lack of total respect which was worthy not of a ruler but of a person addicted to opium. The reply from Shah Ismail infuriated Sultan Selim hugely who put the messenger to death immediately after reading it.⁵⁵ Sultan Selim then sent his third

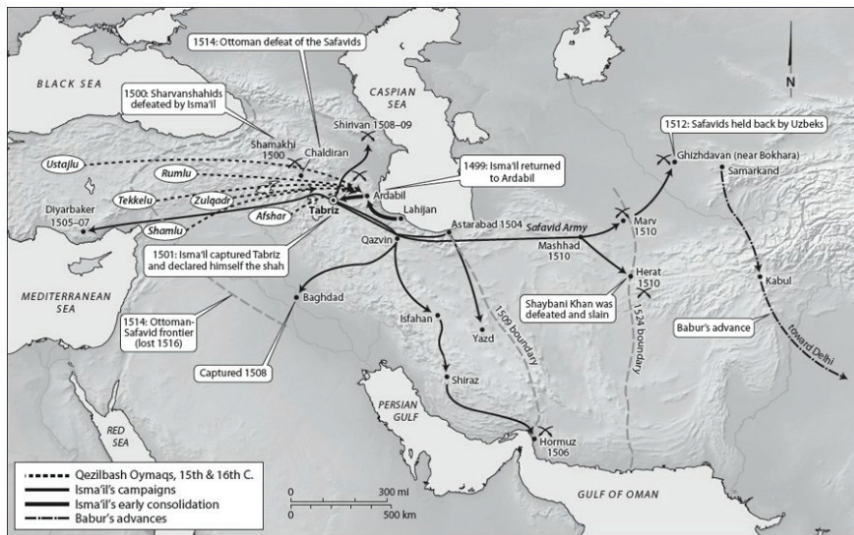
message to Shah Ismail expressing his warlike intentions. As a reciprocal insult to Shah Ismail, Sultan Selim now labeled the Safavid ruler as the “Sufi kid” and the “Ardabil lad” and sent a gift consisting of a rag, a staff, a device for cleaning the teeth, a rosary and begging bowl, intended as a reminder that Shah Ismail was unfit to rule and would be better off to follow his ancestor’s way of ‘mendicant’ mysticism.⁵⁶ In this way, Sultan Selim and Shah Ismail were openly insulting each other and exchanging war of words under the cover of irony and mockery, conveyed sentiments of contempt or hatred.⁵⁷

Sultan Selim Provoked Shah Ismail for a Set-Piece Battle

While exchanging of war of words with clear insultation were taking place between Sultan Selim and Shah Ismail, Sultan Selim and his army continued to march towards Persia. The Safavid scorched-earth tactics all along the Ottoman advance deprived the Sultan’s advancing army of food and fodder. It is recorded that despite the army’s apparent grumble (which was tantamount to a near mutiny) at the interminable march through a devastated region the indomitable and uncompromising Sultan continued his march towards Azerbaijan. At one stage of his perilous journey from Erzenjan to Tabriz, the capital of Shah Ismail, Sultan Selim was seen to be increasingly worried as he predicted that the Safavid ruler would not consent to a set-piece battle which would mean a prospect of a prolonged military campaign in Persia during the bitter winter months. To overcome his concerns, Sultan Selim dispatched his fourth message to Shah Ismail challenging and provoking him to a set-piece battle. Addressing Shah Ismail merely as a common soldier, Sultan Selim wrote in the message: “If you conceal yourself in the corner of fear and fright, you cannot be permitted to call yourself a man. Instead of the helmet, put on the woman’s bonnet; instead of the coat of mail, take the parasol, and lay aside your thirst for dominion and royalty.”⁵⁸ In his message, Sultan Selim also advised Shah Ismail to show his valor instead of running away “like a woman”. Sultan Selim went on to say: “In such case, you had better wear a *chadur* (a veil) instead of your armor.”⁵⁹ This message was accompanied by a present of women’s clothes, as a double irony upon the pusillanimity of the Shah.⁶⁰ As expected, Sultan Selim’s letter produced desired results. Following a hasty military meeting with his Qizilbash chiefs after receiving Selim’s letter, Shah Ismail chose to engage Sultan Selim in a set-piece combat, despite the advice of several of his generals to the contrary. Ismail then pitched his camp at a place called Chaldiran which is about 80 miles

towards the north-west of Tabriz and 50 miles northwest of the city of Khuy in Azerbaijan (in present day northwestern Iran). Shah Ismail was able to assemble an army of 40,000 men at Chaldiran. On August 22, 1514, Sultan Selim appeared on the scene with his 100,000 fighting troops consisting of 300 field guns (200 cannon and 100 mortars) after a journey of about 1000 miles in four months.

Below is a map of the battle of Chaldiran.



Source: Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*, Yale University Press, London, 2017, p. 59.

Events of the Battle of Chaldiran

Reportedly, before finally setting up his camp at Chaldiran, Shah Ismail consulted with his military commanders of the war council. Ismail's two military chiefs namely Muhammad Khan Ustajlu and Nur Ali Khalifa Rumlu who had first-hand experience of Ottoman methods of warfare counselled against a frontal attack because of the strength of the Ottoman artillery and advised that an immediate attack should be made upon the enemy forces, before they could bring up their field-guns and fasten them with strong chains, thus making the Ottoman front impregnable and unassailable. However, this tactical advice was turned down by a senior Qizilbash commander named Durmish Khan Shamlu (who had a privileged position at the court) and by Shah Ismail himself. The Ottomans were allowed to complete their war preparation at Chaldiran for Shah Ismail and

Durmish Khan Shamlu wanted that enemy's arrangements to be completed, so that the Persians may have a chance of displaying their bravery and military ardour in full view on the battle field. Equal in religious zeal, personal bravery and material discipline, Shah Ismail was far inferior to the Ottoman Sultan Selim in the numbers of his troops and in the total absence of artillery. Once the preparations of both warring parties were completed, the Safavid army led by Saru Pira opened the battle on August 23, 1514, by attacking the Ottoman forces with a wild cavalry charge. The Ottoman war tactics were to draw the Safavid cavalry within the range of their artillery and muskets, because the guns were concealed behind the infantry. As a result, the Ottoman suffered the initial enormous casualties as Shah Ismail and his Qizilbash commanders attacked the enemy on both flanks simultaneously. Shah Ismail was able to compel the Ottoman troops to move back on to the rear-guard. But when the Ottoman troops brought firepower (guns and mortars) into play it quickly decided the fate of the battle with a devastating effect on the Safavid side. The Ottoman firepower shattered the Safavid defence and Shah Ismail was forced to leave the battle field wounded. Shah Ismail, with 300 men, first fled to Tabriz and then to Darguzin in Iraq. Suspecting an ambush Sultan Selim forbade the pursuit of the fleeing Safavid army, however, he celebrated his victory by erecting a pyramid of skulls of his enemies on the battle field. The Safavid army was so devastated that it failed to reappear and Sultan Selim made his triumphal entry into the Safavid capital Tabriz on September 5, 1514. The Sultan proposed to stay in winter in Tabriz and complete the subjugation of whole Persia the following spring. But the war council and his ministers rejected the proposal in the face of scarcity of food and fodder and for fear of the approaching bitter winter and anxiety about their long supply lines. Therefore, after spending eight days in Tabriz, Sultan Selim started his return march on September 13, 1514, to his capital. On the way, he conquered and annexed the Safavid provinces of Diyar Bakr, Albistan, Marash and Arzinjan.

Causes of the Safavid Defeat

A good number of reasons can be cited for the Safavid defeat at the hands of the Ottoman at Chaldiran. **Firstly**, the battle of Chaldiran is marked by the unequal military power of the two contending parties which decided the fate of the battle in favor of the Ottomans. The numerical superiority of the Ottoman army (100,000) was a key factor in this regard and the Ottoman troops outnumbered Ismail's 40,000 army men by two to one. **Secondly**, the battle of Chaldiran, which ended with an Ottoman victory,

is usually presented in history books as an example of the effectiveness of firearms technology. That is, the Safavid military forces were not as technologically advanced as the Ottomans were. The Ottoman victory at Chaldiran essentially owed to this new firearms which they adopted rapidly, extensively, and with great effect. In fact, the Ottoman possession of artillery and firearms including 200 guns and 100 mortars and the use of this firepower was crucial in deciding the result of the battle. **Thirdly**, Shah Ismail's decision to reject the war strategy proposed by some Qizilbash war veterans who had first-hand experience with the Ottoman warfare was another cause of his defeat at Chaldiran. The short-sighted decision with an unmatched military power brought a total disaster for Shah Ismail. An analyst has put: "Had the advice of Muhammad Khan Ustajlu been followed and the battle of Chaldiran fought on the first of Rajab (that is, on August 22) when the Ottoman army, worn by travel and disarrangement, had just arrived, the Persians might have secured a victory."⁶¹ **Fourthly**, the Ottoman campaign came at a time when the Safavids faced a renewed Uzbek incursion in Khurasan and this compelled Shah Ismail to station some of his forces on the Uzbek frontier. Shah Ismail's inability to raise a larger force to combat the Ottomans compelled him to take a defensive strategy.⁶² **Fifthly**, in Ismail's view there were no legitimate grounds for Ottoman belligerence. Hence he was not fully prepared and was busy hunting in Isfahan when Sultan Selim actually appeared for a war. Moreover, Ismail was certain that the Ottoman would not prevail the long and extended lines of communication, the difficulties of transportation and the harsh climate of eastern Anatolia and Azerbaijan and above all the Safavid scorched-earth defensive tactics. But all proved wrong when the Ottomans came with the ultimate intention of giving a battle with the Safavids which ended up in their favour. **Sixthly**, Shah Ismail's record of past victories might have made him overly confident about the superiority of the Qizilbash cavalry and its spirit of sacrifice on the battle field, a fact that explains his lax preparation despite the glaring disparity in troops' numbers. As an ardent follower of Shi'i Islam and a dedicated defender of the cause of Ali (R.) and his sacred house, Shah Ismail could not have doubted that divine providence would not prevail. Perhaps, for this reason Shah Ismail and his Qizilbash chiefs spent the night before the battle drinking until dawn while drunkard Ismail began his day hunting quail on the adjacent plain at a time when his vanguard forces suffered heavy blows from the Ottoman artillery. **Finally**, Sultan Selim made his long perilous march to Persia mostly through loyal territory which certainly contributed to the Ottoman victory over the Safavids.⁶³

Consequences of the Battle of Chaldiran

Now we turn to the far-reaching consequences of the battle of Chaldiran which are discussed in the following sub-headings.

a. Human Casualties

The Ottomans inflicted a crushing defeat on the Safavids at Chaldiran in 1514. The Safavids lost 2000 strong men in the battle. The extent of the disaster for the Safavids was remarkable because many of the figure fell in the battle were highest ranking Qizilbash officials who were known for their efficiency in the battle fields and many of them helped Shah Ismail to establish his new dynasty in Persia in 1501. There were also a number of the highest Twelver religious dignitaries of the Safavid empire among those who were killed. Military prisoners, whether officers or soldiers captured by Sultan Selim were all put to the sword.⁶⁴ The Safavid human casualties continued even after the battle ended. During the course of Sultan Selim's return march, he occupied the Safavid provinces of Marash, Arzinjan, and Diyar Bakr by killing Shah Ismail's great generals and governors of those provinces: Alaud-Dawla Dhul-Qadr, Nur Ali Khalifa Rumlu, Qara Beg Khan (brother of Muhammad Khan Ustajlu) respectively. The Ottoman losses at Chaldiran were not negligible at all. True, Sultan Selim celebrated his victory by erecting a pyramid of the skulls of the fallen generals and soldiers of Shah Ismail, he had to purchase this victory by the important lives of his veteran generals like Hasan Pasha (governor-general of Rumelia), Hasan Beg (governor of Morea) Atak Beg alias Alquj Ughli, Uways Beg, Sulayman Beg, Ayas Beg.⁶⁵ It is estimated that Sultan Selim lost his 3000 army men in the battle of Chaldiran.

b. The Safavid Lost their Capital Temporarily

The Ottoman victory at Chaldiran was definite though not conclusive. Their victory opened the road to Tabriz—the Safavid capital—which surrendered peacefully and Sultan Selim entered the city on September 5, 1514 and left it on September 13, 1514. The loss of the capital, although for a short period, brought the Safavid power on the verge of collapse. Abbas Amanat has stated that before he left Tabriz, Sultan Selim allowed his troops to loot the city and rounded up and took to Istanbul a considerable number of artists, artisans, and merchants from Tabriz and elsewhere in the Safavid domains including more than twelve painters, book illuminators, and calligraphers.⁶⁶ The victorious Ottomans also took

many precious things from the Hasht Bihist Palace of Shah Ismail and according to Muhammad Ada'i-i Shirazi, "they piled what was looted on the ground which looked like mountain.The army had looted so much that the camels' backs were bent under the weight of gold."⁶⁷

c. Territorial Loss of the Safavids and the Readjustment of the Safavid-Ottoman Border

The Safavids not only lost in the battle, they also lost strategically important provinces of Albistan, Arzinjan, Diyar Bakr and Marash. The Ottomans, following their victory at Chaldiran, put an end to the Dhul-Qadr dynasty of Marash and Albistan and absorbed them into their empire.⁶⁸ The occupation of Diyar Bakr and Arzinjan by the Ottomans strengthened their hold over eastern Anatolia. According to Adel Allouche, of these two, the control of Diyar Bakr was of utmost importance because it led to the creation of an Ottoman zone in the upper Euphrates—an area crossed by major routes linking Persia to Anatolia and northern Syria. This permitted the Ottomans to keep a watchful eye on the respective movements of the Safavids and the Mamluks, thus decreasing the chances of coordination of their armies. The capture of Diyar Bakr also involved a logistic advantage: the Ottoman, having acquired such permanent strategic base, would be able to launch future expeditions into either Persia or Syria with relative ease. Thus, the battle of Chaldiran resulted in a major readjustment of the Ottoman-Safavid frontier which remains almost unchanged to this day.

d. Economic Blow to the Safavids

Following their victory at Chaldiran, the Ottomans continued to consolidate their position in central and eastern Anatolia. This Ottoman consolidation not only cost the Safavids direct loss of territory but also removed their hopes for unhindered access to the Black Sea for economic purposes through an Anatolian enclave. While Sultan Selim's commercial blockade, which he initiated prior to the battle of Chaldiran to sever the flow of goods between the two states and thus to deliver a crippling economic blow to the Safavid Persia by preventing it from exporting its silk to the Ottoman markets and to the west, continued and it started biting the Safavid economy severely. Not only that after the battle of Chaldiran, for at least four centuries the Safavids and their successors faced an Ottoman barrier that deprived them of direct political and commercial access to the Mediterranean world. In the meantime, the Portuguese took possession of the island of Hormuz from the Safavids as a result of the latter's defeat

at Chaldiran. The Portuguese established a garrison there which placed the entrance to the Persian Gulf in their hands for a century to come, thus hitting the Safavid economy very badly.⁶⁹

e. The Safavid Revolutionary Zeal was Contained

The most immediate consequence of the battle of Chaldiran was a serious downturn in Safavid revolutionary zeal. As stated previously that the Safavid movement which started as a religious movement by Sheikh Safiuddin, eventually resulted in the establishment of a political power in 1501 by Shah Ismail, with Twelver Shi'ism as its official state religion. The newly established Safavid state became very much offensive in nature and began to show every sign of exporting revolutionary zeal to the Ottoman territory by manipulating the Shi'i population and large Turkomen Qizilbash followers of Shah Ismail. The Ottoman victory at Chaldiran not only stopped the expansion of the Safavid Shi'i messianic revolution but also eliminated any potential replication of a Safavid-like revolution in Anatolia. The Safavid defeat at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514 also marked the end of their military expansionism. Thus, after the battle of Chaldiran, the Safavid Shi'i state was in effect confined to Persia while the Ottoman patronage of Sunni Islam further expanded throughout the Arab Middle East and beyond.⁷⁰

f. Change in Safavid War Strategy

Following the defeat at Chaldiran, a major change was brought in the Safavid war strategy. After their shocking defeat at Chaldiran, the Safavids were thrown on to the defensive in their subsequent long-drawn-out struggle with the Ottomans.⁷¹ The Qizilbash leaders also took into account the lesson of the battle of Chaldiran and avoided engaging the Ottoman army in future pitched battles. The superiority of the Ottoman artillery displayed in the battle of Chaldiran thus compelled the Safavids to limit themselves to occasional attacks and skirmishes. The Safavids, who were appalled at the power of fire-powers of the Ottomans in the battle of Chaldiran, not only cleverly avoided a decisive and retaliatory battle with the Ottoman for many years, they paid keen attention to have such war equipment at their possession. However, it took them close to a century before they were able to match the Ottomans' capabilities and later defeat them at their own game during the time of Shah Abbas the Great (1588-1629). Thus, the age of Gunpowder Empires came to Persia with an experience of defeat at Chaldiran.⁷²

g. The Loss of Shah Ismail's Morale

Another serious consequence of the battle of Chaldiran was a melancholic bend in the personality of Shah Ismail. Until his humiliating defeat at Chaldiran in 1514, Shah Ismail had record of victories in the battle fields and he subscribed publicly to the belief that he was a manifestation of not just the spirit of Hazrat Ali (R.), the third caliph of Islam, but also a wide array of mythical and historical icons. The Safavids' first defeat at Chaldiran destroyed the confidence of the Qizilbash, if not their belief, in Shah Ismail's invincibility. For Shah Ismail, Chaldiran did not mean merely the loss of a battle and of extensive tracts of land; the defeat at Chaldiran was a severe blow to both the myth of his invincibility and the Qizilbash's steadfast adherence to him. His claim of divinity was seriously weakened by the defeat at Chaldiran. As a result, he would never lead the Safavids into battle again during his remaining ten years life and thus ended Shah Ismail's expansion for good.⁷³ Shah Ismail left military responsibility to his officers and he indulged into music, drinking, hunting, carousing and lapsed into a persistent passivity. Consequently, his last decade was marked by his indulgence and escape from state affairs and the charismatic Safavid leadership gradually transformed into a traditional Persian kingship.⁷⁴

The magnitude of the disaster of the battle for Shah Ismail and his subsequent behavior may be judged from the fact that with his ignominious defeat two of his favorite wives named Tajlu Khanum and Behruzeh Khanum fell into the hands of his enemy.⁷⁵ Although Abbas Amanat has mentioned that Tajlu Khanum was later able to join Shah Ismail,⁷⁶ however, Joseph Von Hammer and Adel Allouche have stated that she was captured and taken to the Ottoman capital by Sultan Selim where she was married to his state secretary (or to the army chief judge) named Jafar Celebi who was later executed. Before she was taken to Constantinople, Shah Ismail had sent a delegation consisting of four theologians Sayyid Abdul Wahhab, Qadi Ishaq, Mulla Shukrullah, and Hamzah Khalifah to Sultan Selim (who was then at Amasya on his return march to his capital) in order to obtain the release of his beloved wife Tajlu Khanum. Selim lent a deaf ear to this request and jailed Shah Ismail's envoys.⁷⁷ Thus, the defeat at Chaldiran, the loss of his favorite wife along with the capital Tabriz (although for short time), had a lasting legacy on the mind of Shah Ismail who later chose to a life of isolation instead of active life of the state. Sir Malcolm has put: "The effect of so great a reverse, on the sanguine mind of Ismail, was deep and lasting: though before of a cheerful disposition, he was never afterwards seen to smile."⁷⁸

h. The Change of the Safavid Geographical Centre of Gravity

The battle of Chaldiran had immense repercussions not only on Shah Ismail's personal conduct but also on the history of Persia. With the resulting loss of extensive tracts of land in eastern Anatolia including Diyar Bakr, Albistan, Marash and Arzinjan, the Safavid capital Tabriz now found itself deprived of its more or less central location and placed on the frontiers of the empire. The Safavid court in Tabriz now lay within the action-radius of the Ottoman army. Given the fact, the Safavids felt urgent to transfer their capital from Tabriz to a relatively more central place of their state. Although Shah Ismail clung to Tabriz as his capital and the seat of government, but his son and successor Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576) moved the capital to Qazvin in 1555.

i. The Birth of Long-term Enmity between the Ottomans and the Safavids

The low-intensity hostility between the Ottomans and the Safavids increased over time and flared into a devastating war at Chaldiran in 1514 that gave birth to a long-term enmity between the two Muslim powers of the time. In the wake of the battle, Shah Ismail sent an apologetic letter to Sultan Selim with suitable presents. Sultan Selim replied by imprisoning the envoy and his companions. Shah Ismail sent another letter to Sultan Selim with messages of friendship, however, it remained unanswered.⁷⁹ Therefore, no peace agreement was signed and a state of war remained between the two Muslim neighbours.⁸⁰ Resultantly, the Safavids and the Ottomans were seen to engage militarily at intervals during the whole of the Safavid period till 1736 over eastern Anatolia, Azerbaijan, and parts of Iraq. According to an expert, this rivalry and military engagements had international ramifications because the Safavids often engaged Ottoman armies and resources, limiting Istanbul's ability to act against the Habsburgs in the Mediterranean and Hungary and thus altering power relations in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁸¹

j. The Safavid Enemies were Emboldened

Apart from the Ottoman, the Safavids had other enemies in the east, the Uzbeks. The Safavid defeat at Chaldiran emboldened them and they renewed their attacks on the Safavid state. As stated before, in the battle of Marv that occurred in 1510, the Safavid enemy in the east, the Uzbeks, were severely punished by Shah Ismail. Taking the advantage of the

Safavid defeat in the battle of Chaldiran, the Uzbeks, under their new leader Ubaydullah Khan increased aggressive activities in the Safavid frontier and invaded Khurasan.⁸² The Uzbeks aggression continued unabated and it increased as time progressed. Muhammad Zaman Mirza governor of Damghan also rose in open rebellion thinking to himself that he would never get a better opportunity than this and created troubles for the Safavids after Shah Ismail's defeat at Chaldiran.⁸³ Meanwhile, Babur, Shah Ismail's former ally captured Balkh and Qandahar and Shah Ismail had to witness such things as he remained aloof from the affairs the state following his defeat in the battle of Chaldiran. The Portuguese in the Persian Gulf also became aggressive following the Safavid defeat at Chaldiran.

k. The Ottomans Moved to Annex the Mamluk Empire

The Ottoman triumph at Chaldiran and the annexation of Marash by Sultan Selim accelerated the Ottoman hope to conquer the Mamluk empire. Two years later following the victory at Chaldiran Sultan Selim took it through the battle of Marj-e-Dabiq in 1516. As a result, the Ottoman authority was established in Egypt, Syria, northern Sudan, in the Red Sea area as well as over Yemen and the Islamic holy cities in Arabia.

Conclusion

The history of interactions between two major contemporary Muslim powers, the Shi'i Safavid state and the Sunni Ottoman empire, is full of acrimony, enmity and military engagements. The battle of Chaldiran was one of the first military conflicts of a series that took place in 1514 and ended with a decisive victory for the Ottoman empire. The establishment of the Shi'i Safavid state challenging the authority of the Sunni Ottoman empire, a series of its anti-Ottoman policies, provocative activities and territorial disputes invited Sultan Selim's aggressive reaction and this resulted in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514. True, the battle ended in favour of the Ottomans, it left long-lasting negative legacy for both the Safavids and the Ottomans themselves. While the battle seriously contained the Safavid revolutionary zeal, it also gave birth to permanent enmity between the Safavids and the Ottomans. This in turn, engaged the Ottomans permanently with the Safavids which actually absorbed the Ottoman power and as a result, the Ottomans failed to extend their sphere of influence in the Mediterranean and in the European front.

Notes and References

- 1 The basis of the Safavid dynasty and state was the Safaviyya religious order, a Sunni order based in Ardabil, northwestern Iran, which was named after the order's founder, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ishaq (1253–1334). John McHugo, *A Concise History of Sunni and Sh'is*, Saqi Books, Great Britain, 2017, p. 137; Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman empire*, Facts On File, Inc., New York, USA, 2009, p. 284.
- 2 Sh'ism is the major sectarian division standing outside the "orthodox" Sunni majority in Islam. Derived from the word "party," the first Sh'i promoted the candidacy of Ali ibn Abu Talib (R.), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad (sm) as his rightful successor (caliph). After the death of Ali (R.) 661, the Sh'i formed a religious community with the development of distinct sources of authority and law. The Imami or "Twelver" rite of Shi'i Islam—the largest and most tolerant subdivision within that religion, whose followers believe that the 12th imam (Muhammad al-Mahdi) who went into occultation in the ninth century will return in future.
- 3 The Qizilbash were formed out of several Turkish Shi'i groups that were living in northwest Persia (Azerbaijan) in the fifteenth century. They were: Ustajlu, Shamlu, Takalu, Rumlu, Baharlu, Zulkadar, Qajar and Afshar. They bore the titles of Beg, Khan and Sultan. They were called the 'men of sword' in Persia while the Ottomans sarcastically called them Qizilbash or red-heads.
- 4 Sunni is the member of one of the two major branches of Islam and the Sunni Muslims regard their denomination as the mainstream and traditionalist branch of Islam—as distinguished from the minority denomination, the Shia. The name 'Sunni' comes from the word sunnah, referring to the behaviour of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. The differences between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims arose from a disagreement over the succession to Muhammad and subsequently acquired broader political significance, as well as theological and juridical dimensions. The Sunnis recognize the first four caliphs or Khalifas as the Prophet Muhammad's (SM) rightful successors, whereas the Shi'i believe that Muslim leadership belonged to Muhammad's son-in-law, Ali (R.) and his descendants alone.
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- 6 Kaveh Farrokhi, *Iran at War: 1500-1988*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, New York, 2011, p. 21.
- 7 Eastern Anatolia was home of large number of pro-Safavid Qizilbashes, some of whom migrated to Persia and helped Shah Ismail to seize power in 1501. Later years only witnessed their growing influx into Persia.
- 8 Eskandar Beg Monshi, *History of Shah Abbas the Great*, vol. I (tr. by Roger M. Savory), Westview Press, USA, 1930, p. 67.
9. Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700*, UCL Press Limited, 1999, UK, p. xvii.
- 10 Yahya Armajani, *Middle East Past and Present*, Prentice Hall, Inc, New Jersey, USA, 1970, p.163.
- 11 THE LETTERS OF OTTOMAN SULTAN SELIM I AND SAFAVID SHAH ISMAILI, <http://www1.udel.edu/History-old/figal/Hist104/assets/pdf/readings/02selimismail.pdf>

- 12 Kaveh Farrokh, *op., cit.*, p. 21.
- 13 Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, Vol. II, Macmillan and co., Limited, London, 1921, p. 162.
- 14 Turcoman and Turkman, is a term that was widely used during the Middle Ages for the people of Oghuz Turkic origin. Oghuz Turks were a western Turkic people that, in the 8th century A.D, formed a tribal confederation in an area between the Aral and Caspian seas in Central Asia.
- 15 Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflit (906-962/1500-1555)*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin, 1983, p. 65.
- 16 Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, Cambridge University Press, London, 1993, pp. 218-219.
- 17 Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 39.
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- 20 Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 40.
- 21 Sir Percy Sykes, *op., cit.*, p. 162.
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- 27 Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Masters, *op., cit.*, pp. 285-286; Kaveh, p. 21.
- 28 Joseph Von Hammer, *Campaigns of Osman Sultans Chieflly in Western Asia: From Bayezyd Ildrim to the Death of Murad the Fourth (1389-1640)*, translated from the German by Thomas Aquila Dale, Vol. I, London, 1835, p. 115.
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- 31 Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, p. 73; Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, 40.
- 32 Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 40; Adel Allouche, *op., cit.*, pp. 109-110.
- 33 John F. Guilmartin, Jr., 'Ideology and Conflict: The Wars of the Ottoman Empire, 1453-1606', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Spring, 1988, Vol. 18, No. 4, The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars (Spring, 1988), p. 735.
- 34 In the battle Timur defeated the Ottoman Sultan Bayzid I and after capturing and caging him he was displayed for public.
- 35 .Kaveh Farrokh, *op., cit.*, p. 21.
- 36 *Op., cit.*, p. 22; Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, p. 73.
- 37 Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 40.

- 38 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, pp. 98, 106-107.
- 39 *Op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.
- 40 Eskandar Beg Monshi, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- 41 Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, p. 74; Roger Savory, *op. cit.*, p. 40; Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
- 42 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.
- 43 Sir John Malcolm, *The History of Persia, from the Most Early Period to the Present Time*, Vol. I, London, 1829, p. 327.
- 44 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 45 Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75; Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
- 46 Reportedly, in his answer, Ubaydullah Khan expressed his readiness to join in an attack on the Safavid state; however, due to internal problem, he could not join Sultan Selim to attack the Safavid.
- 47 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 115; Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 48 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 49 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- 50 Kaveh Farrokh, *op. cit.*, p. 22; see also: Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88; Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 113. The commercial blockade went into effect at the beginning of the summer of 1514 and lasted through Sultan Selim's reign.
- 51 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 130; Adel, p. 118; Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, p. 76. The figures for the size of the armies of the warring parties in the battle of Chaldiran differ widely. According to the Ottoman eye-witness historian Hakimuddin Idris Bitlisi, the numbers of the forces of two belligerents were: 40,000 Safavid army and 100,000 Ottoman army. However, according to Persian sources, the disparity of the number was even greater: 12,000 or 20,000 Safavids against 120,000 or even 212,000 Ottomans. (Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79). Roger Savory (pp. 40-41) and Adel Allouche (p. 119) have supported these figures. Apart from these figures, Markham has recorded the number of Ottoman troops was 200,000, and the Safavid was only 30,000. (p. 270). Percy Sykes has mentioned the Ottoman force constituted 120,000 and the Safavid force consisted of 60,000. (pp. 162-163). Abbas Amanat records that the number of Ottoman force was 160,000 while the Safavid was only 20,000.
- 52 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-128.
- 53 Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76; Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.
- 54 Kaveh Farrokh, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- 55 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 132; Ghulam Sarwar, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 56 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 118; Abbas Amanat, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.
- 57 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
- 58 *Op. cit.*, p. 134.
- 59 Adel Allouche, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- 60 Joseph Von Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

- 61 Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, p. 80.
- 62 Percy Sykes, *op., cit.*, p. 162.
- 63 Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol., 6, *op., cit.*, p. 225.
- 64 Those who had been killed at Chaldiran included: Muhammad Khan Ustajlu, Nizamuddin Abdul Baqi, Syed Sharifuddin Ali, Syed Muhammad Kamuna, Saru Pira Ustajlu, Husain Beg Lala Shamlu, Khulfa Beg, Yusuf Beg Warsaq, Pira Beg, Sultan Ali Mirza Afshar and a number of provincial governors. Shah Ismail himself was wounded in the arm and foot and his horse fell under him and he barely escaped captivity.
- 65 Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, pp. 80-82; Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 42.
- 66 They later established in Istanbul a Persian community of artists who would have a lasting influence on Ottoman fine arts. Abbas Amanat, *op., cit.*, pp. 72-73.
- 67 Vural Genc, 'From Tabriz to Istanbul: Goods and Treasures of Shah Isma'il looted after the Battle of Chaldiran', PhD University of Istanbul, *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 44, 2015, p. 228.
- 68 Roger Savory, *op., cit.*, p. 45.
- 69 Adel Allouche, *op., cit.*, p. 122.
- 70 Abbas Amanat, *op., cit.*, p. 74.
- 71 The Safavid had to wait until the reign of Shah Abbas the Great to regain the lost reputation and restart their offensive war strategy.
- 72 Abbas Amanat, *op., cit.*, pp. 74-75.
- 73 John McHugo, *op., cit.*, p. 139.
- 74 Abbas Amanat, *op., cit.*, p. 73.
- 75 Peter Jackson and Laurence Lockhart (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol., 6, *op., cit.*, p. 224.
- 76 Abbas Amanat, *op., cit.*, p. 72.
- 77 Joseph Von Hammer, *op., cit.*, p. 148; Adel Allouche, *op., cit.*, p. 120-121.
- 78 Sir John Malcolm, *op., cit.*, p. 327; Sir Clements Robert Markham, *A General Sketch of the History of Persia*, Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1874, p. 271.
- 79 Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, p. 83.
- 80 On, May 29, 1555, following another conflict, Shah Tahmasp of Iran signed the first official peace agreement with the Ottoman Sultan Suleyman in Amasya.
- 81 Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, *op., cit.*, p. 284.
- 82 Ghulam Sarwar, *op., cit.*, p. 86.
- 83 He abandoned Shah Ismail's service and went to Astarabad to join the Turkomans. He was supported by a Turkoman leader named Qazi Khan and they moved against Pir Ghayb Khan, the governor of Astarabad, who finally left the province for Dāmghān in face of joined forces of Muhammad Zaman Mirza and Qazi Khan.